Chapter 5

Presuppositions of Conversion: For and Against
The controversy regarding conversion, as we have already pointed out, can really be dealt with only at the level of presuppositions of both the parties. Evidently the presupposition of an advocate of conversion, for religious cause, can only be his claim to the superiority of his own religion over others'. The same thing, therefore, applies to the missionaries too. The vigorous zeal and self-sacrifices they manifested in their missionary activities show clearly how strongly they were convinced of the superiority of their religion. Most of the missionaries were not only convinced of the superiority of their own religion over Hinduism, but also tried to establish the same in many ways. Particular mention may be made about their attempts to establish it in terms of (a) doctrines, (b) of practices, and (c) on the basis of certain points of uniqueness. They are all interrelated, true. Yet they are sufficiently distinct from each other, so that different missionaries have, by emphasizing one or the other according to the circumstances, made that a ground for conversion to Christianity.

As against such attempts of the missionaries, some of the Hindu leaders built up such a positive resistance to their claims that their reasons cannot be overlooked by us, when considering the presuppositions of the opposing side.
We shall consider the responses of only three of them: (a) Raja Rammohun Roy (RR), (b) Swami Dayananda Saraswathi (DS), and (c) Mahatma Gandhi. Each one of them has indeed considered the various grounds given by the missionaries. However, each one has emphasized one or the other of these grounds much more than the others. Thus RR has actually tackled the doctrinal grounds of the missionaries' claim. DS has been interested in meeting them more on the practical level. And Gandhi has had many occasions to discuss with the missionaries on the points of uniqueness in Christianity.

In this chapter we shall try to consider the controversies arising out of the missionaries' presuppositions regarding doctrinal and practical grounds and correspondingly the opposition of RR and DS. We shall first give an account of the controvertists' positions and then some comments on their positions. We postpone the consideration of the missionaries' presupposition, based on the uniqueness of Christianity, to the next chapter.

(ii) **Doctrinal Grounds for and against Conversion: An Account of a Controversy**

In this section we are discussing this question: What can be said about one's own religious doctrines being superior to another's? This we shall do by considering a specific controversy that took place between a missionary and RR.
RR came across a letter from a missionary, in a Bengali Weekly, containing six questions against the Hindu doctrines: The first four showed the unreasonableness of the Vedanta Shastra, Nyaya Shastra, Mimasa Shastra and the Samkya Shastra, respectively. The fifth one was to show the unreasonableness of the Puranas and Tantras. The final question was concerned with the Karma doctrine. The intended result of such queries was to "abuse and insult" Hindu beliefs/doctrines as "contrary to reason". The implication was that a reasonable Hindu had to leave Hinduism and get converted to Christianity, if he wanted to keep 'rationality' in his religious belief/doctrines.2

RR was much pained by and provoked at the missionaries' attempt in "overturning the beliefs of the natives" by "abuse and insult." If "by the force of argument they could prove the truth of their own religion and the falsity of that of the Hindoos, it was all right".3 But whether those persons who travel to a distant country for the purpose of overturning the opinions of its inhabitants and introducing their own, were prepared to demonstrate that the latter were more reasonable than the former?4 This was the challenge RR put forward to the missionaries. And he also made it clear to them: "In consideration of the small huts in which Brahmins of learning generally reside and the simple food such as vegetables etc. which they eat, the missionaries may not
abstain from controversy from contempt of them. For, truth and true religion do not always belong to wealth and power, high names or lofty places."^5

With this counter-challenge to the missionaries, RR goes to make replies to the specific queries of the missionary in the letter alluded to above. It may not be necessary to make a detailed study of all his replies. For it is not clear whether that missionary wanted to speak of all the Shastras being unreasonable or whether RR wanted to speak of the reasonableness of all the doctrines. Hence we will just take up for consideration the type of replies he gave to the missionary, with illustrations wherever necessary.

(i) The first type of his answer consists in showing that some of the Hindu doctrines are more rational than the Christian doctrines. This he did with reference to the first four questions of the missionary mentioned above. We may illustrate this type with reference to his reply regarding the Nyaya system, and that too, only with reference to the question of creation. The missionary had raised the point that God, according to the Nyaya, appears like us, to be in need of material aids like Space, Time and Atoms. And therefore the Nyaya theory of creation is less rational than Christian theory of creation "ex nihilo".
Whereas RR replies to the missionary as follows: "Any object whether God or not—God can never be conceived, divested of space and time. If you therefore set aside the idea of space and time, you will not be able to prove anything whatever. Both Nyaya System and Christianity believe God to be eternal and the very term eternity, implying duration without beginning or end, makes it coeval with God. But if we mean by the eternal existence of God that he had no beginning in point of time nor will he have an end, then this definition is not only applicable to God and to time, but also points out that even the notion of the eternity of God depends on the notion of time. It is obvious that the material cause of the world is its most minute particles, whose destruction is evidently impossible; these are called ānus or atoms. The immaterial God cannot be supposed to be the material cause of these particles, nor can nothing be supposed to be the cause of them; therefore these particles must be eternal, and are only brought into different forms at different times and places, by the will of God."\(^7\)

Thus according to RR, the three concepts (Space, Time and Atoms) of the Nyaya are explaining the concept of creation far better than the Christian concept of creation 'ex nihilo'. So, actually the former is more rational than the latter.
(ii) The second type of RR's answer consists in showing that if some doctrines are unreasonable, they are not more so than those of Christianity. This may be explained with an illustration from his reply to the missionary's question about Puranas and Tantras. Regarding Puranas and Tantras the missionary had said that they are unreasonable because they enjoin the worship of God as possessing various names, forms and localities, having women and children as subject to senses, sensual pleasures etc. And they also enjoin the belief that such visible gods are omnipresent. How could it be? 8

As against this RR referred to many Biblical passages and claimed that they also spoke of God as possessing various names, forms etc. He asked the missionaries: "Whether or not they call Jesus Christ who is possessed of the human form, and also of the Holy Ghost who is possessed of the dove shape, the very God? (Lk. 3, 22) And whether they do not consider that Jesus Christ, the very God, received impression by the external organs, eyes etc., operated by means of the active organs, hands etc. And whether or not they consider him as subject to all the human passions?" He then asked the missionaries: "Was not Christ not angry? (Mk. 3, 5) Did he not experience pain? (Mt. 27, 46) Did he not eat and drink? (Lk. 7, 34) And did not the Holy Ghost move from one place to
another? (Lk.3,22) And did he not beget Jesus Christ by his intercourse with a woman? (Mt.1,18). "If they accept all this," he concluded, "then they cannot find fault with the Purenas alleging that in them the names and forms of God are established".  

Likewise, he took the doctrine of Trinity and argued out that it was "diametrically opposed to one's senses, to one's experience to the uniform course of nature and to the first axioms of reasons." Once again, in the same way, he did with reference to the Christian doctrine of Atonement. So, as a sort of final conclusion, RR observed: "As to their attempts at the converting of Hindoos to the Christian Faith these Teachers of strange doctrines may now have been convinced ... that no grown up native of India, possessed of common sense and common honesty will ever be persuaded to believe in their self-contradictory Creed, and that their religious efforts will be unavailing unless they adopt or be enabled to adopt some unfair means for the promotion of Christianity." In short, then, conversion to Christianity could not be advocated by Christians with their strange doctrines, on the basis of rationality.
(iii) Comments on the doctrinal presupposition of conversion

Conversion is sometimes made out to be rational, meaning that the choice in favour of one religion other than one's native religion is based on his understanding of the relative merits or the religious beliefs/doctrines of both the religions. What the missionary had done here was perhaps to stimulate this kind of choice on the part of at least the 'literati' of India. He took pains to prove the irrationality of the Hindu doctrines/beliefs with an underlying assumption that his own religious beliefs/doctrines were more rational. What RR tried to do was to give counter-arguments to the missionary's. He wanted to show that his own religious doctrines/beliefs were more rational than the Christian doctrines. If some of them were irrational, they were not more so than the Christian doctrines. Hence conversion to Christianity could not be held on the basis of rationality.

That both the parties to the controversy here were busy with establishing the rationality/irrationality of religious doctrines does not imply that they believed that the doctrinal element is the sole element of religion or even as the most important element of religion, to the exclusion of the other elements such as practices/rituals etc. The missionaries as well as RR himself were concentrating also on other elements like many practical aspects of Hinduism.
Thus the missionaries were also pointing out the degraded Hindu practices and thereby making a ground for conversion (as will be clear from the next section), and RR was interested in reforming many degraded practices such as idolatry. But still it is obvious from the foregoing account of the controversy that the attention of both the controvertists had been drawn so much to the doctrinal element in religion. Why?

Variety of factors could have been responsible for this. May be the missionaries thought the doctrinal element in Hinduism was the weakest and most vulnerable and so it was easy to attack Hinduism thereby. Or, perhaps they thought that doctrines/beliefs were a rather important element in religion and so for converting Hindus, a frontal attack on their doctrines was absolutely necessary. Or, probably they felt that they should concentrate first on the literati, because once the elite of a society were converted the rest would follow suit. And for their conversion the best strategy was believed to point out their doctrinal weakness. In the same way a number of factors must have influenced RR to have taken keen interest in picking up the controversy with the missionary on the basis of the rationality of doctrines. Presumably RR wanted to show to the missionaries that Hindu doctrines were not as vulnerable as they imagined, or that the literati could not be converted as easily as they thought.
and so on. We are not proposing to go into an analysis of
the factors that were operative in the making of the contro-
versy and thereby decide which side was correct. For, that
would require a thorough knowledge of the historical and
sociological conditions of the times, and psychological
factors of the controvertists, which is an impossible task.
Nor is it necessary to go into all those factors in a philoso-
phical thesis. That would be beyond the scope of our thesis.

Again, we are not proposing to go into the specific
considerations of all the arguments, put forward by each
party to establish the superiority of one's own religious
doctrines in opposition to the set of doctrines of another's
religion. For, going into those specific details of the
controvertists' arguments will not help us to decide the
fundamental question: 'How far a set of beliefs/doctrines
are superior to another set of beliefs/doctrines?', unless
we know how to decide one set of doctrines is superior to
another. So the immediate task that we face now is: 'how to
decide one set of doctrines as being superior to another?'

There might be different ways of judging whether one
set of doctrine is better than another.

(i) The metaphysical way is to take the different
metaphysical systems implied by the doctrines of each party
and then consider whether one can have a more consistent metaphysical system.

(ii) A more practical way will be to consider the relationship between a given set of doctrines and the religious way of life. Is it the systematization of doctrines that gives rise to the religious way of life? Or, is it the religious life which gives rise to a particular systematization of doctrines? If a particular system of doctrines/beliefs alone gives rise to the religious way of life, (say, facing crises and temptations in life with an equanimity of mind, and also extending this equanimity of soul all through one's life) then, it should follow that only those that have that set of doctrines/beliefs should be able to attain to the life of perfection. But it is a matter of fact that persons holding to different theories/doctrines/beliefs are able to face crises and temptations. Not only that, there are in each religion, lives of great saints, who are similar in their attainments in spite of the different beliefs/doctrines they had upheld. This shows that the beliefs/doctrines do not really play an essential role in the formation of religious life, rather an auxiliary role only. The relationship between the doctrines/beliefs and the living is essential, only in the sense that there must be a certain context of doctrine for that living, but not in the sense that a given (specific) set of doctrine alone can provide that context.
Now, the doctrinal context may be of different grades, depending upon the ability of a person's sophistication. Sometimes people do something or live in a particular way, just because a guru has said so. Here there is precious little to theorize or intellectualize the religious way of living. But people do get convinced by what a guru has said because of his life. If he had said e.g. "you must do this, because there is God" there will be people who do it simply, because they believe there is God. And this itself they believe just because the guru has said it. But suppose, people begin to raise a doubt about what the guru had said, or why he had said so, etc., still the answer can be given in such a way that it is not different from the previous one (e.g. what the guru says cannot be wrong). But when one raises a further doubt, which is of a different category, e.g. "We see a physical object, but we don't see God. But still, why should we accept God?" etc., then there begins to be a theorization, sophistication, and doctrinalization. More and more doubts mean more and more complex theorization and sophistication.

Therefore the suggestion that is made here is that doubt always goes with life, and that according to different kinds of doubts raised with reference to life. And different kinds of theorization arise, according to the different capabilities of persons to remove the doubts. Different kinds
of doubts arise and different kinds of systems arise. One kind of systems removes one kind of doubts for some. Another kind of system appeals to others with different kind of doubts. Now, is it possible to say that religious living without the complex theoretical system is rather primitive, as against the other way of living, which has a philosophical system backing it. No; the former may be a religion which is primitive in sophistication, but there is no reason to say that such a religion is primitive religiously. In tackling the fundamental problems of man the former is in no way less capable than the latter.

If this is so, then it is clear that no one system of doctrines/theories can be accepted as better than the other. Perhaps the mistake committed by the missionaries was that the kind of theories/doctrines that they were accustomed to have was the only one true one, and that that alone could give rise to the religious life. The whole attempt of the missionary seems unjustified first because his was an attempt to put up one kind of beliefs/doctrines as the right kind and the other kind of beliefs as the wrong. This he would not have done if only he knew that the function of doctrinalization/theorization arises only depending on the exigencies of different kinds of queries and doubts and also the different kinds of capabilities to answer those doubts and
that the religious way of living which is the test of the authenticity of any doctrine is itself essentially does not depend upon it, although takes its support from it.

Likewise, RR also committed the same mistake which the missionary committed. He wanted to prove the superiority of the Hindu system of doctrines as against the Christian system of doctrines. But they both must realize that any system of doctrines/theories considered even in the best light possible, will be open to objections. It is possible that those objections may be answered. But still to the one who does not accept the system, the answers will be unsatisfactory. But to one who accepts the system, the objections would be the result of misunderstanding which can be removed if one had a true understanding of the system. Secondly the test of Religion is not the best of theory but the genuine praxis i.e. the religious mode of life in action.

(iv) Grounds for and against Christian conversion with reference to Hindu practices/rituals - A Presentation of the controversial trends

In this section we are not going to deal with a specific controversy as in the case of the missionaries and RR. Rather we will deal with the controversy that is involved in two movements: one, the conversion-movement that was initiated by Christian missionaries with reference to the degraded Hindu
practices, the other, the counter-movement of DS which consisted in reforming these practices and thereby putting an end to Christian conversions, and also in reclaiming the converted.

Being brought into contact with a culture that was previously unknown or little known, many of the practices prevalent in those days in India, appeared to them as morally debased and spiritually darkened. There was the shocking custom of hanging those children who were supposed to be under the influence of a malignant spirit on a tree where the evil spirit was supposed to reside, and thereby appease it. Children so hung would generally be destroyed by birds of prey or animals. A missionary, named Thomas, once saved a baby at the moment when a jackal was running away with it. There was again the custom of throwing children into the sea at the Sagar Island or into the Ganges or Kaveri with a belief of benefit to the survivors. Self-torture like undertaking fire-baths in the hope of earning spiritual merit or eradicating sins was believed to be sanctioned by religion. Even human sacrifices were upheld in some places. The system of dancing girls being attached to temples and recruitment of wives for idols in certain temples looked to the missionaries as if that sacred places were being converted into brothels. Vamachari worship, in which meat and wine were offered to a naked female, could not be understood by them as a means of religious attainment.
Caste practices reducing the position of the lower classes to that of untouchables who could not enter the temples, could not be understood by the missionaries as religious practices. Child marriage, enforced widowhood, female infanticide, *suttee*, etc., made the life of high caste women miserable.

Some of the impressions which the missionaries had about such practices may be worth quoting. To one it looked an inconceivable contradiction to see how people who were so scrupulous about killing the most insignificant insect could tolerate such practices like *suttee* or infanticide etc., where so many weak and innocent human beings were led, with affected resignation to their death. Naturally one exclaimed that everyday was a "new proof of that wretched slavery which they (the Hindus) are under to the powers of darkness". Still another burst out into a passionate cry to the Almighty:

"Why then almighty Father, why
Do wretched souls in millions die?
While wide th' infernal tyrant reigns
O'er spacious realms in ponderous chains?"

The situation in India was bad because, they thought, their religion itself was false. Thus, for example, Charles Grant in his treatise maintained that Hindus were degenerate because of the nature of their religion itself. A Chaplain
of the East India Company, C. Bushanan, in a pamphlet presented a fearsome account of the ceremonies at Jegenath Temple and the behaviours of the priests and pilgrims there, and declared that the Hindu religion was the cause of the moral degeneration of the Hindus. A Scottish missionary, Alexander Duff, described Hinduism as 'an old peretent religion. To his fellow-missionary John Wilson, Hinduism was 'the grandest embodiment of Gentile error.'

As against this "false religion, giving rise to false moral standards, if not to outright turpitude" the missionaries thought that their own religion was an excellent religion which enforced a very strict morality. As against the debased, superstitious practices of idolatry, the missionaries felt that their own religion was filled with denouncements of idolatry in all its forms. Their feeling of contrast between the 'excellence' of their own religion and morality on one hand, and the 'religious debasedness' and 'moral degredation' of Hinduism on the other, could perhaps be brought out by an extract from Wilberforce's argument in a Parliamentary debate:

"Both their civil and religious systems are radically and essentially the opposites of our own. Our religion is sublime, pure and beneficent. Theirs is mean, licentious and cruel. Of our civil principles and condition, the common
right of all ranks and classes to be governed, protected and punished by equal laws is the fundamental principle... of theirs, the essential and universal pervading character is inequality; despotism in the higher classes, degradation and oppression in the lower."

Hence, they thought that the only way to improve the deplorable condition of their dominions in India was to introduce Christian principles and convert them into Christianity. To cite an authority in this respect,

"The true cure of darkness is the introduction of light. The Hindus err because they are ignorant and their errors have never fairly been laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them would prove the best remedy for their disorders."^33

It is against this background that the Evangelical movement started in English, and the campaign for getting an entry of missionaries to India for propagating Christianity. As a result of it, the missionary clause was finally introduced in the Charter Act of 1813, as against erstwhile "neutral policy" of the East India Company.^34 It is from then onwards that an influx of missionaries poured into India, unchecked and unresisted, with an open determination of destroying the practices of 'false' religion and introducing the practices
of the true religion. That is how the efforts of the missionaries became a really conversion-movement in India, which had grown very strong by the time of DS.

A striking point to be noted here is that DS's perception of the situation was also exactly like that of the missionaries. He substantially agreed with the missionaries that the Hindu practices, as well as rituals etc., were all in the most degraded form. However, his diagnosis of the situation as well his suggestion of the solution were quite different. All the evil practices and the superstitious rituals, ingrained in the society, according to DS were largely due to the corrupt Brahminical domination, the selfish priests who thrived on peoples' superstitions, who were not averse even to literary fraud for pecuniary gains. It was they, he said, who for their selfish interests composed the Puranas and initiated all forms of idolatry and other practices connected with it. He disbelieved even Ramayana and Mahabharata and all the post-Mahabharata Shastras. Whereas only the Vedas constituted the real scriptures of Hinduism. So, in his opinion, the real solution to the problem consisted in rejuvenating Hinduism by revival of the Vedic practices, and Vedic rituals and purging out all the post-Vedic practices. And as a true dedicated Swamiji, he took it upon himself the task of reforming Hindu practices after the pattern of Vedic practices.
He denounced idol-worship, pilgrimages to the shrines, etc., as un-Vedic practices. He rejected all kinds of animal sacrifices. He accepted only those rituals like *agnihotra* which were recorded in the Vedas, and condemned all other, un-Vedic, rituals as inventions of Puranic Priests, who were parasites on the society. The priestly class could be done away with, he held, because all the ceremonies could be performed by any educated individual. He also published a small treatise called *Sanakar vidhi*, on the observance of various ceremonies according to the spirit of the Vedas.

DS introduced a strict morality with regard to meat-eating, drinks, adultery etc., as having no sanction in the Vedas. He insisted that child-marriage must be put an end to. He prohibited enforced-widowhood and allowed to virgin widows and widowers to remarry. However, he maintained that the widows and widowers who had lived with their spouses should not remarry. Yet, for their relief, and for the relief also of husbands and wives in certain circumstances, he laid down the law of *niyoga*. He also made thorough recast, on the traditional understanding of the Caste system. The classes like the *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaiya* and *Sudra* have no doubt been mentioned in the Vedas. But he insisted that Vedas do not uphold a caste system as was practised at
that time. "All individuals should be placed in different
classes according to their qualifications, accomplishments,
and character." He insisted that everyone, whether male
or female, whether Brahmin or Shudra, had a right to education.

To make his reformation collectively effective, D 3
established his Sema\aj which was not only able to bring about
an awareness of the social evils, but also an active interest
in their abolition. After the Master, the Arya Sema\aj not
only raised its voice against child marriage, but also tried
to enforce the rule that no girl be married under 16, and no
boy under 25. The Arya Sema\aj also carried out the task of
solemnizing and encouraging widow remarriage. A beginning
was made in education both girls and boys on 'national lines'.
Girls' schools and schools for boys were opened at several
places. Orphanages were opened to give shelter to waifs
and stays of all castes. Under the inspiration of the
Master, the Arya Sema\aj condemned the Caste System, created
public opinion through press and public preaching etc., against
caste prejudices, and implored the outcasts be accepted to
the Hindu fold. And in all its institutions like schools,
orphanages, stree sama\aj, widows' home etc. no caste distinct-
ions was seen, and inter-dining and social mingling was we\ere
permitted.
Thus, the reform-movement that DS initiated individually, as well as through his Samaj, was just parallel to all the works of the Missionaries, and thereby proved a counter-movement to the Christian conversion-movement. Many a Hindu, thanks to the movement of the Arya Samaj, not only did not lose faith in Hinduism, but could even feel genuinely proud of his own faith. How far these attempts of DS and of the Arya Samaj proved successful in preventing the Christian conversions is difficult to assess. Anyway it is beyond the scope of our thesis. But the endeavour to put up a fight with the missionaries could not but be appreciated. Besides, there was something more positively in opposition to the Christians' conversion-movement. That was the shuddhi movement initiated by DS himself. The impact of conversion of Hindus to other faiths was such that DS thought that unless the Hindus opened their doors to members of other faiths, they would remain a hunting ground for the missionaries of other faiths. So he mooted the question of shuddhi, first, in Punjab where the Hindus felt the missionary propaganda was a real threat. And he himself performed a reconversion of a Christian. Later he reiterated his stand that shuddhi was a proper and necessary procedure. After DS shuddhi has played a significant role for instance in reclaiming 100,000 Malkana Rajputs and others who were converted during Moplah rebellion in Malabar in 1921.

Today also it is being carried on so as to prove itself as a
force to be reckoned with. There seems to be also public support to such re-conversion movements. Even the supposedly secular and civic body like a city Municipality has expressed joy over re-conversions. Thus for instance, recently Lala Parishad of Pune congratulated Sadhu Brahmachari Vishvanathji for having reconverted about 225 people from Christianity. 52

(v) An analysis of the 'practical' grounds for/against conversion

The foregoing survey gives us an idea of the Hindu practices/rituals, as viewed by the missionaries on the one hand, and DS on the other. Was the Missionaries' perception of the situation correct? Or, was the perception by DS correct? Whether the facts, each side adduced to corroborate one's own view, were really the case? All such questions we cannot be concerned with, here. It is the task of sociologists or/and historians.

So, our analysis will be concerned only with the question: how far their perception of the facts (practices) was coloured by their understanding of their own religion as well as that of the others'? Both the parties agree in this that the situation they faced was an utter degredation of practices, socially and religiously. But they differ from each other in the response they showed in respect of the situation.
The approach of the missionaries consisted in this that "if such is the situation, so must be their religion" i.e. if the practices/rituals are bad then their religion must be false. It is the false religion which gives rise to false moral standards. Whereas their own religion was enforcing strict morality. So, the only way to save the situation was to introduce the 'light' into the 'darkness'.

But this sort of approach is very misleading. For, first of all it is not very clear whether all those degraded practices were laid down by a religion. One of the questions that the missionaries ought to have raised and did not raise is: "Whether those practices were really laid down by religion, as they thought they were. For it is possible that certain degradations develop on account of a variety of factors, and need not be strictly laid down by a religion. Another question that the missionaries have not tried to raise nor answer is this: Whether a particular practice had a form which was not degraded or had only the form which was degraded?

Without raising such questions and without making any efforts to find out answers to such questions, if they came to conclusion that the religion alone was the cause of all the practices in the manner they were practised, it definitely
was a wrong approach!

Obviously they were no fools so as not to see the relevance of raising such questions nor to make some efforts to raise these questions and find out suitable answers to such questions. Yet if they did not do so, it was only because their approach was overpowered by their ultimate presupposition about their own religion and that of others. They were so convinced of the truth that they had the Truth, that they felt it an obligation on their part to impart it to others. It was this fundamental assumption about their religion that coloured, their perception of the Hindu practices as arising from a 'false' religion itself. Again it was this assumption that prevented them from examining whether the practices, only a degraded form or whether they had any other form than the one which was practised. It was not because they thought the practices were bad here that they were led to think that they alone had the Truth with them, but actually it was because they were convinced of their possession of the Truth solely, that they were easily led to the conclusion that these practices, which were bad, must be arising from Un-Truth.

Thus, while considering the missionaries' approach, whether correct or not, we are led to really examine whether their presupposition that they alone had the Truth, was right
or not. This we shall actually consider in the next chapter. So leaving aside our analysis of the missionaries' approach at this stage, let us take up the analysis of DS's response to the situation.

Perhaps the best way of making an assessment of DS's response, is to raise the same two questions we raised with reference to our assessment of the missionaries, specially because both seem to have faced the same situation. Any way we are comparing the missionaries and DS in respect of their responses to a concrete situation viz., the practices of Hinduism. So perhaps an assessment of their merits could be best made by raising the same questions with both. Now, with regard to the first question viz. whether those practices were really laid down by the religion, DS's reply was a clear cut 'NO'. The Hindu religion, which was Vedic, according to him, was the best expression of the Truth; perhaps even solely the Truth. The Vedas, he interpreted, were emphatically monotheistic. Vedic worship, he said, was strictly without images. Hence there was no question of the religious practices of Hinduism being idolatrous, at its source. So, he insisted that all these 'idolatrous' and 'superstitious' practices were all later accretions, and degenerations, rather than steming from the Hindu religion itself. As regards the evils and immoral practices that were present in
the society of that day, they could only be removed if the Vedic practices could be resuscitated. All those evils, pointed out by the missionaries, such as child marriage, enforced-widowhood, lack of education, inequality of the sexes, and rigid practices of caste system etc., he claimed, were not there during the time of Vedas, and the needed social reformation could be brought about by reviving the Vedic practices.

They were not only just assertions; but he also put them into practice. Particularly through his Arya Samaj he tried to bring about the needed reform on the basis of the Vedic practices. How far his attempts and those of the Arya Samaj proved successful in reforming Hindu practices, after the light of Vedic practices, is difficult to say. But, again, that is outside of our purpose. In all these frantic efforts of D.S., what is implied is that he accepted the existence of the degraded practices and was anxious to show to the Westerners that these degradations were not the essence of Hinduism, as was believed by them.

The real question is, at what point the degradation appear? That brings us to the second question we wanted to consider viz. "Whether the practices, as practised, had a form which was not degraded, or whether they all had only the form which were degraded. This question was not raised
either by the missionaries, or by DS. This might lead us
to conclude that the degradation was so much prevalent that
even people like DS could not but accept the fact and that
is why they did not raise such a question but rather were
only keen on reforming the situation. And such a conclusion
might be true also. Granted that prevalence of the degra-
dation was the case, let us raise another question: What
does that imply? Does that imply that the practice, in
principle was bad, or was the social institution in which
the principle was embodied, bad? Of course a sharp distinct-
ion between the principles of a practice and the social
institutions in which the principle is embodied is not there.
But one cannot deny that, there is such a distinction
between the two. It is possible that the principles were
all right, but the institutions in some respects were not
so. Thus, e.g., in respect of a ritual practice, say idol
worship, the principle behind it is definitely all right.
As we have already seen, it can be used as a symbol for
communion with God. But may be the social institution which
could grow around that practice viz., the temples, priestcraft
etc., could become corrupt. Now, because the social
institution had become corrupt, did it mean that practice
of idol worship was itself bad? Perhaps this DS failed to
see, whereas Gandhi saw it. And that is why while DS tried
to do away with idolatry altogether, Gandhi was not ready
to do so.
In the same way, in respect of other practices also it is possible to draw a distinction between the two. Thus, in the case of Suttee, one could see the principle under which its origin could be upheld. It is said that at the time of the rise of Rajputs against Muslim rulers, the Muslims would usually abduct the women and spoil them or convert them to Islam. To avoid such misfortunes the Rajput women volunteered to die on the pyre of their husbands. When a King died, what would happen to the Queen, or his favourite queen? This sort of anxiety also could have caused the queens to take up Suttee. If women thought they could not keep their 'sheela', their vow of virginity except by suttee, perhaps it was advisable for them to do so. But of course, the way it was institutionalized later and carried on irrationally, might have given ground to reject it. But the question is whether we could make a distinction between the principle involved in the act, and the extent of degradation on account of the institutionalization of a particular practice.

Likewise the devadasis would have really been women dedicated to gods and that they really worshipped gods with their music and dance. In fact persons like Kesarbai Kerkar have clearly professed: "For seven Decades I've sung for the Gods. If incidentally, my music has pleased the audiences, I feel doubly fulfilled." But if the system,
as such, had started to be degraded of course that deterioration had to be removed. But can we really say that the practice in itself was wrong? The *devadasi* system might have developed out of a deterioration of a nunnery system that is common today in other religions like Christianity and Buddhism. With regard to the practice of tree worship, again, it could be said -- in fact Gandhi has actually said it -- that it symbolizes true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom. In such a country especially in which there is a scarcity of trees, tree worship assumes a profound economic significance. Though it is also true to say that the poor simple-minded women, who offer worship to trees, have no reasoned understanding of the implications of their act.

Thus it is possible that in all those practices which DS as well as the missionaries found bad, one will be able to distinguish between the principles behind a practice and the social institution or the form into which it had degraded. That there was, thus, a possibility of considering something in favour of a practice, was not considered by DS. In so far as somebody like Gandhi for instance was able to see the possibility of a defence in the practices, one cannot be ready to condemn them immediately. Whereas DS was ready to condemn them summarily, because they had been condemned by others. In so far as the sympathetic understanding was not
there in DS then, he was no different from the missionaries, and Gandhi was essentially different from both the missionaries and DS.

No doubt DS's response is different from that of the missionaries, inasmuch as he had made it very clear that those degradations did not necessarily arise out of the religion itself, as the missionaries maintained. But in so far as he thought that the Hindu religion meant only 'Vedic', and that all those practices which did not correspond with the Vedic practices, must be false, he was showing as much an exclusivistic attitude as the missionaries. Again, insofar as DS assumed that only Vedic religion was the superior religion, compared to all other religions, and that Vedas alone contain the Truth, the whole Truth, he was again no different from the missionaries, who held the same assumption with reference to their own religion.

Thus it becomes evident that DS's assumption and approach were essentially the same as those of the missionaries, and that there was an essential difference between DS and missionaries on the one hand and Gandhi on the other. This will be still more evident from an assessment of Gandhi's attitudes to Shuddhi movement.
The claim for re-conversion through shuddhi was based most often on the ground that conversions to other faiths were not genuine. Thus it was argued: if young children in orphanages had been converted by missionaries, or if people from the depressed class had joined Christianity for material considerations, but later they felt it worthwhile to readopt their ancestral faith, was it not right to reconvert them? But Gandhi's opinion was different: If a person, through fear, compulsion or for material gain went to another faith, it was a misnomer to call it conversion. So any such repentants must be re-admitted to the Hindu fold without ado, certainly without any shuddhi. The reason for such a stand of Gandhi was this: shuddhi if needed to be performed, implied that there was first a stage of ashuddhi. But there was really no such stage at all in all such cases mentioned above. For, when the acceptance of a different faith had been done by mistake, then really the rejection of his faith was also by mistake. When both rejection of his own faith and acceptance of new faith, both had been done by mistake, where was the ashuddhi? So, Gandhi said there was no need of a shuddi ceremony.

But it might be argued that the shuddi ceremony does not necessarily imply a previous occurrence of some ashuddhi. It may just mean a form by which those who had joined other
faiths are just accepted back. But in that case, that
ceremony can simply be an open declaration of those who are
coming back into one's own fold. Why should there be a
‗shuddhi‘ ceremony? Suppose shuddhi ceremony means really
an open-declaration ceremony only, what harm is there to
perform shuddhi? That cannot be right. For the implication
between the two forms of ceremony are very different. Open—
declaration-ceremony implies just re-version of people. It
gives an opportunity to people concerned to declare themselves
publicly that they are Hindus, as well as for others to
accept them as Hindus publicly Whereas shuddhi ceremony means
a re-conversion. It implies an acceptance of the former
conversions as real conversion, consequent upon a ‗real‘
rejection of one's faith. It implies again that that accept­
ance is once again rejected, as a result of the acceptance,
cease again, of the old faith. So actually there are four
stages implied in this case of shuddhi - reconversions:
(a) rejection of the old faith, as real; (b) acceptance of
the new faith, as real; (c) rejection of that new faith;
(d) acceptance of the old faith again. Whereas the open-
declaration ceremony does not imply any such stages. Since
the rejection of the old faith as well as the acceptance of
the new faith are said to be a mistake, no actual crossing
have taken place. The so-called converted actually remain
where they were. Hence Gandhi said that there is no need
of a shuddhi-ceremony.
Thus, since Gandhi did not accept shuddhi, he actually implied thereby that he did not believe in conversion as a policy, in respect to all those cases where conversions were wrought through fear, compulsion, starvation, or for material considerations etc. Whereas insofar as DS advocated shuddhi, he showed that he accepted conversions as a matter of policy. And that was essentially the position of the missionaries too. They believed in conversion as a matter of programme. And DS also believed in it. Thus DS's position was actually the same as that of the missionaries. This was a fundamental point of difference between Gandhi and DS. In sofar as this was so, DS's response was actually not a traditional response of a Hindu, whereas Gandhi's response would be more in line with the traditional Hindu response. In fact Gandhi himself attested to this. "After much prayerful study of the Hindu Shastras I have come to the conclusion that there is no room in them for conversions such as they have in Islam and Christianity."58

But if more and more people from Hinduism are joining other faiths, will not Hinduism be in danger? Will not Hinduism face an actual erosion, unless reconversions, or even proselytization is taken up? But that was not the way of protecting Hinduism, according to Gandhi. "I, for myself, would love to protect my religion with tapascharya - the way of prayerful suffering which is the royal road to success
in any noble object... He who has no inkling of religion, whose heart is arid and unpurified—how dare he purify others?"59

But will such a spiritual way of approaching the problem, really solve the actual problem. The Untouchables, for example, would easily be inclined to go to other faiths where they are able to get better treatment. Will not such an influx of people into other faiths, be a portent threat to Hinduism itself? Can such a threat be solved merely by one's self-purification alone? Are not such concrete measures like shuddh necessary?

To such questions Gandhi pointed out firmly that Hinduism would perish not through individual conversions, not even through mass-conversions, but only because of sinful denial of justice to Harijans, by the so-called Caste Hindus. He drew the attention of the Caste Hindus to this that the real wonder was not that many had left Hinduism, but many more had been loyal to Hinduism in spite of the inhumanities and hardships they had suffered in the name of that very faith. This wonderful loyalty itself should urge the Caste Hindus to render justice to them. Hence Gandhi admonished them to have a heart-search and self-purification, which alone would protect Hinduism and not any movement at conversion, or reconversion.60
Here again one can find the essential difference between the responses of DS and of the missionaries, on the one hand, and Gandhi's response on the other. The missionaries pointed their finger to the harsh practices of the Caste Hindus towards the Untouchables, and the solution they offered was to bring them into their own fold. (Whether they succeeded to give a perfect equality to the Untouchables in Christianity itself, would be a big question). Whereas DS while claiming that Vedic religion did not offer room for such practices, and trying to reform the existing practices by reviving the practices, advocated re-conversions. But Gandhi's only weapon was the reformation of the practices, and of the living, but not re-conversion. His insistence on the living the sole means of protecting Hinduism, or any other religion for that matter, was because that was what constituted real 'Religion' for him. All these 'conversions' and 're-conversions' etc., did not really constitute religion for him. Changing sides and crossing the floors etc., may be aspects of politics, but not of religion. That is why he was so much against those practices, and insisted only on pure living, both on the part of the Christians, and Hindus, including DS's camp. The understanding of religion which is behind such a response of Gandhi, will be clear from our account in the next chapter.