THE IDEA OF UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN MODERN INDIAN THOUGHT
(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD)

THESIS
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Dedicated
to
My Beloved Parents
(Mrs. Atiya Iqbal and Mr. Mohammad Iqbal)
who gave their today for my better tomorrow
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(SABA IQBAL)
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgement</th>
<th>Page Nos.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i-ii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Page Nos.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Defining ‘Universal Religion’</td>
<td>1 - 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Present Project, its Thesis and Themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ramananda, Kabir and Dara Shukoh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ramakrishnana Paramhansa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sir Syed and Iqbal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter I</th>
<th>‘Universal Religion’ in Medieval Indian Thought</th>
<th>41 - 52</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ramananda and Kabir: Early Syncretism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dara Shukoh: Synthesis of Islam and Hinduism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ramakrishna Paramhansa: Hinduism and Universalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter II</th>
<th>‘Universal Religion’ in Modern Indian Thought</th>
<th>53-87</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tagore as a Monotheist and Humanist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gandhi’s Views on Religious Tolerance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Radhakrishnan’s Emphasis on Hinduism as an All-inclusive and All-embracing Tradition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sir Syed’s Views on Religious Tolerance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Iqbal on Islam as a Universal Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter III</th>
<th>Vivekananda’s Concept of ‘Universal Religion’</th>
<th>88-151</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nature of Universal Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Vedanta as the Basis of Religious Universalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ‘God’ as the Common Basis for the Unity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Views on Hinduism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Practical Vedanta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Views on Visistadvaita and Dvaita
7. Views on Buddhism and Jainism
8. Views on Christianity and Islam

Chapter IV Azad’s Theory of Religious Universalism 152-202
1. Religion and Islam
2. Monotheism and Universalism
3. Deviation, Distortion and Return
4. Unity and Plurality of Religions
5. Concept of God in Different Religions
6. Concept of Jihad

Chapter V Conclusion 203-232

References 233-248

Bibliography 249-256
INTRODUCTION

Defining ‘Universal Religion’

Religion is the faith by which man lives. It reflects his inward vision of the light that can descend upon him. Universal religion is constructing one’s faith and vision upon man’s true identity as man or to present a true human identity regardless of colour, caste, nationality, creeds etc. It is apart from political barriers and cuts across the racial, national, geographical boundaries. It is based upon such higher values as truth, beauty, justice, love, peace, progress etc. It gives attention to the basic spiritual identity of man. It provides common platform to all religious faiths. Different religions get together with the spirit of co-operation.

In his celebrated work The Essential Unity of All Religions, Bhagvan Das has defined Universal Religion as that religion “in which there may be Universal Agreement”. But the question is how can we find the element of agreement when there is so much difference among religions?

The answer to this question is that in religion we must make the effort to determine what is the most certain and good and what may be most approved and agreed in any circumstance by all humanity. Religion should promote good will, sympathy and brotherhood among all human beings. This is the only way to repress conflict, prejudice, misconception, disagreement and narrow minded zeal.
According to Bhagvan Das, the new declaration of Universal Religion must be based on the principle of majority rule. This means there should be first of all an agreement between the great religions that all of them teach the same truth.

"Those truths and practices which receive not only the greatest number of, but unanimous, votes from the living religions, those beliefs and observances on which all are agreed should obviously be regarded as constituting Universal Religion".  

This kind of religious universalism is not a new idea but is already present in many ancient texts. The Upanishads, for example, say:

"Cows are of many different colours, but
The milk of all is of one colour, white;
So the proclaimers who proclaim the Truth
Use many varying forms to put it in,
But yet the Truth enclosed in all is One".  

This sentiment is echoed in Rumi in the following verse:

"Jesus put many cloths of many hues
Into one jar, and out of it they came
With all their hues washed off, all clean and white,
As seven-coloured rays merge in white light".  

Krishna, too, says in Gita and not once but twice:

"To but One Goal are marching everywhere,
All human beings, though they may seem to walk
On paths divergent; and that Goal is I,
The Universal Self, Self-Consciousness".  

Krishna says that the teaching he is giving to Arjuna was given by Vivasvan to Manu, by Manu to Ikshvaku, and then by many Rshis, age after age. All is always present in the Memory of God, the Omniscient,
Omnipotent, Omnipresent Universal Self, the One principle of all Life and Consciousness.

Similarly, in Islam Muhammad (the Paigham-bar, the Rasul, i.e., the ‘message-bearer’, sent by the Spirit) says:

“This that I am now uttering unto you,
The Holy Qur’ an – it is to be found
Within the ancient Seers’ writings too;
For Teachers have been sent to every race.
Of human beings no community
Is left without a warner and a guide.
And aught of difference we do not make –
For disagreement there is none ‘twixt them –
Between these Prophets. All that have been sent,
Have been so sent but One Truth to proclaim –
I, verify the I Al(l) One, am God,
There is no other God than, I [the Self,
The Universal all-pervading Self],
And I alone should be adored by all”.

The Qur’an makes this further clear in the following verse:

“Teachers are sent to each race that they may
Teach it in its own tongue, so there may be
No doubt as to meaning in its mind.
An Arabic Qur’an is thus revealed,
That Mecca and the cities round may learn
With ease the Truth put in the words they know.
For had we made them in a foreign tongue
They surely would have made objection thus –
“Why have not these revealings been made clear?”

The obvious significance of these remarkable texts is that the essentials are common to all religions: that Truth is universal and not the monopoly of any race or teacher; that non-essentials vary with time, place, and circumstance; that the same fundamental truths have been revealed by God in different scriptures, in different languages, through different persons born in different nations.
The Prophet of Islam adds the positive counsel:

"Let all of us ascend towards and meet together on the common ground of those high truths and principles which we all hold".\(^8\)

"Verily, all who faithfully believe in God, and Day of Judgement, and do good, whoever they be, Jews, Christians, Sabians, they shall have their reward from the Lord God. There is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve".\(^9\)

"Cling, all, to the strong rope of Love Divine
Love for each other, and of the One God
And do not think of separation ever".\(^10\)

The word ‘religion’ which is derived from Latin *religare* means ‘to bind back’. It means that bonds of love and sympathy should bind human beings with each other and with God. According to Bhagwan Das, it means

"The power to bind together the hearts of men to one another, by the common bond of God, the All-pervading Self. It is the power to give birth to, and to nourish and maintain, a high civilization. It is noteworthy that every historic civilization has had, and has today, its specific religion, its worshipped ideal. Indeed the birth of a new religion, i.e., a fresh revival of the spirit of religion, whence united co-operation has invariably proceeded and given again birth to a new civilization".\(^11\)

In same manner, the Vedic word ‘Dharma’ is from the root *Dhr* which means ‘hold and bind together’. It also has same significance.

"The ‘holding together’ of human being in a ‘society’ is not possible without perpetual ‘give and-take’, ‘right-and-duty’, incessant little or great acts of self-sacrifice, yajana, qurbani. The self-assertion of any one individual is not possible without corresponding self-denial on the part of some other or others".\(^12\)
There are three main aspects in all religions. In the Vaidika Dharma they are expressly mentioned as Janana-marga, Bhakti-marga and the Karma marga. In Islam it is called Haqiqat, Tariqat and Shariyat. Buddhist, Jaina and Christian theology also have words with same significance. In the words of same author,

"We may distinguish three main parts or aspects in all the great religions. In the Vaidika Dharma they are expressly mentioned: the Jnana-Marga, the Bhakti-marga, the Karma-marga. Generally corresponding to these are, the Haqiqat or Aqayad, the Tariqat or Ibadat, and the Shariyat or Ma’amilat of Islam. Gnosis, Pietas, and Energeia; the (a) Way of Knowledge, Illumination, Gnosticism, (b) the Way of Devotion, Pietism, Mysticism, (c) the Way of Rites and Ceremonies and Works of self-denying Charity. Activism, Energism, Practicalism – these seem to be similarly distinguished in Christian theology, and to have the same significance. In the Buddhist Eightfold Path, the three most important rules under which the other five may be classified, are Right Knowledge, Right Desire and Right Action – Samyakdrshti, Samyak sankalpa and Samyak vyayama; which are the same things as the three Vaidika Margas. The Jaina teaching is the same”.  

Universal religion laid stress upon the essential unity of all the great religions of the world. It teaches respect for all. It teaches that different spiritual paths lead to the same goal. The growth of human personality and the growth of human society depend upon the higher values.

Universal religion does not teach man’s isolation from the society or the annihilation of the individual in the depth of the universal. The universal is unproductive without the individual. The individual can discover its true center of gravity only in the heart of universal. The boundless creativity of the universal can find its expression only in and through the individual.
Universal religion therefore helps the individual rise form its ego shell of dogmatism, casteism, and cultural differences.

The Present Project, its Thesis and Themes

From what has been written above, it is clear that the idea of universal religion is attractive from multiple points of views. Firstly it is a great intellectual concept which has captivated the attention of scholars and reformers throughout the civilized history of humanity. Secondly, many catholic minds have found it as a sure means of ending conflict among the rival faiths and bringing harmony between them. Thirdly, it provides a perspective to read the religious history of mankind in the spirit of empathy and understanding religions in their core aspects. Further, an essential commonality is discovered in the bewildering diversity of religious traditions when the universalistic framework is made to be the focus of study.

It is also to be noticed that while all religious traditions had their dogmatists and fanatics, within them there have also been no dearth of people who were respectful and tolerant of other religions while being at the same time observant and faithful to their own. Whether the pagan saints of Greek and Roman religious denominations, or Sufis and mystics of Islam or Bhakti saints of medieval and modern Hinduism, they all sought to spread the message of love and peace among the communities.

It is further to be emphasized that India has always been the place specially hospitable for such an idea to take root and flourish. The
Upanishads kept this message in their metaphysical formulae and so did many other kinds of literature of later times. The idea was also greatly popular among the saints of mystically inclined poets of Islam who flourished in both early and later phases of medieval Indian history. The culmination of this trend of interactivity between Islam and Hinduism was in the writings of Vivekananda who was himself a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, a Bengali saint of nineteenth century.

Since the articulate beginnings of the idea of universal religion lie in the medieval times when there was a high degree of fusion between the Hindu and Muslim religio-mystical thoughts and movements, it is appropriate that we begin our explorations form that period of Indian history. The first chapter of this thesis that comes after Introduction, therefore, is titled as “Universal Religion in Medieval Indian Thought” and deals with the ideas of Ramananda, Kabir and Dara Shikoh on the one hand and Ramakrishna Paramhansa on the other. Ramananda was a Bhakti saint made famous for having his disciple Kabir whose poetic adventures laid strong foundation for the syncretic thought in not only medieval but also modern India. His stress on pure monotheism, rejection of idolatry, externalism and ritualism and his message of peace and harmony among the followers of diverse religions is still a source of inspiration for many.

Kabir lived in a time when the Mughal court was patronizing the same ideas at official level. Akbar, under the influence of his courtiers Abul Fazal and Faizi was promoting a synthetic religion called by him
Din-e-Ilahi which he thought should replace the existing religious denominations in order to realize religious unity among his subjects. This trend of thought was later provided a philosophical foundation by his great grandson Dara Shukoh. Being initiated under a reputed Muslim sufi and being also trained under the Brahmin scholars of Benaras, he was eminently suited to bring out a reconciliation between Hinduism and Islam. The views of all these great reformer will be briefly discussed in this chapter.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of an outline of ideas of Ramakrishna Paramhansa who, as already indicated, was the chief mentor of Vivekananda.

The second chapter deals with the idea of universal religion as it was elaborated and articulated by such modern Indian thinkers as Tagore, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan on the one hand and Sir Syed and Iqbal on the other. It is noted that the modern Indian thinkers, whether Hindu or Muslim, were simply bewitched by this idea and were keen to show that the religion they professed must be interpreted in such a way as to show that they contained essential universalist elements and that whatever particularism or parochialism there was, was only incidental and non-essential. Tagore himself was a man of wide sympathies having been exposed to the monotheistic-moralistic tendencies of Christianity and Islam besides his being rooted in the intellectualism as well as devotionalism of his own Hindu religion. Gandhi too, though not a philosopher, was yet a
great proponent of the commonality between Hinduism on the one hand and Islam and Christianity on the other. “Ishwar and Allah are both thy names” was his famous hymn and mantra. Radhakrishnan also wrote several treatise to emphasize the universalistic aspects of Hinduism.

Among the modern Muslim thinkers, Sir Syed is universally recognized as the greatest – not only for his reformist works but also for his rationalism and liberalism. His was a revolt against orthodox parochialism and literalism. The scripture must be interpreted rationally and the core Islamic beliefs should not be confined to the observance of Muhammedan Sharia. It should be recognized that it was this anti-parochialism and liberalism that later on characterized the thought structure of Abul Kalam Azad. The rational and liberal trends also found a voice in Iqbal who both by his poetry and philosophical writings tried to make Islam a dynamic and universal religion.

The fourth and fifth chapters deal with the ideas of Vivekananda and Abul kalam Azad respectively in detail. The former created a revolution in Hindu thought by showing particularly to western public that Hinduism was not a religion of fossilized philosophical ideas or pernicious rituals or harmful superstitions. It was scientific, rationally advanced and universalistic. It was, above all, an inclusive religion which accorded respect and acceptance to other religions as well. Truth was found in all religions and so also were they all equally the means of salvation and liberation. The core idea of Hinduism being the realization of God through
mystical practices, it was immaterial whether one observed the rituals of this religion or that religion.

Abul Kalam Azad similarly emphasized the fact that Islam chiefly meant submission to God. Islam was not a religion that was only the religion of Arabian prophet Muhammad. The Quran itself speaks of all nations having their guides who preached the worship of God to them. Wherever there is pure worship of God, it is Islam. Din or religion must be distinguished from Sharia which is a system of law. The latter is time and space bound while the former is universal. Azad's commentary on the various suras of Quran is universally considered as a landmark achievement in the modern understanding of Islam.

The "Conclusion" part of thesis attempts a critical review of all the ideas discussed in the various chapters. It is noted that while the idea of universal religion is in itself a creative construct, it is also not without drawbacks. Various writers and thinkers, especially those who came later, were genuinely concerned with the rivalry, disharmony and conflict prevailing among the followers of different religions. The best way they thought for overcoming this situation was to talk in terms of unity and universality as emanating from a religious source itself rather than some non-religious secular ideology. There is obviously no doubt that if all agree on some universally acceptable religious principle which is also the essence and chief concern of religiosity, conflicts will be substantially minimized, if not obliterated.
But then it is also to be recognized that while looking for the commonalities, these thinkers ignored, somewhat illegitimately, the vital differences that existed among religions. In other words, the ideational peculiarities constituting the identities of particular religions was scarified at the altar of universality. Besides, there has been a tendency among these various authors to establish their own religion to bear the universalistic elements. In a way, it killed the very purpose of seeking religious unity and universality.

In so far as the universal religion as a spiritual idea has had a smooth and linear history starting from medieval to modern times culminating in the writings of Vivekananda and Azad, it would be appropriate to introduce the life and works of various personages whose views have been discussed in this work in brief or in detail.

**Ramananda, Kabir and Dara Shukoh**

**Ramananda** (1360–1470), also called as Sant Ramanand or Swami Ramanand, was a Vaishnava saint. He is considered to be the reviver of the Ramanandi sect. Ramananda for the most part of his life lived in the holy city of Varanasi, and was a pioneer of the Bhakti movement, as well as a social reformer in Northern India.

When Ramananda was a child, he studied the Hindu scriptures and showed great interest in spiritual thoughts. He received his early education in Kasi. A renowned philosopher and the prophet of the new Vaishnava religion, known for his downplaying the role of caste, Ramananda was
particularly known for worshipping Lord Rama and his wife Goddess Sita. Ramanuja and Ramananda both believed that the human soul is distinct from the Supreme Spirit and retains its identity and separate consciousness. Ramananda visited many places of pilgrimage, including Jagannath Puri, where a memorial in his honour still exists.

Ramananda realized that God can be worshipped by everyone because Lord Rama himself has never stopped the people of any caste from reaching Him. Instead, the Ramayana is full of stories about Shabri, Kevat, etc. who all were lower castes, but Rama gave them equal respect, the way he respected Brahmins. Ramananda believed that in spiritual pursuit, the caste system of India is redundant. He believed that to truly devote yourself to Lord Rama, one must forget one's caste identity and social status. Ramananda is quoted as saying, Let no one ask a man's caste or with whom he eats. If a man is devoted to Hari, he becomes Hari's own. Ramananda had disciples of all castes.

The institutional centrality of Ramananda has long been reflected in the 'guru parampara' that connects every Ramanandi through an unbroken succession of gurus with Ramananda himself and, eventually, Ramchandra. Ramananda taught his followers to pay special attention to Rama and his wife Sita. He lived a life of dedication and self-surrender to the Supreme Soul, 'Paramatma'. According to Saint Ramananda, Lord Rama was the Supreme Spirit and the human race was simply one large family, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. He was a skilled and impressive preacher, who drew large crowds wherever he traveled, yet most of Ramananda's poems
and sayings were not preserved. The result is the lack of texts that modern scholars and historians can use to unearth the life of Ramananda. Ramananda was a learned man. Many of the books which are supposed to have been written by him such as Sri Vaishnava, Matanbuj Bhaskar and Sri Ramarachan Padhti are still available.

Ramananda’s name was immortalized by his more famous disciple Kabir Das\textsuperscript{15}, the well known mystic poet. He was a man of principles and practiced what he preached. People called him by different names like das, sant, bhakta etc. As Das, he was referred to as the servant of humanity and thus a servant of divinity. He had a strong belief in Vedanta, Sufism, Vaishnavism and Nath sampradaya. He applied the knowledge that he gained through the various experiences of his life. He was always in the pursuit of truth and nothing could hold him back. Kabir was well known for his religious affiliation.

There are plenty of legends associated with the birth and death of Kabir (1440 -1518). Some people say that he was born in a Muslim weaver family, while others say that he was born to a Brahmin widow. It is said that, when he headed his way for heaven, tussle took place between the Hindus and Muslims over the issue of performance of the last rites. Eventually, a tomb as well as a Samadhi Mandir, both were constructed, which are still standing erect next to each other.

Kabir’s poetry is a reflection of his philosophy about life. His writings were mainly based on the concept of reincarnation and karma. Kabir’s philosophy about life was very clear-cut. He believed in living life
in a very simplistic manner. He had a strong faith in the concept of oneness of God. He advocated the notion of Koi bole Ram Ram Koi Khudai.... The basic idea was to spread the message that whether you chant the name of Hindu God or Muslim God, the fact is that there is only one God who is the creator of this beautiful world.

Kabir was influenced by the prevailing religious mood of his times, such as old Brahmanic Hinduism, Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism, the teachings of Nath yogis and the personal devotionalism of South India mixed with the imageless God of Islam. The influence of these various doctrines is clearly evident in Kabir's verses. Eminent historians like R.C. Majumdar, P.N. Chopra, B.N. Puri and M.N. Das have held that Kabir is the first Indian saint to have harmonised Hinduism and Islam by preaching a universal path which both Hindus and Muslims could tread together. But there are a few critics who contest such claims.

The basic religious principles he espoused are simple. According to Kabir, all life is an interplay of two spiritual principles. One is the personal soul (Jivatma) and the other is God (Paramatma). It is Kabir's view that salvation is the process of bringing these two divine principles into union. The incorporation of his verses in Sikh scripture, and the fact that Kabir was a predecessor of Guru Nanak, have led some western scholars to mistakenly describe him as a forerunner of Sikhism.

Dārā Shukōh\textsuperscript{16} (1615–1659), the eldest son of the Mughal emperor Shāhjahān and Mumtāz Maḥal, was born in the city of Ajmer. Although Dārā was a brave warrior, his lack of diplomatic and leadership skills lost
him his crown, and he was forced to flee to Dadar for refuge. There he was betrayed by his host, Malik Jiwan, and handed over power to the new emperor, Aurangzeb. Finally, Dārā was paraded in disgrace through the streets of Delhi and beheaded in August 1659.

Dārā was a patron of arts, architecture, and literature and was himself a skilled calligrapher, artist, poet, writer, and translator. He wrote several works on Sufism and translated a few remarkable Sanskrit works into Persian. Dārā appears to have been interested in the Qādiriyya Ṣūfī silsila (literally, "order") from his childhood. He was formally initiated by Mullā Shāh into the Qādiriyya silsila sometime in 1639 or 1640. He remained committed to this silsila throughout his life, and as a poet he adopted "Qādirī" as his pen name.

It was his interest in Sufism that led Dārā to start writing in 1639 or 1640. His first four works were on Sufism. The first, Safīnat al-Awliyā' (Ship of the Saints), contains more than four hundred short biographies of Ṣūfī saints of various orders. The second, Sakīnat al-Awliyā' (Tranquility of the Saints), encompasses the lives of twenty-eight Qādirī sūfīs, mostly Dārā's contemporaries. The third work, Risāla-i Ḥaqq numā (The Compass of the Truth), is a manual aimed at explaining the theory and practice of Ṣūfī meditation. The fourth work, Ḥasanāt al-‘Ārifīn (Merits of the Gnostics), is a collection of the shaṭḥiyyāt (ecstatic utterances) of the Ṣūfī saints from the eleventh century down to Dārā's own time. His Ṣūfī writings show that he was an enthusiastic follower of the doctrine of waḥdat al-wujūd (oneness of being) and advocated an inclusive approach towards other religions.
It was Dārā's broad-minded Šūfī attitude that brought him to the study of Hinduism. He held a series of dialogues with a Hindu yogi, Bābā Lāl Dās, and discussed with him various concepts of Hinduism, at times comparing them with Islam. This conversation was later compiled as *Sū‘āl-o-Jawāb Dārā Shukoh-o-Bābā Lāl Dās* (The dialogue between Dārā Shukoh and Bābā Lāl Dās). As a result of his discussion with Bābā Lāl and other süfis he wrote *Majma‘- al-Bahrayn* (The Mingling of the Two Oceans). This work represents one of the most important attempts to reconcile Islam and Hinduism in the history of Indian thought, and specifically in the field of comparative religion. Yet despite its ecumenical nature, *Majma‘* became the most controversial work written by Dārā.

Dārā also translated fifty Upaniṣads—under the title *Sirr-i Akbar* (The Greatest Veil)—from the original Sanskrit into Persian. Later, Anquetil Duperron, a French scholar, translated the Persian rendering of Dārā into French and Latin and introduced his work to Europe. In his preface to the *Sirr-i Akbar*, Dārā assigned the Upaniṣads the status of *kitāb-i māknūn* (a well-guarded book)—a status previously assigned by Muslim scholars only to the Qur‘ān. For Dārā, the Upaniṣads and the Qur‘ān represented two facets of the same truth. Dārā's other scholarly efforts in the field of Hinduism include a translation of the Bhagavadgītā and his commission of a translation of the Jōg Bāshist, also known as *Minḥāj al-Sālikīn* (The Path of the Wayfarers). In the preface to Jōg, he praises the prophet Muḥammad and admires the Hindu avatar Ramchand. This also demonstrates that, for him, both personalities were guides of the same stature. Dārā Shukoh's efforts to forge a new relationship between
Hinduism and Islam were the most remarkable ecumenical achievements in the history of Mughal India.

**Ramakrishna Paramhansa**

Ramakrishna\(^7\) (1836-1886) was born in a poor Brahmin Vaishnava family in rural Bengal. He became a priest of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, dedicated to the goddess Kali, which had the influence of the main strands of Bengali *bhakti* tradition. His first spiritual teacher was an ascetic woman skilled in Tantra and Vaishnava *bhakti*. Later an *Advaita Vedantin* ascetic taught him non-dual meditation, and according to Ramakrishna, he experienced *nirvikalpa samadhi* under his guidance. Ramakrishna also experimented with other religions, notably Islam and Christianity, and said that they all lead to the same God. Though conventionally uneducated, he attracted the attention of the middle class and numerous Bengali intellectuals.

Ramakrishna attended a village school with some regularity for 12 years; he later rejected the traditional schooling saying that he was not interested in a "bread-winning education". He became well-versed in the *Puranas*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavata Purana*, hearing them from wandering monks and the *Kathakars*—a class of men in ancient India who preached and sang the *Purānas*. He could read and write in Bengali. While the official biographies write that the name Ramakrishna was given by Mathura Biswas—chief patron at Dakshineswar Kali Temple, it has also been suggest that this name was given by his own parents.
Ramakrishna describes his first spiritual ecstasy at the age of six: while walking along the paddy fields, a flock of white cranes flying against a backdrop of dark thunder clouds caught his vision. He reportedly became so absorbed by this scene that he lost outward consciousness and experienced indescribable joy in that state. Ramakrishna reportedly had experiences of similar nature a few other times in his childhood—while worshipping the goddess Vishalakshi, and portraying god Shiva in a drama during Shivaratri festival. From his tenth or eleventh year on, the trances became common, and by the final years of his life, Ramakrishna's samādhi periods occurred almost daily.

The Bhairavi initiated Ramakrishna into Tantra. Tantrism focuses on the worship of shakti and the object of Tantric training is to transcend the barriers between the holy and unholy as a means of achieving liberation and to see all aspects of the natural world as manifestations of the divine shakti. Under her guidance, Ramakrishna went through sixty four major tantric sadhanas which were completed in 1863. He began with mantra rituals such as japa and purascarana and many other rituals designed to purify the mind and establish self-control. He later proceeded towards tantric sadhanas, which generally include a set of heterodox practices called vamachara (left-hand path), which utilize as a means of liberation, activities like eating of parched grain, fish and meat along with drinking of wine and sexual intercourse. According to Ramakrishna and his biographers, Ramakrishna did not directly participate in the last two of those activities, all that he needed was a suggestion of them to produce the desired result. While Ramakrishna acknowledged the left-hand tantric path, though it had "undesirable features", as one of the "valid roads to God-
realization", he consistently cautioned his devotees and disciples against associating with it. The Bhairavi also taught Ramakrishna the *kumari-puja*, a form of ritual in which the Virgin Goddess is worshiped symbolically in the form of a young girl. Under the tutelage of the Bhairavi, Ramakrishna also learnt Kundalini Yoga. The Bhairavi, with the yogic techniques and the tantra played an important part in the initial spiritual development of Ramakrishna.

The Vaishnava Bhakti traditions speak of five different moods, referred to as *bhāvas*—different attitudes that a devotee can take up to express his love for God. They are: śānta, the “peaceful attitude”; dāṣya, the attitude of a servant; sakhyā, the attitude of a friend; vātsalya, the attitude of a mother toward her child; and madhura, the attitude of a woman towards her lover.

Ramakrishna later engaged in the practice of *madhura bhāva*— the attitude of the gopis and Radha towards Krishna. During the practise of this *bhava*, Ramakrishna dressed himself in women's attire for several days and regarded himself as one of the gopis of Vrindavan. According to Sri Ramakrishna, *madhura bhava* is practised to root out the idea of sex, which is seen as an impediment in spiritual life. According to Ramakrishna, towards the end of this *sadhana*, he attained *savikalpa samadhi*—vision and union with Krishna.

In 1865, Ramakrishna was initiated into *sannyasa* by Tota Puri, an itinerant monk who trained Ramakrishna in *Advaita Vedanta*, the Hindu philosophy which emphasizes non-dualism.
Totapuri first guided Ramakrishna through the rites of *sannyasa*—renunciation of all ties to the world. Then he instructed him in the teaching of *advaita*—that "Brahman alone is real, and the world is illusory; I have no separate existence; I am that Brahman alone." Under the guidance of Totapuri, Ramakrishna reportedly experienced *nirvikalpa samadhi*, which is considered to be the highest state in spiritual realisation.

In 1866, Govinda Roy, a Hindu guru who practiced Sufism, initiated Ramakrishna into Islam. Ramakrishna said that he "devoutly repeated the name of Allah, wore a cloth like the Arab Moslems, said their prayer five times daily, and felt disinclined even to see images of the Hindu gods and goddesses, much less worship them—for the Hindu way of thinking had disappeared altogether from my mind." According to Ramakrishna, after three days of practice he had a vision of a "radiant personage with grave countenance and white beard resembling the Prophet and merging with his body".

At the end of 1873 he started the practice of Christianity, when his devotee Shambu Charan Mallik read the Bible to him. Ramakrishna said that for several days he was filled with Christian thoughts and no longer thought of going to the Kali temple. Ramakrishna describes of a vision in which the picture of Madonna and Child Jesus became alive and had a vision in which Jesus merged with his body. In his own room amongst other divine pictures was one of Christ, and he burnt incense before it morning and evening. There was also a picture showing Jesus Christ saving St Peter from drowning in the water.
Ramakrishna looked upon the world as Maya and he explained that *avidya maya* represents dark forces of creation (e.g. sensual desire, evil passions, greed, lust and cruelty), which keep people on lower planes of consciousness. These forces are responsible for human entrapment in the cycle of birth and death, and they must be fought and vanquished. *Vidya maya*, on the other hand, represents higher forces of creation (e.g. spiritual virtues, enlightening qualities, kindness, purity, love, and devotion), which elevate human beings to the higher planes of consciousness.

Ramakrishna practised several religions, including Islam and Christianity, and taught that in spite of the differences, all religions are valid and true and they lead to the same ultimate goal—God. Ramakrishna's taught that *jatra jiv tatra Shiv* (wherever there is a living being, there is Shiva). His teaching, "Jive daya noy, Shiv gyane jiv seba" (not kindness to living beings, but serving the living being as Shiva Himself) is considered as the inspiration for the philanthropic work carried out by his chief disciple Vivekananda.

**Tagore, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan**

**Rabindranath**¹⁸ (1861-1941) was a Bengali poet, novelist, musician, painter and playwright who reshaped Bengali literature and music. As author of *Gitanjali* with its profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, he was the first non-European to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1913). His poetry in translation was viewed as spiritual, and this together with his mesmerizing persona gave him a
prophet-like aura in the west. His elegant prose and magical poetry still remain largely unknown outside the confines of Bengal.

Tagore modernised Bengali art by spurning rigid classical forms. His novels, stories, songs, dance-dramas, and essays spoke to political and personal topics. *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)*, *Gora (Fair-Faced)*, and *Ghare-Baire (The Home and the World)* are his best-known works, and his verse, short stories, and novels were acclaimed for their lyricism, colloquialism, naturalism, and contemplation. Tagore was perhaps the only litterateur who penned anthems of two countries - *Jana Gana Mana*, the Indian national anthem and *Amar Shonar Bangla*, the Bangladeshi national anthem. In 1901, Tagore left Shilaidaha and moved to Santiniketan to found an *ashram* which grew to include a marble-floored prayer hall ("The Mandir"), an experimental school, groves of trees, gardens, and a library. There, Tagore's wife and two of his children died. His father died on 19 January 1905. He received monthly payments as part of his inheritance and additional income from the Maharaja of Tripura, sales of his family's jewellery, his seaside bungalow in Puri, and mediocre royalties (₹2,000) from his works. By now, his work was gaining him large following among Bengali and foreign readers alike, and he published such works as *Naivedya* (1901) and *Kheya* (1906) while translating his poems into free verse. On 14 November 1913, Tagore learned that he had won the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature, becoming the first Asian Nobel laureate. The Swedish Academy appreciated the idealistic and for Western readers, accessible nature of a small body of his translated material, including the 1912 *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*. In 1915, Tagore was knighted by the
British Crown. He later returned his knighthood in protest of the massacre of unarmed Indians in 1919 at Jallianwala Bagh.

Tagore's international travels also sharpened his opinion that human divisions were shallow. During a May 1932 visit to a Bedouin encampment in the Iraqi desert, the tribal chief told him that our prophet has said that a true Muslim is he by whose words and deeds not the least of his brother-men may ever come to any harm. Tagore noted in his diary: I was startled into recognizing in his words the voice of essential humanity. To the end, Tagore scrutinized orthodoxy.

Tagore's poetry—which varied in style from classical formalism to the comic, visionary, and ecstatic—proceeds from a lineage established by 15th- and 16th-century Vaishnava poets. Tagore was awed by the mysticism of the rishi-authors who—including Vyasa—wrote the Upanishads, the Bhakti-Sufi mystic Kabir, and Ramprasad Sen. Yet Tagore's poetry became most innovative and mature after his exposure to rural Bengal's folk music, which included Baul ballads—especially those of bard Lalon. These—rediscovered and popularised by Tagore—resemble 19th-century Kartābhajā hymns that emphasize inward divinity and rebellion against religious and social orthodoxy. During his Shilaidaha years, his poems took on a lyrical quality, speaking via the maner manus (the Bāuls' "man within the heart") or meditating upon the jivan devata ("living God within"). This figure thus sought connection with divinity through appeal to nature and the emotional interplay of human drama. Tagore used such techniques in his Bhānusimha poems (which chronicle
the romance between Radha and Krishna), which he repeatedly revised over the course of seventy years.

**Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi** (1869-1948) was a pre-eminent political and ideological leader of India during the Indian independence movement. He pioneered *satyagraha*, resistance to tyranny through mass civil resistance. His philosophy was firmly founded upon *ahimsa* (nonviolence). His philosophy and leadership helped India gain independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. Gandhi is often referred to as Mahatma or "Great Soul" (an honorific first applied to him by Rabindranath Tagore). In India, he is also called Bapu and officially honored in India as the *Father of the Nation*. Gandhi was assassinated on 30 January 1948 by Nathuram Godse.

Gandhi first employed civil disobedience while an expatriate lawyer in South Africa, during the resident Indian community's struggle for civil rights. After his return to India in 1915, he organized protests by peasants, farmers, and urban laborers concerning excessive land-tax and discrimination. After assuming leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1921, Gandhi led nationwide campaigns to ease poverty, expand women's rights, build religious and ethnic amity, end untouchability, and increase economic self-reliance. Above all, he aimed to achieve *Swaraj* or the independence of India from foreign domination. Gandhi famously led his followers in the Non-cooperation movement that protested the British-imposed salt tax with the 400 km (240 mile) Dandi Salt March in 1930. He launched the Quit India Movement in 1942, demanding immediate
independence for India. Gandhi spent a number of years in jail in both South Africa and India.

As a practitioner of ahimsa, Gandhi swore to speak the truth and advocated that others do the same. He lived modestly in a self-sufficient residential community and wore the traditional Indian dhoti and shawl, woven from yarn that he had spun by hand himself. He ate simple vegetarian food, experimented for a time with a fruitarian diet, and undertook long fasts as a means of both self-purification and social protest.

Gandhi stated that the most important battle to fight was overcoming his own demons, fears, and insecurities. Gandhi summarised his beliefs first when he said "God is Truth". He would later change this statement to "Truth is God". Thus, Satya (Truth) in Gandhi’s philosophy is "God".

The essence of Satyagraha (lit. ‘insistence/holding of truth’) is that it seeks to eliminate antagonisms without harming the antagonists themselves and seeks to transform or “purify” it to a higher level. A euphemism sometimes used for Satyagraha is that it is a silent force or a soul force (a term also used by Martin Luther King Jr. during his famous “I Have a Dream” speech). It arms the individual with moral power rather than physical power. Satyagraha is also termed a universal force, as it essentially makes no distinction between kinsmen and strangers, young and old, man and woman, friend and foe. Gandiji wrote: There must be no impatience, no barbarity, no insolence, no undue pressure. If we want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant. Intolerance betrays want of faith in one’s cause. Civil disobedience and
non-cooperation as practised under Satyagraha are based on the law of suffering, a doctrine that \textit{the endurance of suffering is a means to an end}. This end usually implies a moral upliftment or progress of an individual or society. Therefore, non-cooperation in Satyagraha is in fact a means to secure the cooperation of the opponent consistently with truth and justice.

Although Gandhi was not the originator of the principle of non-violence, he was the first to apply it in the political field on a large scale. The concept of nonviolence (\textit{ahimsa}) and nonresistance has a long history in Indian religious thought and has had many revivals in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Jewish and Christian contexts. Gandhi explains his philosophy and way of life in his autobiography \textit{The Story of My Experiments with Truth}.

Gandhi was born a Hindu and practised Hinduism all his life. As a common Hindu, he believed all religions to be equal, and rejected all efforts to convert him to a different faith. He was an avid theologian and read extensively about all major religions. Gandhi believed that at the core of every religion was truth and love (compassion, nonviolence and the Golden Rule). He also questioned what he saw as hypocrisy, malpractices, and dogma in all religions, including his own, and he was a tireless advocate for social reform in religion.

\textbf{Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan} \textsuperscript{20} (1888–1975) was an Indian philosopher and statesman. He was the first Vice-President of India (1952–1962) and subsequently the second President of India (1962–1967). One of India's most influential scholars of comparative religion and philosophy, Radhakrishnan is thought of as having built a bridge between the East and
the West by showing that the philosophical systems of each tradition are comprehensible within the terms of the other. He wrote authoritative exegeses of India's religious and philosophical literature for the English speaking world.

In 1918 Radhakrishnan was selected as Professor of Philosophy by the University of Mysore. By that time he had written many articles for journals of repute like *The Quest, Journal of Philosophy* and the *International Journal of Ethics*. He also completed his first book, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*. He believed Tagore's philosophy to be the "genuine manifestation of the Indian spirit." Dr. Radhakrishnan's second book, *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* was published in 1920.

Dr. Radhakrishnan stated that Western philosophers, despite all claims to objectivity, were influenced by theological influences of their own culture. He wrote books on Indian philosophy according to Western academic standards, and made all efforts for the West to give serious consideration to Indian philosophy. In his book "Idealist View of Life", he made a powerful case for the importance of intuitive thinking as opposed to purely intellectual forms of thought. He is well known for his commentaries on the Prasthana Trayi namely, the Bhagavadgita, the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutra.

It is not God that is worshipped but the authority that claims to speak in His name. Sin becomes disobedience to authority not violation of integrity.
Sir Syed and Iqbal

Syed Ahmad Khan\(^{21}\) (1817-1898) was born in Delhi. Syed Ahmad’s education followed classical lines. After the Quran he learnt Persian and Arabic followed by Mathematics and Astronomy.

Sir Syed was an institution in himself. He wrote on history, politics, religion, science, law and on Urdu language and literature. Before the age of 29, he had written a booklet *Jam-e-Jam (The Cup of Jamshed)*. It recorded, briefly, the account of three emperors. It covered the period from that of Amir Taimur Sahib-e-Qiran to Abu Zafar Sirajuddin Bahadur Shah.

When, in 1846, Syed Ahmad came and stationed himself in Delhi, he began work on the *Athar-us-Sanadid*, which was based on the research he did on some monuments of the city and surrounding districts. Sir Syed was made an Honorary fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society on the June 20, 1864. After this came the *Favaid-ul Afkar fi A’mal-ul Farjar*, an Urdu translation of the Persian papers written by Khwaja Fariduddin Ahmad, Syed Ahmad’s maternal grandfather. This paper deals with the theory of application of compasses.

A pamphlet was rendered by Sir Syed in 1848, *Qaul-I Matin dar Ibtal-i-Harkat-i-Zamin*, which dealt with the Ptolemyian theory of the stationary position of the earth. Influenced by the puritanical reformer, Shah Ismail, Syed wrote two tracts the first of which titled *Kalimat-ul Haq’at* (1849), dealt with practices prevalent among mystics with the critical approach to the relations between the leader(pir) and followers(murid). The second, *Rah-e-Sunnat dar Radd-i-Bid* (1850) carried
the denunciation of bid’a (false heretical practices) inherent in the religion of that time.

The Silsilat-ul-Muluk, another work by Syed Ahmad, contained a list of the rulers and emperors of Delhi over the past five thousand years. The work contained extensive records of the reigns of rulers, and was originally included within the first edition of the Athar-us Sanadid. Kimiya-i-Saadat, Ain-i-Akbari, Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind, The Loyal Mohammedans of India, Tabbyin-ul-Kalam were also written by Syed Ahmad.

Sir Syed’s ideal was visualized in the formation of a university in Aligarh. He believed that as two institutions in England produced great statesmen, generals and poets, Muslims too would emerge there as great and progressive men.

Sir Muhammad Iqbal\(^\text{22}\) (1877-1938) was a Muslim poet and philosopher born in Sialkot (now in Pakistan), whose poetry in Urdu and Persian is considered to be among the greatest of the modern era, and whose vision of an independent state for the Muslims of British India was to inspire the creation of Pakistan. He is commonly referred to as Allama Iqbal.

After studying in England and Germany, Iqbal established a law practice, but concentrated primarily on writing scholarly works on politics, economics, history, philosophy and religion. He is best known for his poetic works, including Asrar-e-Khudi—which brought a knighthood—Rumuz-e-Bekhudi, and the Bang-e-Dara, with its enduring patriotic song
Tarana-e-Hind. In Afghanistan and Iran, where he is known as Iqbal-e Lāhorī (Iqbal of Lahore), he is highly regarded for his Persian works.

Iqbal was a strong proponent of the political and spiritual revival of Islamic civilization across the world, but specifically in India; a series of famous lectures he delivered to this effect were published as The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam.

Iqbal's thoughts in his work primarily focus on the spiritual direction and development of human society, centred around experiences from his travels and stays in Western Europe and the Middle East. He was profoundly influenced by Western philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson and Goethe. He soon became a strong critic of Western society's separation of religion from state and what he perceived as its obsession with materialist pursuits.

The poetry and philosophy of Mawlana Rumi bore the deepest influence on Iqbal's mind. Deeply grounded in religion since childhood, Iqbal began intensely concentrating on the study of Islam, the culture and history of Islamic civilization and its political future, while embracing Rumi as "his guide." Iqbal would feature Rumi in the role of guide in many of his poems. Iqbal's works focus on reminding his readers of the past glories of Islamic civilization, and delivering the message of a pure, spiritual focus on Islam as a source for socio-political liberation and greatness. Iqbal denounced political divisions within and amongst Muslim nations, and frequently alluded to and spoke in terms of the global Muslim community, or the Ummah.
Iqbal's poetic works are written primarily in Persian rather than Urdu. Among his 12,000 verses of poetry, about 7,000 verses are in Persian. In 1915, he published his first collection of poetry, the *Asrar-e-Khudi* (*Secrets of the Self*) in Persian. The poems emphasise the spirit and self from a religious, spiritual perspective. Many critics have called this Iqbal's finest poetic work. In *Asrar-e-Khudi*, Iqbal explains his philosophy of "Khudi," or "Self." Iqbal's use of the term "Khudi" is synonymous with the word "Rooh" mentioned in the Quran. "Rooh" is that divine spark which is present in every human being, and was present in Adam, for which God ordered all of the angels to prostrate in front of Adam. One has to make a great journey of transformation to realize that divine spark which Iqbal calls "Khudi".

In his *Rumuz-e-Bekhudi* (*Hints of Selflessness*), Iqbal seeks to prove the Islamic way of life is the best code of conduct for a nation's viability. A person must keep his individual characteristics intact, but once this is achieved he should sacrifice his personal ambitions for the needs of the nation. Man cannot realise the "Self" outside of society. Also in Persian and published in 1917, this group of poems has as its main themes the ideal community, Islamic ethical and social principles, and the relationship between the individual and society. Although he is true throughout to Islam, Iqbal also recognises the positive analogous aspects of other religions. The *Rumuz-e-Bekhudi* complements the emphasis on the self in the *Asrar-e-Khudi* and the two collections are often put in the same volume under the title *Asrar-e-Rumuz* (*Hinting Secrets*). It is addressed to the world's Muslims.
Swami Vivekananda and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

Swami Vivekananda was born in a well-to-do family in Calcutta on January 12, 1863. His pre-monastic name was Narendranath Dutt. His father, Biswanath Dutt, an Attorney-at-Law in the High Court of Calcutta, was generous in nature and was gifted with artistic faculties. He was well versed in music and literature, specially Persian literature. His mother, Bhubaneswari Devi, was known for her charity, religious temperament and keen memory.

In the seventies and early eighties of the nineteenth century there was a countrywide intellectual movement in India, in which Bengal took the leading part Calcutta was the centre of the movement, Narendranath was still a student, but his youthful and alert mind was very much alive to it. He was moved by reading Stuart Mill’s ‘Essays on Religion’, was drawn to important personalities of Bengal like Devendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, and Sivnath Sastri, became an ardent Sadharan Brahmo Samajist, but was not satisfied. He experienced a ‘great turmoil of soul’, and ‘went through a series of intellectual crises’. His heart would not rest until he knew the ultimate reality. He approached the learned and religious men with the question - ‘Sir, have you seen God?’ The answers he got were disappointing.

But he got the answer at last and it was from one who lived in the image of God. This was Ramakrishna — an unsophisticated man without the three Rs. who had disarmed’ the young intellectual by his simple and
direct answer — ‘Yes my son, I have seen God. I do see Him just as I see you, before me. But, I see the Lord in a much intense sense, and I can show Him to you”. Narendranath, the iconoclast, stood face to face with this saint of the orthodox Hindu pattern whom he was to accept as his Guru. Long after, the Swami said, “I was always looking for something that would prove him to be holy; It took me six years to understand that he was not holy because he had become holiness itself”.

The first session of the Parliament of Religions — “a notable event in mankind’s long search for spiritual harmony” — opened on Monday, September 11, 1893. Vivekananda, a young man of hardly thirty-one, was there to represent Hinduism. He presented Hinduism as the mother of religions that had taught the world universal acceptance and toleration. People heard something new and strange, something that appealed directly to their hearts, and stirred their souls. They heard that the Hindu refused to call himself a sinner for he believed himself to be a son of God, a sharer of immortal bliss, a holy and perfect being. They heard that the Christian was not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian, but that each must assimilate the spirit of the other and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth. They heard that in spite of the malicious dissenters there would be written on the banner of each religion — “Help and not Fight, Assimilation and not Destruction, Harmony and Peace and not Dissention”. The listeners were amazed at his wisdom, “It was the religious consciousness of India
that spoke through him”. Vivekananda was acclaimed as the ‘greatest figure in the Parliament’.

The Swami spent more or less three years in the United States where he met and made friends with eminent persons (like Prof. John H. Wright, William James, Josiah Royce, C.C. Everett, D.D., A.O. Lovejoy, Merwin-Marie Snell, Nicola Tesla, Ella Wheeler Wilcox etc.) who became his ardent admirers. He toured almost the whole-of the United States delivering lectures before large gatherings as well as small groups of devoted individuals. He tried to convey a correct idea of Hinduism and a true picture of its homeland — India. In the summer of 1895 he spent two months at Thousand Island Park on the St. Lawrence River with some of his western disciples.

The Swami founded the Vedanta Society in New York in 1894, and in January 1895, finished his famous treatise on Raja-Yoga, the lofty philosophy of which, according to Tolstoy, has ‘remained unsurpassed in the whole history of the human race’.

From America the Swami went to England twice, first in 1895 and the next time in 1896. In England also he lectured and took classes and met with immediate success. He was highly appreciated by the press and was received well by aristocratic circles and even by the heads of the churches. He met Professor Max Muller and during a visit to the Continent, Paul Deussen. The Swami was very much impressed by the courage and integrity of English character and England gave him the greatest of his
disciples, Margaret E. Noble – then a young headmistress of a school in London and afterwards ‘Sister Nivedita’ – who was to play a very significant role in the Indian Nationalist Movement in the early twentieth century.

Swamiji left London on December 16, 1896 and started for India. He was greeted by thousands with tumultuous joy and applause. Rajas drew his carriage, elephants, camels and horses marched in procession, canons boomed, flowers and garlands strewed his path and choirs chanted the hero's victorious home-coming.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad\textsuperscript{24}, originally named Ahmad, was born in Mecca in 1888. He was also called Firoz Bakht by his father, and spent his childhood in Mecca and Medina where his father's house was a great centre of learning. He received his early education under his father's guidance and has also been to the world-famous university of Al-Azhar in Cairo. By the age of 14 he had covered the entire ground included in the Oriental Curriculum of the day and was actually put in charge of classes in various subjects. He was generally regarded as a prodigy even at that age. His quick intelligence and his thirst for knowledge unhampered by inherited or environmental prejudices marked him out as a man pre-eminently fitted to fill any role which required courage and intellectual integrity of a high order. He was born in a family which was well known for its strict orthodoxy. But his natural boldness prompted him to re-examine every aspect of life afresh. The first stirrings of his mind have
been recorded by him in a brief autobiographical note in the *Tazkira*, which he wrote during his internment at the age of 30. He found it impossible, he records, to accept anything without examining it afresh in the light of his own reason. For a time he even lingered in the realm of skepticism. But deeper probings revealed to him the solid core of Islamic teachings.

Hitherto both in religion and in politics the educated Musalmans of the day used to look upon the Aligarh school of thought as the final source of guidance. As every one, familiar with Muslim political thought in India, is aware, after having attended the Congress once, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan concentrated on Muslim education and drew the Muslims away from politics. In 1906 under official guidance, the Muslim League came to be founded as the organ of the Muslim political opinion. The aim of the League as declared then was to foster loyalty to the British Crown and British officials used to look upon the League as an instrument of their political policy. Even the famous Comrade which the late Maulana Mohammad Ali published in Calcutta in 1911, in its earlier phases drew its inspiration form the Aligarh school of thought. Abul Kalam Azad initiated a vigorous campaign against this school of thought in his journal and invited the Muslims to co-operate with the Congress in liberating the country from foreign domination. The politicians of the old school of thought were startled. Even Maulana Mohammad Ali in the beginning showed a marked tendency to counteract the effect which the *Alhilal* was producing among the Indian Musalmans. The *Alhilal* gradually but steadily
made its way into the hearts of progressive Musalmans and the stagnant waters of orthodoxy and indifference were stirred to their very depth.

From the day of its appearance in 1912 to the day it ceased publication in 1915 under the Defence of India Act, the Alhilal exercised a powerful influence among the Indian Musalmans, and up to this day neither in form nor substance has it been surpassed, though many efforts have been made by several aspirants to reproduce its excellence. At first the Government snuffed it out of existence in 1915. Abul Kalam’s irrepressible genius, however, blossomed out in the Albalagh which he brought out after the cessation of the Alhilal. It had scarcely been in existence for a few months when, in April 1916, the Government of Bengal externed him from that province. The Punjab, U.P., Bombay and other Governments had already declared him an unwelcome guest, and he was constrained to remove himself to Ranchi where he was interned 5 months after his arrival there. He was released in 1920. When he emerged from his internment (he was the last of those who had been interned during the Great War to be released), he was hailed by the united body of Muslim theologians of India as a clear thinker who had earned the right to be respected.

It is difficult to compress all one can say about him into a brief sketch. He is a man of rare gifts, whose towering personality cannot be dwarfed by the others’ political prejudices whether born of ignorance or of malice. In non-Muslim circles he is better known by his political
association than by the still greater qualities which lend to his personality - a stature rarely achieved in the intellectual world. He yearns and longs to find the time to give himself an opportunity for intellectual work, but the urgency of the political all is so clearly concrete to his mind and the need of the millions so intensely felt by him that he would rather sacrifices the dearest desire of his heart than ignore this call. None who knows him can resist the charm of his personality. To know him is to love and respect and admire him.

Azad\textsuperscript{25} wrote extensively before joining active national politics. But most of his writings were in Urdu even as they covered a wide range of topics relating to various topics of Islamic theology and history and politics. By and large, these writings are still untranslrated and not available to wider public. The work that made him famous as an Islamic scholar was his commentary on some parts of Quran titled as \textit{Tarjuman-ul-Quran} published in 1931. He desired to coordinate the teachings of Islam with the principles of human welfare and for this it was necessary to cleanse the Islamic principles of the myths and superstitions which had crept into them. Tarjuman ul-Quran turned out to be a highly successful commentary as it reflected Azad's amazingly vast store of knowledge, his clarity of mind, his phenomenal memory and his extra-ordinary power of expression and communication. Commenting on the fundamental unity of all religions, Azad wrote in \textit{Tarjuman-ul-Quran}, "The fundamental concept of all religions is belief in the existence of God. All the religions teach the same truth and the worship of God is ingrained in human nature. Thus
differences in religion are created (only) by three factors, dispute over the attributes of God, differences in modes of worship, and differences in religious laws. These differences are created by time circumstances, by environment. None doubts the existence of God.”

Discussing the unity of religions and oneness of God, he said, “The tragedy is that the world worships words and not meanings and even though all are seeking and worshipping but they quarrel with one another and differ on mere names. Once the veil of names is lifted and the real meaning being the same is brought out all quarrels would cease.”

Next to Tanuman-ul-Quran, Tazkirah is the most important book written by Azad. It represents the first chapter of his autobiography though he stopped proceeding further in autobiography lines after writing about his great ancestors. However, it contains revelations about Azad's life, more about his turbulent youth, presented in romantic style. Tazkira was the first book of Azad to be published. It also discusses religion, philosophy, logic, history, Sheikh Wasti, Imam Ibn Taimiyya- two great Islamic scholars, the life of the prophets and various other topics. Ghubar-e-Khatir is Azad's last book before he wrote his autobiography India Wins Freedom. After writing it, the pre-occupation with politics gave him no time for writing. It is a collection of letters, written as pastime, when he was detained in the Ahmed Nagar Fort, to Nawab Salar Jung Habibur Rahman Khan Sherwani- a renowned theologian with the Nizam's Government at Hyderabad, which were never posted. These letters convey,
in balanced and dignified manner, the essence of Azad’s mature experience. Besides revealing various things about himself, implicity or explicity, it also describes how prisoners spent their days in Ahmednagar jail. He also attacked religious superstitions and rituals and the conflicts between the creeds. There is no better or more reliable source for any biographer of Azad than Ghubare-Khatir. It carries details about Azads’ personal bio-data, his family history, his education, his psychological make-ups and the motivations that shaped his character.
Chapter - I

‘UNIVERSAL RELIGION’ IN MEDIEVAL INDIAN THOUGHT

Ramananda and Kabir : Early Syncretism

After dealing extensively with the idea of universal religion, we discuss here below the views of some of its most important exponents in the medieval India. It would be appropriate to start this historical discussion with Ramnanda who was the bridge between the Bhakti movements of the south and the north. He taught the doctrine of Bhakti to all the four castes without bias. He admitted disciples from all castes and from both sexes, even from Musalamans.

Ramananda’s teachings gave rise to two schools of religious thought. One conservative and the other radical. Among his famous disciples was Kabir about whom the famous historian Tarachand says :

“Kabir is a genius of a different order. He has gazed into the mystery of life and seen the vision of the ineffable light. He brings from the world of beyond a new message for the individual and for society. He dreams of a future purified of insincerities, untruths, uglinesses, inequalities; he preaches a religion based on the only foundation on which faith can stand, namely, personal experience. He brushes aside unhesitatingly the whole paraphernalia of dogma and authority, for his soul is sick of the sorry spectacle of the quarrels of creeds and the worship of empty shells of the formal religions. He tolerates no shams and demands reality in the search after God”. ¹
Kabir compares the relation of man with God as the relation of sea-waves with sea itself. He uses the same example to present the relation between oneness of universe and the Absolute.

“As ice is made from water, and as ice will become water and vapour, so is the reality from that, and therefore this and that are the same”.\(^2\)

God is the central theme of Kabir’s thoughts whom he calls by many names such as Rama, Hari, Brahma, Satpurusa, Bechun, Allah, Khuda.

According to him, God is transcendent and immanent, impersonal and personal, infinite and finite, without qualities and qualified, the non-being and the being, the conscious and the unconscious, neither manifest nor hidden, neither one nor two, both within and without. According to Kabir,

“Oh, how may I ever express that secret word?
Oh, how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that ?.....
There are no words to tell that which He is”.\(^3\)

He says it is insufficient for ordinary humans to hold the entire view of total reality. When a man expanded his consciousness, he can see the Lord in me and in you.

“His vision of dynamic reality is vouchsafed to few, it is impossible to see it by the light of ordinary reason for the analytical intellect is the cause of separation, and “the house of reason is very far away”.\(^4\)

This is the reason why Kabir speaks God as transcendent.

“The Absolute (Para Brahman), the Supreme Soul (Purusa) dwells beyond the beyond”, or as pure Essence (Pak Dhat), at other times as identical with all beings.\(^5\)

Further,
“He himself is the true, the seed and the germ. He himself is the flower, the fruit and shade. He Himself is Brahma, creature and Maya”.^6

Following Qur’an Kabir holds that the nature and the essence of God is light.

“See the ocean filling One Light (nur) which spreads in the whole creation”, and, “Thy light (nur) fills all”, and “the Light is covering, the light is the seat, the Light is pillow”.^7

Kabir is a mighty warner, path maker, the great admirer of the unity of Hindu and Muslim communities of India. He taught that “the divine disclosed itself in the human race as a whole”.^8

The mission of Kabir was to preach a religion of love which unites all people. He rejects those features of Hinduism and Islam which are against this true spirit. He rejected those religions which gave no importance to the real spiritual welfare of the mankind. He selected from both religions their common elements, and the similarities between them.

“The mission of Kabir was to preach a religion of love which would unite all castes and creeds. He rejected those features of Hinduism and Islam, which were against this spirit, and which were of no importance for the real spiritual welfare of the individual. He selected from both religions their common elements, and the similarities between them”.^9

“The Hindu resorts to the temple and the Musalman to the mosque, but Kabir goes to the place where both are known. The two religions (din) are like two branches in the middle of which there is a sprout surpassing them. Kabir has taken the higher path abandoning the custom of two. If you say that I am a Hindu then it is not true, nor am I a Musalman; I am a body made of five elements where the unknown (ghaibi) plays. Mecca has verily become Kasi, and Rama has become Rahim”.^10
Kabir says that Musalman and Hindu are like two branches of one and same tree.

Further he says that “I am not the follower of law (dharma) nor am I without law; I am not an ascetic nor devotee of desire. I am not a speaker nor a listener, I am not a servant nor a master. I am not bound nor am I free, nor am I engaged in worldly pursuits. I never parted from any nor am I a companion of any. I do not go to hell nor do I proceed to heaven. I am the doer of all actions, yet I am different from them”.11

He says that the Hindus should give up their ceremonial, sacrifice, idol worship, caste difference. According to Kabir,

“The Hindus should give up what every reformer since the days of Buddha had insisted upon ... ceremonial, sacrifice, lust for magical powers, lip worship, repetition of formulae, pilgrimages, fasts, worship of idols, gods and goddesses, Brahmin supremacy, caste differences, prejudices concerning touchability and food”.12

Further, he asks the same question to all Musalmans. Can they give up their trust in one Prophet, one book?

“The Musalmans should give up their exclusiveness, their blind trust in one Prophet and his book, their externalism in the performance of rites – pilgrimage to Mecca, fast and regulated prayers, their worship of saints (aulia and pirs) and prophets (paighanbars)”.13

Kabir asked both Hindus and Muslims to have respect for all living beings and to refrain from violence and bloodshed. We can see it in the following lines:

“I shut not my eyes, I close not my ears, I do not mortify my body;
I see with eyes open and smile, and behold His beauty everywhere.

Whatever I do, it becomes His worship. All I achieve is His service".14

Kabir says Hindus and Musalman are one as they worship same God. They are children of the same father, they are seeds of the same blood.

“All the men and women that are created are your form. Kabir is the son of Allah and Rama. He is his Guru and Pir” 15

And

“The Hindu and Turk have one path which the True teacher has pointed out; says Kabir, hear ye saints, say Rama or say Khuda”.16

And

“The religion of those who understand is one, whether they are Pandits or Shaikhs”.17

Kabir’s was the first attempt to reconcile Hinduism and Islam. He was the first man to come forward to proclaim a religion of the centre. He took up the middle path. His attempt at reconciliation of Hinduism and Islam was subsequently taken up all over India. Akbar’s Din-i Ilahi was not an isolated whim of a ruler who had power. It was an inevitable result of the syncretic forces which were on the rise in India. We can find it in the teachings of Kabir.

The constructive part of Kabir’s mission is to turn the attention of the people of whole world to a religion of universal path. No Hindu or Muslim could take exception to such a religion. A way was found which both Hindu and Musalman could walk on together.
Dara Shukoh: Synthesis of Islam and Hinduism

Dara Shukoh’s is the second greatest name in the history of Indian syncretic thought. He was of the firm belief that the Absolute in the final analysis was one and same, and merely expressed in different forms in different religions. Each religion has its own language. There is the difference of languages not of absolute.

“Dara Shukoh implied that an appreciation of the subtleties of Tasawwuf in both Islamic Sufism and Hindu mysticism was the exclusive domain of the elite of both religions”.

According to Dara Shukoh, determination of the absolute took place in respect of purity or impurity.

“Self manifestation’ of the primal aspect of the Essence was ruh (atman or soul) and in its secondary aspect was known as jasd (sarir) that is, body”.

Dara Shukoh believed in the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud. Like all followers of Wahad al Wujud, he saw in the creator and created relationship a process of ascertainment of the Absolute. Absolute is known as Ruh-i Azam (super soul) in the state of the Ahadiyya (the abstract notion of Oneness).

“To Dara, Ruh-i Azam or Abul Arwah (soul of souls) was identical with Parmatma. Another analogy was taken from the inter-relationship between water and waves. The combination of waves in their complete aspect, he believed, could be likened to Abul-Arwah or Parmatma, while ‘primeval water’ was like the Absolute”.

The followers of the Wahdat al-Wujud believed that Ahadiyya or Abstract Oneness was most indeterminate of all indeterminate states of the
Absolute, that is, the state preceded by what they called the state of Unity in plurality.

Jamal and Jalal were as the two of God’s attributes which human beings could perceive. Dara Shukoh believed in trigunas.

“Dara Shukoh identified the triguna (the three gunas or attributes in Hindu philosophy), sattva, rajas and tamas, with the beauty and majesty of God. To him, sattva was creation, rajas was duration and tamas was destruction. Dara Shukoh identified Brahman with jibra’il, Vishnu with Mika’ïl and Mahesvara (Siva) with Israfil”.21

Dara Shukoh identified Allah with Sanskrit ‘Om’, Huwa (He) with Sah, firishta (angles) with divata, and the Mazhar-i Atam (Perfect Manifestation) with avatara. Through avatara, according to Dara Shukoh, Qudra (power of God) was manifested in such a way as would not have been manifested otherwise.

The mystical view of Islam comes from Dara’s interpretation of the ‘light verse’ in the Qur’an:

“Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light, Allah giveth unto His light whom He will, and Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah’s knower of all things””.22

Dara Shukoh says that this light verse of Qur’an is equivalent to Sanskrit verse.

“Allah is the light of the heaven and the earth’ was equivalent to the Sanskrit ‘Jyoti Svarupa’, Svaprakasa and Svapanaprakasa”.23
Mutazila and Shi’is rejected the sufi theory of the vision of God on earth. They denied that people were able to see God. Dara Shukoh says that there is no contradiction between Sufi’s theory of the vision of God and the theory of His being.

“Dara Shukoh saw no contradiction between the sufi concept of the vision of the Divine and the theory of this being Absolute Essence, Ultimate principle and Unknowable; and he explained the lack of contradiction by reminding his readers that God, being Omnipotent, was potent enough to manifest Himself in any manner, any where and at any time.”

According to Dara, the following verse from the Qur’an stated this truth:

“Whoso is blind here will be blind in the hereafter, and yet further from the road”.

Dara says that Mahapralaya of the Hindu mystics and the Qiyamat (Resurrection) of the Muslim are same.

“To Dara Shukoh the equivalent of Vision of god to Hindu followers of the Unity of Being was Saksatkar, which was confirmed by the Vedas”.

In the Sufi cosmology, there were four spheres: ‘alam-i nasut (sphere of humanity), ‘alam-i jabarut (celestial world of Divine Names) and ‘alam-i lahut’ (sphere of the Godhead). Some other sufis considered five spheres, the fifth being alam-i misal (world of analogies). These concepts of spheres are equivalents to the Sanskrit terms of jagrat (nasut), svapna (malakut), susupti (jabarut) and turiya (lahut).

Dara Shukoh believed that the fourth Hindu sphere that is Turia is lahut (Godhead). He says that lahut (Turia) was identical with Being. It comprehended all the other three worlds.
Ramakrishna Paramhansa : Hinduism and Universalism

Ramakrishna Paramhansa was the pioneer of the modern universalist spirit in Hinduism. He was a true Hindu, and was ready at any moment to defend the whole of Hinduism.

“Rama Krishna regarded all deities as manifestation of the impersonal Supreme. He recognizes the goddess Kali as one of the chief manifestations of God. She was to him the divine mother of the Universe, and he worshipped her more than any other divinity. He worshipped her by means of idols; for he implicitly believed the Hindu doctrine that the divinity fills every one of his own idols with his presence. He also held the ordinary Hindu idea of the guru. Here is one of his sayings: “The disciple should never criticise his own Guru. He must implicitly obey whatever his Guru says”.28

Ramakrishna was a devout Hindu. He says that Christianity was demanding acceptance from Hindus. It claims to be the one religion for whole world. Islam was also present, but less active. He declared that all religions were true in their essence. All are identical. Each man should remain in the religion in which he is born.

The system of philosophy Ramakrishna followed was the monistic Vedanta as taught by Shankaracharya. But he also said that the doctrines of dualism, qualified monism and monism are stages of spiritual progress. They were not contradictory to each other. They are stages of evolution of human mind. The non-dual state of consciousness is the ultimate goal to be
realized. It is a realisation which is beyond mind and speech. The stages up to non-dualism can not be understood by mind and intellect and expressed in words. In that state both the absolute and the relative are equally eternal. The Lord himself, his name and his abode – all are of pure consciousness. On the part of the ordinary human beings, in whom the attachment of worldly object prevails, dualism is commendable. For them, the loud singing of the Lord’s name, His glory, His powers, etc. are advisable. One who has realized the nondual state becomes silent. Non-dualism is not a matter to be described. As soon as one tries to speak or say anything, dualism becomes inevitable.

According to Ramakrishna, the personal and impersonal aspects of God are not contradictory with each other but are the two aspects of the same reality. The same reality is viewed from different standpoints.

He further said that religion is a matter of realization. It concerns with realizing the unity that exists between God and man. He desired to attain the Vaishnava ideal of love for God. After that he desired to know and understand about the other religions like Islam and Christianity.

“He found a Mahommedan saint and went to live with him; he underwent the discipline prescribed by him, became a Mahommedan for the time being, lived like a Mohammedan, dressed like a Mohammedan, and did everything laid down in their codes.”

Further, he tried to understand Christianity,

“He had seen Jesus in a vision, and for three days he could think of nothing and speak of nothing but Jesus and His love.”
Ramakrishna came to conclusion that all religions were true. All religions are simply various paths leading to the same goal. According to him,

“All religions are true and good; and, therefore, every man ought to remain in his own religion”.

He says religion is realization of God. Different religions are different paths leading to the same goal. No religion is superior to any other religion.

“If religion properly so called is realization of God, it follows that all religions fulfilling such a condition are true. They are merely different paths leading to the same goal. Hence no religion is inferior or superior to any other religion. All are equally true. Thus we must not only respect or tolerate other religions, but must accept them. And if we accept different religions as true, we will have to accept the different concepts - personal and impersonal, with or without form – of God as equally true”.

Ramakrishna recommended Bhakti Marga for man. Bhakti means complete devotion to God. Every moment thinking of God, seeing God in everything is true bhakti.

“Bhakti is to adore God with body, mind and words. With body means to serve and worship God with one’s hands, go to holy places with one’s feet, hear the chanting of the name and glory of God with one’s ears and behold the Divine image with one’s eyes; with mind means to contemplate and meditate on God constantly and to remember and to think of his lila. ‘With words’ means to sing hymns to Him and chant His name and glories”.

Ramakrishna spoke of Hinduism as a Universal and Eternal religion.

“The eternal religion, the religion of rishis, has been in existence from time out of mind and will exist eternally.”
There exists in this Sanatana dharma all forms of worship, worship of God with form and worship of impersonal Deity as well. It contains all paths – paths of knowledge, devotion and so on. The other forms of religion, the modern cults, will remain for a few days and then will disappear”.  

He said that God can be realized by every man. People do not understand this because of blind faith and rigid superstitions. He says that superstitions and conflicts are removed when man belongs to God. This awareness of God in all walks of life makes true salvation for every individual.
Chapter - II

‘UNIVERSAL RELIGION’ IN MODERN INDIAN THOUGHT

Tagore as a Monotheist and Humanist

After registering its emphatic presence in medieval times, the idea of religious universalism became increasingly popular among the modern Indian thinkers – both Hindu and Muslim. Among these, the first to give a powerful voice was Rabindranath Tagore. He gave a new direction to Indian philosophy. He was a man who changed the thought of people about religious dogmas and superstitions. He was a mystic, humanist, poet, philosopher and the great follower of Brahmosamaj. Under the influence of Brahmosamaj he tried to remove the superstitions of Hindu religion. He visualized a version of Hindu religion which was a combination of some elements of Brahmosamaj and some elements of orthodox Hinduism. He mentions in his famous book *Religion of Man* that my conception of religion is basically that of a poetic religion. He believed in man’s self-realization and this belief was the center of his life and works. The basic idea of his religious thought is the realization of one’s kinship with everything and cultivate the feelings of universal love for mankind. Tagore believed in religion of man.

In modern times, everyone thinks for civilization of machines and modernity. But in the race of modernization man forgets his reality. Man has forgotten his rationality which is the essence of his being. He never thinks
about humanity and welfare of humanity. In a condition when a man completely forgoes his aim of life and forgets his duty as a human being, the one thinker who apprehended this problem in a rigorous way was Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore tried to rekindle the feeling of humanity in man. He says that worship of God means service of mankind.

According to Tagore, we cannot confine religion in any group, sect, nation, caste, colour or institution. He says that being Hindu, Muslim or Christian is a matter of chance. It is a fact that every man takes birth in a particular family and inherits thereby certain customs and norms of living in society. For example, if we are born in a Hindu family, we adopt those things which are around us, like customs, values, rituals etc. We try to sincerely perform and abide by them. But it is not the real religion because it is not the means of our self-realization. The aim of true religion is realizing the power of self, creating self-awareness, and exercising freedom of choice. Man has certainly the capacity of self-awareness and this awareness is not in the sense of physical or material well-being but the capacity to realize the spirituality that is above the physical and mental world. It means he has an inner power of knowing himself as a spiritual being. The realization of self is the realization of one's manhood. As we know, by nature man is creative and his creative power is his dharma or true religion. The innate truth of man is expressed in the true religion of man. Now the question arises what is the innate truth of man? In Tagore's own words it is that, "Man possesses an extra awareness that is greater than his material sense. This is his manhood. It is this abiding creative force which is his religion".\(^1\) For this reason, if we adopt any religion without self-awareness that cannot be true religion.
Tagore often uses the Sanskrit word 'Dharma' to denote his idea of true religion. He uses it in a deeper and wider sense in comparison of the word ‘religion’. Dharma is the innermost nature of the individual. It is implicit truth, real essence of all things. Dharma is the truth which is inherent in man. The true religion has the quality of freedom which everyman has. Freedom is the essence of man’s nature because by nature man has a creative power which is inherent in him. Tagore says that every physical object has a religion that means every physical object has creative power.

Tagore says, “Dharma is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth of all things”.2 Again, he says, “In my language the word religion has a profound meaning. The wateriness of water is essentially its religion, in the spark of the flame lies the religion of fire. Likewise, man’s religion is his innermost truth”.3

Tagore was a monotheist and anti-ritualist. He says that for the realization of true religion it is not important that we perform rituals like going to mosque, temple or churches, or follow priests. He said,

“We do not want nowadays temples of worship and outward rites and ceremonies. What we really want is an ashram. We want a place where the beauty of nature and the noblest pursuits of man are in sweet harmony. Our temple of worship is there where outward nature and human soul meet in Union”.4

It is a fact that in the world there have been many religious creeds and these various creeds have different forms and ways. These various practices mislead the believers and create conflicts. We can indeed say that conflicts
take place in religion because man takes up particular forms of religion. He does not see the holistic aspects although that alone is the essence of true religion. According to Tagore, the true religion of man is free from all such types of particular forms and should never be confused with the “institutional religion”. He says,

“It should be remembered that religion and churches of religious organization are not the same. They are to one another as the fire is to the ashes. When the religions have to make way for religious organization it is like the river being dominated by sand breeds, the current stagnates and its aspect become desert-like”.

Tagore truly believes that institutional religions have almost vitiated the real aspects of religion. Institutional religions give emphasis only on the superficialities of religion. They apprehend and spread out the external aspects of religion. The religious sects never touch the inner aspect of religion which is the essence of religion that is the freedom of soul. In institutional religion every institute takes religion as a slave and interprets religion in accordance with its own will that suits him. Institutional religion distorts the essence of true religion.

Tagore says,

“The same blindness which impedes them to rush to bathe in a particular stream, renders them indifferent to the suffering of their unknown fellow men. God does not appreciate this prostitution of his most precious gift”.

Institutional religion or religion of communities is parochial and therefore away from the qualities of naturality and reality. It has a limited area. There are fixed limits around it. But the religion of man has the quality
of naturality and freedom. True religion cannot create any compulsion and give space to thoughts of every individual. According to Tagore institutional religion are rigid, dogmatic and false.

"In dogmatic religion all questions are definitely answered, all doubts are finally laid to rest. But the poet's religion is fluid, like the atmosphere around the earth where light and shadow play hide and seek... it never undertakes to lead anybody anywhere to any solid conclusion; yet it reveals endless spheres of light, because it has no walls around itself".7

True religion has the quality to fulfill the cravings of our nature. According to Tagore, Religion is an attitude of love and unity. Love is the highest form of religion. Feeling of love existed in every human being and he should cultivate a universal feeling of love with every human being.

As we know, man also has brutish nature which requires the satisfaction of many physical needs. But only the satisfaction of physical needs is not enough. Because there is something inherent in his nature that he can realize by satisfying what is within him. “Religion has its function in reconciling the contradiction, by subordinating the brute nature to what we consider as the truth of man.”8

We can say that divinity is present in every human being and the aim of true religion is to realize this innermost essence of man that is divinity.

Tagore, in his famous book The Religion of Man, says: “Religion consists in the endeavour of man to cultivate and express those qualities which are inherent in the nature of Man, the Eternal, and to have faith in them.”9
Tagore rejected asceticism. A saint is a man who renounces the world, which means he renounces the action. He is totally detached from his Dharma. He cannot realize the nature of infinite soul or supreme soul. If we renounce the world, how can we perform our duty or Dharma, that is, cultivate the universal love and service to humanity. He says, “No my friends, I shall never be an ascetic, whatever you may say.... I shall never leave my hearts and home and retire into forest solitude...if its silence is not deepened by soft whispers. I shall never be an ascetic.”

Tagore had a firm belief in God and nature. Tagore was an aestheticist. He says God and man both are artists. God is designer of universe in a broad sense, and man is also an artist in the sense that he has the capacity of realization or creative power to understand the spirituality which exists in him. He says, “It is God, the artist who finds the final fulfillment in mankind.”

Man has two aspects in his nature. One is the individual or physical soul which is limited and the other is infinite which is a supreme self or God. The highest reality is universal man. The infinite self has the quality of ever-growing freedom. Infinite nature of man is in his spiritual freedom.

According to Tagore, finite and infinite aspects of man’s nature is the realization of universal in individual, because universal is the surplus of individual. Without finite or individual self we cannot realize the infinite. He says that as an artist man has creative power and this creativity in man represents his spirituality. Due to this spirituality man unites with God.
Tagore considered man like a ‘temple of divine’ where temple is body and divine is soul. Sometimes he considered man as the art work of God; sometimes he called him a co-worker with God, a friend and a playmate. In *Gitanjali*, he said: “The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky with the tune of thee and me; all the air is vibrant, and all the ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.”

Tagore always called God as Man, a Supreme Man or *Mahamanav*. He said in his book *The Religion of Man*: “For this can only be relevant to the God who is God and man at the same time; and if this faith be blamed for being anthropomorphic, then man is to be blamed for being man, and the lover for loving his dear one as a person instead of as a principle of psychology.” Tagore’s religion is realization of oneness of the individual soul with supreme soul. This we can realize in the realization of love and joy. Tagore’s religion is religion of love; love is the highest form of religion.

In the words of Charles A. Moore, “Tagore actually finds the ideal of religion in universal love and service to mankind, in the more humanistic and worldly sense of service to man as man and in world”.

Tagore tried to humanize religion; he says that worship of God means service of mankind. Thus, we can see say that the simple expression of love for all humanity is Tagore’s concept of religion.

**Gandhi’s Views on Religious Tolerance**

Gandhi’s name is the greatest among all the modern Indian thinkers. He achieved fame as a saint, a freedom fighter, humanist, social reformer and nationalist.
Gandhi grew up in a well balanced atmosphere. He imbibed religious and moral tradition of his family in his native place in Gujrat. He studied the Ramayana, Bhagavad-Gita and many other books of Jainism and other scriptures of world religions. The ancient Hindu tradition was, however, the base of Gandhi’s religious thought. He always confessed his faith in the Hindu religion and way of worship. His study of the scriptures of this religion gave him a moral sense and sharpened his religious insight.

Now before the discussion of Gandhi’s appeal to religious tolerance we will make a brief discussion on the basic character of Gandhi’s religious thought.

Gandhi’s concept of religion is very closely related with his concept of Truth or God. The basic belief of Gandhi’s religious thought is that there is only one reality, ‘God’ who is nothing else but Truth. On this basis it is clear that if truth existed God existed. His most famous statement ‘Truth is God’ meant that for him Truth was religion. Truth or God is the essence of true religion. He defines religion as devotion to some higher power or reality. In other words, devotion to truth is religion. The way of truth is the way which helps us to achieve spirituality. Explaining his idea of religion, he once wrote: “Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not a Hindu religion... but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which charges ones very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies”.

According to Gandhi, there are two aspects of man’s nature. One is brutish and the other divine. Brutish aspect of man’s nature is not permanent. It can be changed in some ways. Some ethical elements like goodness, righteousness, morality are present in every human being.
Religion is a way to purify the nature of man’s character. It means religion has the capacity to develop the sense of spirituality in man. When the sense of spirituality had developed in man, man achieves power which helps him to make or understand the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, moral and nonmoral, ethical and unethical, true and false etc. It develops the feeling of love and search for truth. Religion is the way to develop morality in man, because morality is the essence of true religion. “True religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what tree is to seed that is sown in soil”. Or, again, “As soon as we lose the moral basis, we close to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man for instance cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God on his side”. Morality, according to Gandhi, forms the essence of religion. Gandhi took the truth as a highest moral virtue. He identified religion with truth. To him, “There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness”.

Gandhi says that Religion is nothing but a belief in moral order or Dharma because truth constitutes the essence of Dharma. The truth constitutes the highest religion. “Religion is belief in the ordered moral government of world”.

Religion is not only the belief in moral order; it is the way of life also. That means it tells us how to live, eat and purify one’s self for attaining salvation or liberation. To quote his words, “You must watch my life, how I live, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all these in me is my religion”.
Gandhi generally followed orthodox Hindu ways of worship. So the backbone of Gandhi’s thought was ancient Hindu tradition. In general, Hinduism is a peculiar religion having no essential tenets as found in other religions. It does not have any one founder, prophet, text, creed, specific rituals etc. In Hinduism there are various beliefs and practices. Among those you can pick up one way and call yourself a Hindu. Hinduism does not insist upon believing in the concept of one God. A Hindu can believe in one God or many gods. He would be a polytheist, monotheist or monist, or even an atheist. Hinduism is a vast religion and away from all types of complexities. Hinduism is like a tree which has several branches and you are free to pick up any one branch or way and achieve the goal that is salvation.

Gandhi says that every man is born in a family and each family has its own culture and traditions. That tradition is important for him. I am born in a Hindu family and therefore Hindu tradition and culture suit me. So I adopt Hinduism. In that sense birth is an accident. It is not a matter of human choice. But in case of the choice of tradition, culture, way of life and religion, everyone is free to choose his way which gives him satisfaction and suits him.

In Hinduism there are many ways of attaining the supreme end of life. Three ways are however more specifically mentioned, namely the way of knowledge (Jnana Marga), way of action (Karma Marga), and the way of prayer (Bhakti Marga). Man is free to pick up any marga or path and become a follower of Hinduism.
On this basis we can say that by nature of Hinduism is universal and liberal, and against rigid dogmatic rules of religion. Gandhi says:

“Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it there is room for the worship of all prophets of world. It is not missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term... Hinduism tells every one to worship God according to his faith or Dharma and so lives at peace with all religions”.²¹

Further, “Hinduism is not a codified religion. We have in Hinduism hundreds and thousands of books whose names even we do not know, which go under the name of Shastras”.²² Hinduism is free from all types of religious conflicts. Broadly, we can say that Hinduism is by nature liberal. Gandhi has a firm belief in Hinduism. There are a lot of valuable elements present in Hinduism and Gandhi was much impressed by them. He said that I felt proud being a Hindu. But it does not mean he avoided other’s faith. He always respected all other world religions. We can see how much Gandhi was influenced by Hinduism but also by Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism etc.

Islam preaches a rigid faith in monotheism i.e. faith in only one God as expressed in its basic proclamation La ilaha illallah (there is no God but Allah). But, on the other side, it has many ethical principles which give new direction to Gandhi’s thought. Islam preaches brotherhood of man, kindness, universal love, peace for all and service to humanity. Gandhi says that Islam is a religion of love and peace and its conception of universal brotherhood is such as not to be seen in any other religion. In his own words, “the spirit of brotherhood is manifested in no other religion as clearly as in Islam”.²³
Gandhi says that many misconceptions exist in human mind about Islam because of wrong interpretation of Quran. Islamic approach is universal and tolerant. We can see it in its attitude towards other religions and prophets. It opens gates for all and recognizes the other prophets such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus etc. who came at different times to work for the spiritual welfare of human being.

The Qur’an declares, “The same religion has been established for you that he enjoined on Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, namely that you should remain steadfast in religion and make no divisions therein”.

Gandhi was also impressed by the Islamic ethics. He says that as I understand the Islam, it is a peaceful religion which teaches real love and kindness for all and service to humanity. In the discipline of Islam, there are restrictions against drinking, illegal relation, murder, lying, cheating etc. If these evils are removed from the society, peace will prevail. The aim of the Islam is to establish peace in society and work for the welfare of humanity.

Gandhi was also impressed by Christianity and Judaism. He says that Christianity is one of great religions, which gives emphasis on absolute love. Love is the most important virtue in Christianity. No other religion gives attention to such pure love with God and universal love for whole humanity. We can indeed say that Gandhi’s conception of true religion and his ethical point of view as exemplified in his love with God and humanity are influenced by Christianity. Gandhi says,

“Christianity’s particular contribution is that of active love. No other religion says so firmly that God is love and New Testament is full of the word. Christians,
however as a whole, denied the principle with their works".25

Gandhi’s concepts of Ahimsa and Satyagraha are also taught by Jesus. Jesus’ whole life is a great example of love and sacrifice for humanity. We can see the reflection of Christianity in Gandhian thought.

According to Gandhi, simple Christianity is religion of love for whole humanity. Gandhi’s concept of Satyagraha, his message of non-violence, love and peace for all are so much similar to the teachings of Christ.

Buddhism and Jainism, according to Gandhi, are part of Hinduism and both were nurtured under its umbrella. He did not consider Buddhism and Jainism as separate from Hinduism. Hinduism as an all-inclusive and tolerant religion covered a wide variety of sectarian thoughts. We can especially see the deep impact of Jaina teachings on Gandhian thought. The many important elements of Gandhi’s ethical teachings like Ahimsa (non-violence), Satyagraha (fasting), Aparigraha (non-attachment), Asteyya (non-stealing), Satya (truthfulness), Brahmcharya (celibacy) are also present in Jaina’s ethical teachings.

Gandhi does not believe in ritualistic religion. He always gave preference to moral and spiritual elements in religion. Buddhism that came in existence almost at the same time as Jainism was also against ritualism and caste distinctions.

After this discussion, we can see clearly the impact of different religions on Gandhi’s thought. He says there are many religions in this world and they are all different paths leading to the same goal.
Radhakrishnan's Emphasis on Hinduism as an All-inclusive and All-embracing Tradition

In philosophical tradition of India, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan has a great place among modern Indian thinkers like, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Iqbal etc. He is considered as a great intellectual teacher of philosophy and religion.

The root meaning of religion as we understand the word, is 'binding force'. But, in the world, many religions exist and each religion claims that its scripture is unique and its God is superior than other Gods. So, because of their claims of perfection and absoluteness there has been a change in the real meaning of religion. Now the general attitude of religious people is to think that the one religion is opposed to another. But the reality is that no one can claim to perfection and absoluteness about his religion and think derogatively about other religions.

Radhakrishnan emphasises this when he says: “Religion should not be confused with fixed intellectual conceptions, which are all mind-made. Any religion which claims finality or absoluteness, desires to impose its own opinions on the rest of the word, and to civilise other people after its own standards”.26

Religion, according to Radhakrishnan, is discipline and practice not theology. It touches the inner core of man and creates the power of conscience to understand difference between good and evil, right and wrong, moral and nonmoral values. It gives us power to escape from greed, lust,
hatred and non-ethical acts. It discovers the essential power in human being to unite his relation with spirituality or ultimate reality of this world.

“Religion is the discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, saves us from greed, lust and hatred, releases moral power, and imparts courage in the enterprise of saving the world. As a discipline of mind, it contains the key and the essential means of coping with evil which threatens the existence of civilized world. It implies the submitting of our thinking and conduct to the truths of spirit”. 27

Religion helps us to change ourselves in our personal and interpersonal lives. It helps us in resolving the conflicts which exist in our own nature and diminish the hateful feelings. It always increases the feeling of love and morality in our life. The true religion always generates the feeling of likeness to divinity or spirituality. Religion is the bridge between God and man and its function is to unite them.

All religious practices like meditation, worship etc. are disciplines which purify the mind. It does not only help in developing an insight to see the reality but it helps us in direct experience of reality with the help of religious insight. We can perceive the divinity and identify ourselves with it through religious discipline.

Radhakrishnan, in his famous book Religion and Society, says that

“The religious man transcends the limitations imposed on him by his material nature or social conditions, and enlarges the creative purpose. Religion is a dynamic process, a renewed effort of the creative impulse working through exceptional individuals and seeking to uplift mankind to a new level”. 28
Religion is identified with feeling, emotion, sentiment, instinct and faith. The aim of religion is to provide spiritual fulfillment to all the individuals.

Religious experience does not create conflict or disturbance in the human life; it brings peace in this world. Radhakrishnan uses the word ‘Shanti’ for it. He defines it as “A positive feeling of calm and confidence, joy and strength in the midst of adversity and defeat, loss and frustration”.

Now the question arises why this experience is called religious and what is peculiar in it in comparison with other experiences? It is called religious because it is a sort of inner satisfaction and has the capacity of realizing spirituality. It discovers eternal truth. Its peculiarity we can see in its effort to discover the life-spirit that unites individuality with higher levels of its own being. Radhakrishnan says that, “However much we may quarrel about implication of this kind of experience, we cannot question the actuality of this experience itself”.

Religious experience has the capacity to diminish the sense of separation and discover the feeling of love and harmony. He says that men are not divided on the basis of religion but many times conflict is the cause of this division. He says that the aim of true religion is spiritual fulfillment. It can be realized when we understand the inner forms of religion or the essence of religion through religious experience. He also says that conflicts take place in our life when we apprehend outer forms of religion without religious experience.
Religion, according to Radhakrishnan, is identified with higher instinct, reason and love. It has deep faith in morality. It is way of life.

“Religion signifies faith in absolute values and way of life to realize them... Religious faith gives us the passion to persevere in the way of life and if it declines obedience degenerates into habit and slowly withers away”.

Different religions, according to Radhakrishnan, are different expressions or modes of one truth. Every religion is the mode of human effort in the direction of spirituality. They all prepare us for struggle and encourage us to achieve the supreme goal of life. In his own words, “the different religions should be regarded comrades in joint enterprise in facing common problems of peaceful co-existence of the peoples, international welfare and justice, racial equality and political independence of all peoples. Different religions are to be used as building stones for development of a human culture in which the adherents of different religions may be fraternally united as the children of one supreme”.

The true religion is not polluted by creeds, dogmas, caste, colour or superstitions. But if this is so, the question arises what is the main cause of the religious differences and how it vitiated true religion? For Radhakrishnan what vitiated the religion was the conflict itself though it cannot affect the essence of true religion. Conflicts are the main cause of religious differences. Conflicts and differences disappear when we begin to think that all religions are the expressions of one truth that is ultimate reality. He, in this context, quotes Muslim Sufi philosopher. Ibn al-Arabi who wrote: “My heart has become capable of every form; it is a pasture for gazelles and convent for Christian monks, and a temple for idols, and the
pilgrims' Ka'ba, and the table of the Tora and the book of the Quran. I follow the religion of love, whichever way his camels take. My religion and my faith is the true religion.”

In Hinduism every group of religion has a right to follow the truth through its own tradition, symbols, and modes of worship. They have complete choice because each religion has its own historical background and grows up with that. Hinduism is called all-inclusive because it gives every kind of support and spiritual freedom to all creeds. According to Hinduism, creeds are different, ways are different but goal is one and same.

Radhakrishnan in his book, *The Hindu View of Life* says that “the differences among the sects of the Hindus are more or less on the surface, and the Hindu as such remains a distinct cultural unit, with a common history, a common literature and a common civilization”.

Hinduism has universalistic approach in this sense. It is not bound up with a creed or a book, a prophet or a founder: Hinduism always searches for truth. In Hinduism there is no end of prophecy and no limits of religious scripture. It always welcomes new experiences and new expressions of truth. “Hinduism has no common creed and its system of worship has no fixed form. It has bound together multitudinous sects and devotion into a common scheme”.

Hinduism is a practical religion because it is a way of life. It gives liberty to every individual to enjoy any code or practice. It never insists on religious action but it always insists on spiritual and ethical approach in life of every individual. Hindu way of life always gave emphasis on moral life and the fellowship for all who accept the law of right and seek for the truth.
Hinduism has rationalistic approach. It studies the facts of human life in scientific spirit. But Hinduism is not only to study the facts but also try to obtain victory over facts. “Religion is not so much a revelation to be attained by us in faith as an effort to unveil the deepest layers of man’s piety and get into enduring contact with them”.  

The religions of the world can be distinguished into two classes. In the first class are religions for whom it is an attitude of faith. In the second class are religions for whom it is an experience to which an individual attaches supreme value. Hinduism and Buddhism fall in this second class of religion. For Hinduism real religion can exist without a definite conception of deity but it cannot exist without distinction between the spiritual and unholy, truth and falsehood. We can see it clearly that in the Hindu theistic system the basic thing is not the existence of deity, but its power to transform man. In Hindu systems of thought like Sankhya and the Jaina, there is no belief in God but yet they affirm the reality of spiritual consciousness.

“Belief and conduct, rites and ceremonies, authorities and dogma, are assigned a place subordinate to the art of conscious self-discovery and conduct with the divine”.  

So the Hindu attitude of religion is to have a universal outlook. Because it never sets for itself any limits. According to Hinduism, religion is the outer expression to the inner realization of God. It is not celebration of ceremonies. It is a kind of experience, the experience of ultimate reality.

In Hinduism experience is self-certifying. Hinduism is the religion of progress. According to Hinduism, religious progress is possible through
tradition, logic and enrichment of life. There has been a continuous
development of new forms and ideas through racial and religious
interactions that happened in the course of India’s chequered history. It
started in most ancient times and continues up to modern era.

“The first impulse of progress came when the Vedic Aryans came
into contact with native tribes. A similar impulse contributed to the
protestant movements of Jainism and Buddhism when the Aryans moved out
into the Gangetic valley”. 38 Again, “The reform movements of Ramananda,
Chaitanya, Kabir, and Nanak show the stimulus of Islam. The Brahmo samaj
and the Arya samaj are the outcome of the contact with western influences,
and yet Hinduism is not to be dismissed as a mere flow and strife of
opinions, for it represents a steady growth of insight, since every form of
Hinduism and every stage of its growth is related to the common
background of the Vedanta”. 39

Vedanta is not a religion but religion itself in its most universal and
deepest significance. There are three divisions of Vedanta. These are
Upanishads, the Brahmasutra and the Bhagavad-Gita. These are three stages
of faith, knowledge and discipline. So all the sects of Hinduism attempt to
interpret Vedanta in accordance with their own religious views. It means
different sects of Hinduism are reconciled with common standard and
regarded as modified expressions of one truth.

As the Mahabharata, one of the great epics, says, “The Veda is one;
its significance is one, though different Vedas are constructed on account of
misunderstanding. The acceptance of common authority by the different
sects helps to purify them. Those parts of the new faith which are not in conformity with the Vedic canon tend to be subordinated and gradually dropped out. While no creeds and no scruples were forced to disappear as outworn or out of date, every one of them developed on account of influence of the spirit of the Vedanta, which is by no means sectarian”.  

So the Hindu method of religious reform is basically democratic because it permits each faith to get the truth through its own ways. Each group has its own historical tradition and change, the condition of its growth of spirit.

Toleration is the most basic tenet of universalism which is accepted by Hinduism. Hinduism does not refuse any religious belief. For example, Christian’s description of personal, immediate dogmatic faith in Jesus and His authority as God is self-certifying. “Christian theology becomes relevant for those who shared and accepted a particular kind of spiritual experience, and these are tempted to dismiss as illusory other experience and scriptures as imperfect”.  But Hinduism was not betrayed into this situation. The Hindu thinker readily admits other points of view than his own considering them to be just as worthy of attention. If the whole race of man, in every land, of every colour, and every stage of culture, is the offspring of God, then we must admit that, in the vast compass of his providence, all are being trained by his wisdom and supported by his love to reach within the limits of their power a knowledge of the Supreme”.

Radhakrishnan knows about criticism of Christian missionaries against Hindu beliefs and religious practices. With deep and clear religious
sense, he removes all criticisms. He says that all such criticisms are due to the lack of understanding. He says we can completely remove them by the understanding of true religion, because only it can stop the complete annihilation of human race. So there is need to understand the true meaning of religion to every individual of world.

**Sir Syed’s Views on Religious Tolerance**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan has a unique place in the history of modern Indian taught. He played a vital role in the educational and social upliftment of Muslim community of India. He had a critical mind and rational outlook. He is also well known as a social reformer, a religious thinker, a humanist and rationalist.

He was much influenced by the spirit of nineteenth century ideology of science and reason. His family background and early religious education played a role in the development of his religious thoughts. He was the founder of Islamic modernism. But before he could grapple with the disciplines of modern knowledge and get a grip on the issues of modern concern, he acquired a deep knowledge of Quran and Hadith on his own. Surprisingly, it was on the basis of his early training in the traditional theological sciences that he could develop a catholic and tolerant outlook towards other religions and other communities.

Sir Syed’s religious outlook was liberal and free from all types of sectarian conflict. He followed his religion very sincerely. He believed in God and Quran. He says that Quran is source of all knowledge and the Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of God.
Sir Syed wanted religion to be a unifying power. He says that religion affects the whole life of man. Religion is an institution in which man learned to model every aspect of his life. He says all great religions were based on high ethical principles which were beneficial for cultured society. Every religion had two aspects: one is its moral part and the other, its belief part. Moral part presents ethics which exists in every religion. There are so many religions and every religion has its own system of beliefs. The plurality of religions creates controversies because every one thinks that his own religion is the only true one.

Sir Syed writes: "But strange is to say that in every age, each clan, tribe and nation, nay almost each separate individual, formed an idea of religion, or rather of the object of it, more or less different from that of others, each moreover being convinced that his own idea was the only true one". He quotes the Quran where God says: "I am with each individual in the appearance which he forms of me in his own mind".

According to Sir Syed, religion is innate in man's nature. There are two aspects of man's nature: one is rational and other brutish. Reason is the element which helps man to choose good and right deeds. It is the most important element which differentiates man from animals. He, thus, writes:

"Of all the innumerable wonders of the universe, the most marvelous is religion, the foundation of which lies in the distinction between the acts of men, distinguishing into good, evil and indifferent; for if there is no such difference, there can be no religion".

He defined religion as that valid principle which decides all intentional deeds, emotional impulse and spiritual sensivities of man. True
religion is based on absolute truth so true religion should be free from any fault. Religion conforms to law of nature. Nature is the best teacher to guide us for true conduct. Nature itself is the creation of creator who is ultimate truth or reality.

Religion is the path to know the reality which is the centre of all religions. We can see the self-expression of this reality reflected in whole universe in the form of love and love is appreciation of beauty. Beauty is perfection. So the concept of reality or God is present in every religion of world. Creativity, love, beauty and perfection are same in every faith.

Sir Syed says that Islam also accepts this conception of God which is acceptable to every man of reason. He has universal outlook about religion. His aim was not to assert the superiority of his own faith in Islam over other's faith. But he wanted to prove that Islam was not an alien religion. It had some valuable elements which are also present in Christianity and Judaism. The aim of Islam is to spread peace and brotherhood in whole world.

Sir Syed was so sincere in his belief that he started to learn more about other religions. He studied Bible deeply. He wrote commentaries on it. In order to understand Judaism he learned Hebrew. His aim was to minimize the existing differences of different faiths. In this way, he introduced the study of comparative religions.

Sir Syed said that religions arouse different feelings in different hearts but they all wanted to know about the mystery behind this universe. He believed that true religion was one where there was no room for contradictions. He said that we must try to define religion rationally.
"Neither an atheist nor a believer can deny the fact that man's constitution is such (or, we may say, God has bestowed upon him the power) that he is able to do certain works and not able to do certain others, and therefore, he must choose for himself a most suitable vocation in life wherein his internal qualities render the service for which he was born. So the only touchstone of a true religion can be this: if that religion is in conformity with human nature or with nature in general, then it is true. It would be a clear proof that this religion is from the hand of God, the Author of Nature both in man and outside".  

Sir Syed further said in a similar context:

"If that religion is against human nature and constitution, and against his power and the rights which follow from these powers, and stands in the way of putting them to useful purposes, then undoubtedly that religion cannot be claimed to issue forth from the hands of the Author of Nature, for religion after all, is made for men. I am fully confident that the guidance which He has given us is absolutely in conformity with our constitution and our nature and this is the only touchstone of its truth. It would be clearly absurd to assert that God's action is different from His words. All creation including man is the work of God and religion is His word, so there cannot be any contradiction between the two".

Coming to Islamic religion itself, Islam was not a new religion started by Muhammad in Arabia. Islam had laid emphasis on the singleness of God but multiplicity of prophets and scriptures. Sir Syed tried to demonstrate the truth of Islam, because Islam has had universal guidance, appeal to peace and universal brotherhood for whole humanity. Concept of God is the common idea of all religions, since God is the creator and the sustainer of whole world or whole humanity. All people had equal rights to salvation.
Sir Syed felt a great need of presenting Islam in its true form. He tried to explain its universality in terms of reason and nature.

Besides being a rationalist, Sir Syed was also a Naturalist. He totally rejected the authority of traditionalism which was expounded by ulama of that time. Sir Syed did not believe in any type of miracles, because these are against the law of nature. Whatever is against the law of nature cannot be true religion.

Sir Syed was influenced by the nineteenth century naturalism. He says that true religion must be in accordance with the law of nature. Islam is the best example of true religion because it equates with the law of nature.

"He expounded the theory that the true religion must be in conformity with nature. He also asserted that God's action could not be different from His words. There cannot be contradiction between work of God and word of God and all of this therefore, should be in conformity with each other".48

We know that law of nature is made by God and Islam is also the word of God. There is an agreement between the two. No ordinance of Islam and no law of Shariat can be against the law of nature. Whatever Islam has called good is good according to Nature and whatever Islam has called evil is evil according to Nature as well. In a word, Sir Syed said: "Islam is nature and nature is Islam".

Sir Syed firmly believed that neither the Quran is contrary to the law of Nature nor law of nature is contrary to religion, there is nothing which is against Fitrat Allah. He declared in an essay entitled, 'Islam is Nature and Nature is Islam'.
"Islam is such a simple and useful religion that even irreligiosity is included in it. What minimum belief an irreligious person may hold, must be the basic creed of Islam. Every religion has certain special rituals and creeds on account of which it is differentiated from other, and anyone who doesn't believe in and follow these rituals is called irreligious, though we have no right to call him so. Religion pure and simple is above all these rituals and formalities with which it comes to be unfortunately bound up, and that is true Islam and Fitrat."

In the same spirit of universality, the Quran invites the people of the Book to "Come and unite on the principle which is common between you and us that you will not associate any other being with Allah in belief and worship".

According to Sir Syed, Islam is a religion without dogmas, without mysteries, without superstitious beliefs and without miracles. The Quran says: "So set thy face to real religion (of the unity of God after Abraham); it is the nature of God on the pattern of which he made the nature of man that is the real religion".

The Prophet of Islam once said: ‘a child is born with a pure nature; it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian’.

The Quran refers to this universal aspect of religion, the minimum demands of belief in the unity of God, generally associated with the name of Abraham. It mentions that his true religion (din-hanif) was creed of the unity of God and not of polytheism.

The second basic element in Islam presented by Sir Syed was reason and commonsense of man as ultimate source of judgment. Sir Syed emphasized that the Quran never taught blind faith in any basic principle of
the religion. In Quran it is always said that one should use his reason in understanding the problems of faith and life with open eye and open heart.

Sir Syed’s ‘reason’ was of course the empirical reason of nineteenth century, a reason to which the Quran also appeals. According to his own definition, the reason was, "that inherent capacity in man by which he draws conclusions on the basis of the observation of objective phenomena or mental thinking processes, and which proceeds from particulars to generalizations or vice versa... It is this capacity of man which has enabled him to invent new things and led him on to understand and control the forces of nature. It is by this that man is able to know things which are a source of his happiness and then tries to get as much profit out of them as possible; it is this which makes a man ask the why and wherefrom of different events around him...". 52

Man is distinguished from animals for his rationality. The Quranic term "names", in the story of Adam (11, 29), should be taken "to mean the same power of reason by which man understands the nature of things, thinks new thoughts and arrives at both synthetic and analytic consequences from the given premises and thought". 53

Islam and reason go together and since reason is universally accepted so should be Islam. Reason of one man can be corrected by the other. It means the reason of one age may be corrected by the reason of the other age. So without reason nothing can be achieved. But despite this, reason is also universal and belongs to whole humanity.
Tawhid is the central belief of Islam because faith in God is the supreme value of life. Tawhid means unity of God. The essence of Tawhid as a working idea is equality, solidarity, brotherhood and freedom. Islam demands loyalty to God because it is the ultimate basis of spiritual life of everyone. Loyalty to God means man's loyalty to his own ideal nature. Islam presents a simple creed which is not difficult to follow. Its striking features in social code are two; one is equality and other is brotherhood. It attempts to break the barriers of caste, colour and class and bring peace for all human beings. Islam has practical ethics. On this basis we can say that Islam fulfills the criteria of universality.

Concept of God is the basic tenet of Islam which is acceptable to any man of reason. Another important tenet is freedom of opinion in Islam. Everybody has right to express his opinion on religious matters. The spirit of Islam is much liberal in comparison with other religions like Judaism, Christianity etc.

Citing the rigidity in Judaism, Sir Syed said that it followed blindly whatever was written in their scriptures. In Christianity this freedom was so liberally used that there was no end to splitting of Christianity into several denominations. But Islam reconciles these two things. Islam rejects rigidity and offers consensus that means 'Ijtehad'. According to him,

"First priority was to follow the injunctions of the Quran; if the solution is missing in it, go to the saying of prophet, or Hadis, if the matter remains yet unresolved, the collective reasoning or 'ijtehad' was the answer. When such step by step provision exists to meet exigencies, it was not right to blame Islam".
Islam has no distinction of caste, colour, religion etc. It is open for all humanity. It gives equal status to all. The law of Islam is one and same for all human beings, for example, the women don’t enjoy a higher status in any other religion than Islam.

Islamic ethics is another universal point. We can see it in the discipline of Islam in the form of restrictions against drinking, illicit relationships, lying, cheating etc. If these evils are removed from the society, peace will prevail which is the aim of Islam as well.

Sir Syed held the view that the religion has been created for mankind rather than mankind has been created for religion. Hence his perception of Islam is not confined to Muslims alone; rather it is much wider and extends to all human beings.

Iqbal on Islam as a Universal Religion

In the history of modern India, Iqbal may be counted among those thinkers who have a great place in world literature. He was a religion-oriented poet. He was a vitalist who believed in a dynamic approach towards life and its problems. His work was not inspired by national or communal motives. The aim of Iqbal’s life was the renaissance of Islam and to achieve the salvation of whole mankind. He gave message for Muslim community in particular and to all mankind in general. He tried to make man conscious of his power, improve his personality and make a peaceful living in this world. He tried to transform the life of people of his own nation and mankind when he perceived that whole mankind has gone on wrong path.
Iqbal had strong faith in Islam and Islamic values of life. We can see his deep respect for Islam and its prophet in his life and works. His Urdu and Persian works reflect his love for Islam and prophet of Islam.

Iqbal is basically a Muslim philosopher. For him religion is most important in the life of every individual, as he says:

"Religion, in its more advanced forms, rises higher than poetry. It moves from individual to society. In its attitude towards the ultimate reality it is opposed to the limitation of man; it enlarges his claims and holds out the prospect of nothing less than a direct vision of Reality".55

Religion is a dynamic force in Iqbal's thought. We can see a remarkable expression of this dynamic outlook in his philosophy of ego (Khudi). Through it he presents the basic progressive and practical outlook of Islam. With its philosophy of action, Islam presents a striking difference to other religious system of Indian and semetic traditions.

Iqbal presents his views in his famous poetic books Asrar-e-Khudi and Ramuz-e-Bekhudi. He uses the term Khudi to mean self-recognition, self-awareness, self manifestation and self-articulation. The specific meaning of self used by Iqbal is 'I' or 'Ego' or personality of a person. Iqbal wants that every man should assert his or her being. He should feel that God is only a greater ego, the supreme ego of the universe which has been created by Him.

Iqbal says that various kinds of abilities and capacities have been present in every human being. The first duty of a person is to know himself
or herself; it is also the duty of man that he should use his inherent capabilities by working for the welfare of community or nation as well as whole humanity.

Iqbal has laid greatest emphasis on the realization of one’s self. In one of his famous Persian verses he says,

“One who denies the existence of God is an infidel in the eyes of Mullah. But one who denies one’s own existence is greater infidel in my eyes”.

As we know every man has two aspects to his nature – one is his individual self and the other the social self. Every human being is an individual as well as a member of the society.

Iqbal’s concept of ‘self’ concerns with individual self-affirmation and selflessness both. He gave emphasis on self-knowledge and self-awareness. He says that when an individual establishes his relation with society or nation he moves from individual to society.

He says that for the welfare of society or nation, first of all man should know his or her inherent power because without knowing or understanding self it is not possible to bring any change in the society. To have the knowledge of one’s self is the religious requirement of every human being. The life of self-affirmation and selflessness can be most authentically lived if one followed the teachings of Islam. For in Iqbal’s view the teaching of Islam is “the most evolved, the most scientific, and the
most natural among world religions”. In one of his interviews, he further said:

"Islam in my opinion is the only positive system that the world possesses today provided the Muslims apply themselves to it and rethink the whole thing in the light of modern ideas".57

Now the question arises why Iqbal considers Islam as a most scientific religion among world religions to be accepted by the entire humanity. To answer this question, one must consider the fact that in Islam the God is the God of entire world, its prophet is blessing for whole humanity and its message is for the whole humanity. It embraces all human beings and there is in it no distinction of caste, colour, religion etc. It opens its gates for all without the consideration of one’s status. There is no room for regional and national prejudice. Indeed universalism and internationalism are the hallmarks of Islam. It wants to see the entire mankind happy, prosperous and at peace.

Islam has taught that man is the architect of his own destiny. According to Iqbal, God has never taught man to sit idle, because creative action of man discloses what the secrets of his predestination have kept hidden. Through action man can prove the capacity and power to liberate himself from the claims of predeterminism. So, in this manner, Islam has universal outlook because the claim of predeterminism relates to the whole humanity. Human action is the necessary element of human progress.

Religion is a cultural force and Islam has a distinct approach towards culture. In the light of Quran, Iqbal says, Islam encourages cultivation not
only of individual or group of individuals but the whole humanity. Cultural
force in Islam moves towards a universal brotherhood in which “the leader
is prophet, the guidance is the Holy Qur’an and the Goal is ‘Allah’”. It
guarantees the continuous progress and betterment of whole mankind.

Iqbal quotes one of the Quranic verse to explain the real character of
the law of Islam. “And to those who exert we show our path”.

Islam has a realistic approach towards life and its problems. It deals
with both material and spiritual aspects of man. Islam has an organic and
humanistic outlook which was against the mechanical rationalism of Greek
philosophical thought.

Islam is not an ordinary religion. It represents a definite progress over
Judaism, Christianity and other religions. It combines the most prominent
features of all religions and its principles are in complete harmony with
reason and moral intuition of man. It is not simply a system of moral rules.
It is based on true conception of human progress. It established certain
principles and transformed the whole human race. It has a reformatory spirit.

The dynamic approach of Islam towards life is a central point of
discussion in Iqbal’s philosophical and other writings. He finds great
cultural value in the institution of prophethood. The appearance of prophets
at different stages of historical evolution is in keeping with the continuous
progress in all fields of human civilization. It gives new thought, new way
of enquiry and new way of knowledge and action. Prophethood in Islam
represents the developing process of human intellect. In this context, Iqbal
gives the example of the prophet of Islam who, he says, stands between
ancient world and modern world.
"In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other source of knowledge suitable to its new direction. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition."  

The spirit of Islam is to make all human beings responsible for their action. Man must solve his problems by his own efforts.  

Islamic system of life has the capacity to erase the conflict of caste, colour and race. It gives the equal right to all human beings. It teaches to man the lesson of self-sacrifice, love and respect to man.
Chapter - 3

VIVEKANANDA’S CONCEPT OF ‘UNIVERSAL RELIGION’

Nature of Universal Religion

Religion, according to Vivekananda, is in essence man’s way of living in the name of truth. It is quite clear that every recognized religion has three concepts. First is philosophy, second, mythology and the third is rituals. Some gave more emphasis on one and some on other aspect. But, obviously, at the heart of every religion was its philosophy and metaphysics which, in the words of Vivekananda himself, “presents the whole scope of religion, setting forth its basic principles, its goal, and the means of reaching that goal”.¹ He says:

“Religion without philosophy runs into superstition; and philosophy without religion becomes a dry atheism”.²

He further says that,

“In every religion there are three parts: philosophy, mythology and rituals. Philosophy of course is the essence of every religion; mythology explains and illustrates it by means of more or less legendary lives of greatmen, stories and fables of wonderful things and ritual gives to that philosophy a still more concrete form so that everyone may grasp it. Ritual is in fact a ‘concretized philosophy’”.³

Every religion has its own philosophy which is unique to itself and which enables it to differentiate it from the other religions. But the question is if each religion differs from the other at its most basic philosophical level, how can it be possible to have one universal philosophy? Moreover, it is
also observed that each one claims superiority on others in a very rigid manner. Sometimes the people say those who do not follow his religion, cannot attain salvation. They must go in hell because their way is not the true and right one. In the words of Vivekananda:

"Each religion brings out its own doctrines and insists upon them as being the only true ones. And not only does it do that, but it thinks that he who does not believe in them must go to some horrible place".

Such an attitude characterizes the minds not because of some evil thought but through a particular disease of human mind. It is called fanaticism. Fanaticism is a mental disease. It is hundred times more dangerous among all diseases. All the evils of human nature is aroused by it. Fanaticism is the main cause of religious conflict. All the evils of human nature are aroused by this religious zeal.

Philosophical aspects of religion are often presented in the form of myths and fables and these become often the source of mutual conflicts and antagonisms. Because each one claims that my stories are not mere myths. Vivekananda illustrates different religious mythologies and presents the true picture of human mind. He gave the example of Christian, Hindu and Jewish mythologies. He says that the Christian believes that God took the shape of a dove and came to earth. For Christian this is history, not mythology. Hindu believes that God is manifested in the cow. But the Christian rejects it saying that it is superstition. Now clearly what is at work here is one's
fanatic bent of mind because if Christian mythology is his religious history then how others’ history could be superstition. If one religion presents its philosophical view through a set of wonderful stories, why should he say other such stories to be myth or superstition.

“The Christian believes that God took the shape of a dove and came down to earth; to him this is history not mythology. The Hindu believes that God is manifested in the cow. Christians say that to believe so is mere mythology, and not history; that it is superstition. The Jews think that if an image is made in the form of a box or a chest, with an angel on either side, then it may be placed in the Holy of Holies, it is sacred to Jehovah. But if the image is made in the form of a beautiful man or woman, they say, “This is horrible idol; break it down!” This is our unity in mythology! Again if a man stands up and says, “My prophet did such and such wonderful things”, other will say, “That is only superstition”. But at the same time they say their own prophet did still more wonderful things, which they hold to be historical”.

Like in the case of their philosophies and mythologies, each religion has also its own particular form of rituals and each of them again thinks that only its own rituals are holy and right. They consider the ritual of other religions simply as superstitions. Every religion prescribes the worship of a peculiar sort of symbol. These symbols are necessary in every religion. Because of lack of knowledge most people cannot understand the abstract spiritual things. Therefore symbols are of great help. In other words, we can say that at the lower point, symbols are helpful to understand the reality. Sometime we cannot think higher ideas about the reality but through symbols we can understand and access that reality. Everything in this world
is looked upon as a symbol and God is seen to be behind all this. Symbols are not the creation of man. "The symbols of religion", says Vivekananda, "have natural growth".

But there is no harmony in different religions because they do not understand the real nature and function of symbols. Therefore if one sect worships a peculiar sort of symbol, another objects to it saying that this particular symbol is horrible. For example, the phallus is the common symbol of Hindu community. Generally, phallus is a sex symbol but for Hindus it is the symbol of creator. Hindu believers cannot connect it with sex. For them it is just a symbol but for other religions it is horrible.

"To the Christian the phallus is horrible, and to the Hindus the Christian Sacrament is horrible. They say that the Christian sacrament, the killing of man and the eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood to get the good qualities of courage and bravery possessed by that man, is cannibalism".6

So the phallus symbol of Hindus and the sacrament of Christian are horrible for each other. In that sense there is no symbol which can be universalized and be acceptable to all world religions.

Now, if the conflict of religions arises on account of the fact that different religions have different philosophy, mythology and rituals, the religious harmony can be attained only by having a universal religion that rises above these differences. But then the question arises if there is any universality in religion or if there can be any universal form of religion?
Vivekananda says that such a religion already exists but we have lost it because of external divergences of religions. These external conflicts affect the essence of religion. Behind the external differences there is essential sameness. Thus, though universal religion already exists, for example in the form of universal brotherhood of man, people fail to notice its presence in their own life. He explains the situation with the help of following parable:

“In India, wine drinking is considered very bad. There are two brothers who one night wished to drink wine secretly; and their uncle, who was a very orthodox man, was sleeping in a room quite close to theirs. So before they began to drink they said to each other, “We must be very quiet, or uncle will wake up”. When they were drinking they continued repeating to each other, “Silence! Uncle will wake up” each trying to shout the other down. And as the shouting increased, the uncle woke up, came into the room, and discovered the whole thing”.

So all the sects cry like these drunken brothers. No one tried to practice restraint in their belief and behaviour. Those who really feel the universal brotherhood, they do not try to make sects out of it but they try to spread out it in whole world. They have sympathy and love for all mankind.

Vivekananda is aware that it is a difficult task. Because different religions gave emphasis on different qualities of religion. So it is much difficult to find the common elements. For example, Islam gave emphasis on universal brotherhood, Hinduism on spirituality, Christianity on self-purification. It is difficult to compare these several elements of religions. It
is therefore difficult to find any universal element in religion. But we also know that they exist. If we explore we will find it within the differences but then our approach has to be not that of exclusion but inclusion. We must seek unity within the diversity.

We must first of all know that we all are human beings and that we are not equal. We are not equal in our physical strength because one man is stronger than other, some have more power and some have less power and some are men and some women. There are many differences between us. But along with these differences we have one element which is common in all of us. We all are human beings, we all belong to one humanity.

“We are all human beings, but are we all equal? Certainly not, who says we are equal? Only the lunatic. Are we all equal in our brains, in our power, in our bodies? One man is stronger than another; one man has more brain power than another. If we are all equal, why is there this inequality? Who made it? We ourselves. Because we have more or less powers, more or less brains, more or less physical strength, these must make a difference between us. Yet we know that the doctrine of equality appeals to our hearts. We are all human beings; but some are men and some are women. Here is a blackman, there is a white man; but all are men, all belong to one humanity. Various are our faces; I see no two alike, yet we are all human beings. Where is this one humanity? I find a man or a women either dark or fair; and among all these faces, I know that there is an abstract humanity common to all. I may not find it when I try to grasp it, perceive it, and actualize it, yet I know for certain that it is there. If I am sure of anything, it is of this humanity which is common to us all. It is through this common entity that I see you as a man or a woman.”

8
Vivekananda says that the universal element that runs through all the various religions of the world, which can be said as being common to all religions is in a general way the faith in God.

"I am the thread that runs through all these pearls", and each pearl is a religion or even a sect thereof. There are the different pearls, and the Lord is the thread that runs through all of them; Only the majority of mankind are entirely unconscious of it".

Vivekananda says that unity in diversity is the scheme of universe.

Two different things are apparently different, but may be similar in a particular sense. Men and women are different with each other but as human beings they are same. As living beings men, animals and plants are all one. In this manner different religions talk of different aspects of the same truth. They all are talking about the same God. In Him we are all one. God is the only one ultimate source of this universe. Every religion, consciously or unconsciously, is struggling towards the realization of this unity that is God.

"We are all men, and yet we are all distinct from one another. As a part of humanity I am one with you, and as Mr. so and so I am different from you. As a man you are separate from woman; as human beings you are one with woman. As a human being you are separate from the animals; but as living being man, woman, and animal are all one. And as existence you are one with the whole universe. That universal existence is God, the ultimate unity in the universe. In Him we are all one".

The idea of a universal religion does not mean that one doctrine should be followed by all mankind. It is impossible. There will not be one universal mythology or one set of rituals accepted by all religious. There can
never be a time when all will accept the same thought. If ever it happens that
would mean the world is not progressing. Sameness and perfect balance will
create an unmoving world. Because diversity is the first principle of
progressive life. If we all think same thought it would be dangerous for the
world. So the differences of thought always must remain, otherwise soul of
our progress or the soul of our thought will cease. Vivekananda says:

“Perfect balance would be destruction. Take, for instance,
the heat in this room, whose tendency is towards equal
diffusion; suppose it gets that kind of diffusion; then for
all practical purposes that heat will cease to be. What
makes motion possible in this universe? Lost balance.
Complete sameness can come only when this universe is
destroyed, otherwise such a thing is impossible. Not only
so, it would be dangerous to have it. We must not wish
that all of us should think alike. There would then be no
thought to think we should all be alike, as the Egyptian
mummies in a museum are, looking at each other without
a thought to think”.

But as we recognize the necessity of variation for the progress of
world, we also recognize unity in nature. We must recognize variation
because only through this variation we can learn about something from
different angles and that this thing while being different from different
points of view is nevertheless one and same.

Vivekananda gave the example of photographs saying that different
photographs of a thing taken from different angles reveal different aspects of
that one thing.

“Suppose a man standing on the earth looks at the sun
when it rises in the morning; he sees a big ball. Suppose
he starts on a journey towards the sun and takes a camera with him, taking photographs at every stage of his journey until he reaches the sun. The photographs of each stage will be seen to be different from those of the other stages; infact, when he gets back, he brings with him so many photographs of so many different suns, as it would appear; and yet we know that the same sun was photographed by the man at different stages of his progress”.

As these different photographs are of the same sun. Different religions are likewise different ways of reaching the same goal. It is a fact that in this world there have been various religious sects having different religious codes and beliefs. It is also historically true that these religious sects are constantly quarrelling with each other. Again, every religious sect considers that its own doctrines are true and its own sect is superior to any other. Thus, various religions are the main cause of man’s spiritual struggles.

“As our social struggles are represented, among different nations by different social organizations, so man’s spiritual struggles are represented by various religions. And as different social organizations are constantly quarrelling, are constantly at war with each other, so these spiritual organizations have been constantly at war with each other, constantly quarrelling. Men belonging to a particular social organization claim that the right to live belongs only to them, and so long as they can, they want to exercise that right at the cost of the weak”.

Religion has a great motivational force. Thus we find that religions breed peace, love, humanity, tolerance, blessing and brotherhood in the whole world. At the same time, it is also the religion that breeds hatred,
bloodshed, enmity between man and man. Nothing indeed has deluged the
world with blood as religion did.

We find that every great religion of world has tremendous power. Sometime people say that they are unaware of this. But ignorance is not excuse. If anyone claims that only his religion is true and God has given certain truths only to him, he is wrong. If all the truths are given in one book, why would there be so many sects? And why will they be quarrelling with each other? What is the main cause of this difference? Answer is very clear that we have failed to understand the essence of religion.

"If the claim of any one religion that it has all the truth, and that God has given it all that truth in a certain book, be true, why then are there so many sects? Not fifty years pass before there are twenty sects founded upon the same book. If God has put all the truth in certain books, He does not give us those books in order that we may quarrel over texts".14

Each sect interpreted the Holy Book in its own way and each one claims that it alone can interpret that book. The other sects cannot understand it. Here is the reason behind all this variety and multiplicity.

"For instance, all the sects that exist among the Christians. Each one puts its own interpretation upon the same text, and each says that it alone understands that text and all the rest are wrong. So with every religion There are many sects among the Mohammedans and among the Buddhists, and hundreds among the Hindus".15

The variety and multiplicity are however not unnatural. For it is not possible that all men believe in one method of thinking. Indeed, if all people think the same thing, there would be no thought to think.
"It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakens thoughts. Now if all thoughts were alike, we should be like Egyptian mummies in a museum.... Whirls and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpool in stagnant, dead water".16

But while it is agreed that change and difference are the sign of life, the question still arises how can all the different thoughts be true at the same time?

Vivekananda says that internal soul of every religion cannot contradict each other. The contradiction takes place in the external forms of religions like rituals, books, languages. He says that religions do not contradict each other; they supplement each other. Each religion takes one part of truth and ignores the other part.

"Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great, universal truth and spends whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is therefore addition not exclusion. That is the idea. System after system arises each one embodying a great ideal, …"17

Further, he says,

"Man never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth – from lesser truth to higher truth, but never from error to truth".18

There can be many contradictory points of view of a thing all depending upon our subjective conditions and situations:

"We are viewing truth, getting as much of it as these circumstances will permit, colouring it with our own feelings, understanding it with our own intellects, and grasping it with our own mind. We can only know as
much of truth as is revealed to us, as much of it as we are able to receive".¹⁹

Another question here is if at all there exists any ideal religion which can satisfy all minds. Vivekananda says that such type of religion does already exist, though we fail to notice it. Universal religion is founding faith and vision upon man’s true identity. Universal religion is beyond the political, national, geographical limits. It is regardless of caste, colour, community, religious creed, race and nationality. Universal religion is all-pervasive. It gives the essential unity of all great religions of the world. Vivekananda uses the one watchword for universal religion, that is ‘acceptance’. Acceptance does not mean tolerance. He recommended positive acceptance.

Universal religion provides a common platform for all religions. It lays stress upon the essential unity of all great world religions. It gives respect for them all as different spiritual pathways leading to the same goal. It accepts all the ruling principle of life. It does not mean that one has to give up one’s previous religious affiliation as a Jew, or a Christian, or a Muslim, or a Hindu, or a Buddhist etc. There is no conflict or incompatibility between universal religion and different historical religions, for it is the common universal essence of them all.

Universal religion stresses the nonsectarian and non-discriminating spiritual values common to the great religions of the world. It goes to the
common roots of all religions. It seeks to appreciate their common denominator. It cautions against the common enemy of man's peace, prosperity and progress. It identifies the common dangers and roadblocks that obstruct the spiritual path of all mankind.

Furthermore, the nondiscriminating outlook of universal religion is all-pervasive. In refusing to discriminate between man and man, it not only transcends sectarian and theological differences, it also pulls down the barriers between the religious and the nonreligious. It seeks to bridge the gulf that separates theists and atheists, gnostics and agnostics, skeptics and mystics. It affirms that the fundamental spiritual potentiality is same in all human beings regardless of their superficial beliefs and tenets. Beliefs and tenets are, in ultimate analysis, mental formations determined by the accidental circumstances of history. So they reflect neither the deepest essence of man's being, nor the essential structure of the Supreme. They are practically useful and pragmatically valid tools of man's self-adjustment to the changing environment. In his inmost essence, the individual man is a spiritual entity, a center of creative freedom. He is neither a mere creature of circumstances, nor a plaything of random forces. His essence lies much deeper than ideas, dogmas and creeds. It is the abiding spirit in him that ultimately counts.
Vedanta as the Basis of Religious Universalism

Vivekananda was an ardent follower of Hinduism. He recognized that Hinduism is a progressive spiritualistic religion. Hinduism is superior to all other religions. But he used the term Hinduism in a very wide sense. He did not mean by it the creed or rituals but the fundamentals of Hinduism. He says that Hinduism as religion is neither creed nor doctrine. It is only realization.

Hinduism for Vivekananda was Vedanta. The word Vedanta literally means the end part of each Vedas.

“The Hindus have received their religion through revelations, the Vedas: They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to the audience, how a book can be without beginning or end but by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery and would exist if all humanity forgot, so is it with the laws that govern spiritual world. The moral, ethical and spiritual relation between soul and soul and between individual spirits and father of all spirits were before their discovery, and would remain if we forgot them”.20

Vivekananda asserts that the harmony and the unity of religions is interpreted in term of equality. He rejects the superiority of one religion over other religion. He also rejects the claim of exclusive truth of any religion. Vivekananda places various religions according to their growth in spirituality. On that basis, he places at the top the Vedantic Hinduism in its advaita form. It does not mean that Vedanta is a superior religion in
comparison to others but it means it is the absolute religion because it is a practical religion and it covers the whole life of man. It enters all parts of life in term of practice.

According to Vivekananda,

"Vedanta, therefore, as a religion, must be intensely practical. We must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives. And not only this. The fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of the world must vanish; for Vedanta teaches oneness – one life throughout. The ideals of religion must cover the whole field of life, they must enter into all our thoughts and more and more into practice". 21

Further he says that it is absolute religion though that does not mean that it is one religion among other religions.

Vivekananda says that truth is one, called Brahman which is the substratum of the universe. This Truth or Reality is undifferentiated, indivisible and impersonal. It is not different from Atman, the self, the reality within each individual. The plurality and diversity that are noticed in the world and between persons are therefore not ultimately true. It is non-dual Brahman-Atman that appears as many and is characterized by many names and forms (namarupa). He says that the same reality exists in and behind all multiplicity.

The multiplicity, according to Vivekananda, "is at best only a hideous caricature, a shadow of Reality". 22 "It is "fictitious" and "mere self-
Vivekananda says that the Reality is “the Divinity within” each individual. Advaita Vedanta is absolute truth. Vedanta is the goal of all humanity. Through Vedantic idea we can realize this oneness of beings. In this manner he says religion is realization that means realization of God in soul. Oneness is the central idea of Vedanta.

“There are no two in anything, no two lives. There is but one life, one world, one Existence, everything is that one, the difference is in degree not in kind”.

The goal of man lies in “realizing God in the soul” or “reunion with God which is every man’s true nature”. It may also be described as “realization of truth within which is oneness”.

It is the same life that runs through all beings, from Brahma to the amoeba; the difference is only in the degree of manifestation. It is not correct to say that we live two lives, one religious and the other worldly. It is the same life that we are religious and also engaged in ordinary worldly activities. According to Vivekananda, “the actual should be reconciled to the ideal; the present life should be made to coincide with life eternal”. He says that Vedanta should be carried into our daily life, the city life, country, national and the home life of every nation.

Vedanta is highly practical. It teaches us to have faith in ourselves and to find God in our self. God is in everything, in the earth, moon, sun,
fire water, heaven, animals etc. They are all the forms of Brahman. “The God of Vedantist is the most known of all, and is not outcome of imagination”.

Vivekananda says that it is not in symbols and images that we find God. It is the God in the sick, the poor, the miserable, the ignorant, and the downtrodden that we have to worship.

Vivekananda says that, what truth is there in any religion, it is the truth of Advaita. According to him,

“Advaita is the One Eternal Religion in which truth is realized and it is the goal of all particular religions towards which they all point. It is this Religion that is expressed and manifested in every existent religion. And it is this that is “the essence” and “the kernel of all religions”.

Thus all religions are related to one religion, the Advaita. There is harmony among all religions.

Vivekananda interpreted religious harmony in terms of equality. He says that all religions are equal, that means all religions are equal among themselves except the Advaita Religion which is the goal of all religions.

Vivekananda claims that Advaita Vedanta is the only absolute religion. He says that Hinduism is the most satisfactory religion in the world, and Advaita is “the cret-jewel of all spiritual thought”. Secondly, he uses words Hinduism, Vedanta, Advaita etc., sometimes synonymously and sometimes differently. Thus Vedanta sometimes stands only for Advaita and
sometimes all Vedantic schools comprising Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita. Sometimes Hinduism is the totality of these three Vedantic schools and sometimes pure Hinduism is Advaita alone." 

Vivekananda looked for a world completely free from the dualistic religion. According to him, “To attain the goal, Advaita should be taught to all everywhere, not only everywhere in India but also outside”.

Thus it is clear that Vivekananda thought of Advaita as the only universal religion, a religion for all people in all places in all times. He says Advaita is not a new religion.

Advaita alone is rational and compatible with science. No religious ideas other than Advaita can stand the test of reason. If a man wants to be religious and rational at the same time, “Advaita is the one system in the world for him”.

The conception of a personal God who created the world out of nothing or out of some material cause, as taught in other religions, is rejected as irrational.

According to Vivekananda, “Has ever your personal God, the Creator of world to whom you cry all your life, helped you - is the next challenge from modern science”. He says that on the other hand, “monistic theory.... is the most rational of all religious theories that we can conceive of. Every other theory, every other conception of God which is partial and little and personal is not rational”.

Vivekananda says that, Vedanta alone is entirely in harmony with Science. According to him, “the conclusion of modern science are the very conclusions of Vedanta”. Vedanta has indeed already discovered the law of conservation of energy and matter.

“The cause is the same as the effect, and the effect is only the cause in another form. Therefore this whole universe cannot be produced out of nothing”.

He says that unity and oneness of all things, though they appear differently, is the basic truth of Advaita and this has been demonstrated by modern science. Science has discovered that all the forces, like heat, electricity etc. are but one force. They “are nothing but the variation of that unit energy”. So “in the midst of the variety of force, there is unity”.

He further says that, science and religion are not different. In that sense, “Vedanta is the only scientific religion”, incorporating within its teaching the law of evolution and the law of conservation of energy and “it is the only religion that can have any hold on any intellectual people”.

Vivekananda gave another universal point of Vedanta. He says that all religions teach ethical precepts like, “do not kill”, “do not injure”, “love your neighbour as yourself”, etc. but not any religion gives the answer of this question why should I love my neighbour? He says Advaita alone gives the metaphysical explanation for it. It says that man must love others because those others are he himself.
“There cannot be two infinities, for they would limit each other and would become finite. Also each individual soul is a part and parcel of that Universal Soul, which is infinite”.39

In other words, he says that the I, self or Atman is not different from the self of all. Vedanta asks every one to see his own self in all and all in his own self. He says it is the awareness of the oneness of all beings that can be the basis of ethical and all practical efforts of loving service. Vedanta removes the consciousness of duality.

Vivekananda says that “in injuring his neighbour, the individual actually injures himself”.40 This is the basis of all ethical code. All beings are one, and all are truly divine. In loving others one loves “God Himself”, the divinity within each being”.41 Vedanta teaches us universal oneness, not love your neighbour as your brother but love everyone as your very self.

“There is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes. It is too often believed that a person in his progress towards perfection passes from error to truth; that when he passes on from one thought to another, he must necessarily reject the first. But no error can lead to truth. The soul passing through its different stages goes from truth to truth, and each stage is true; it goes from lower truth to higher truth”.42

“As manifested beings we appear to be separate, but our reality is one, and the less we think of ourselves as separate from the One, the better for us... from this monistic principle we get at the basis of ethics, and I venture to say that we cannot get any ethics from anywhere else”.43

So Advaita alone provides a firm foundation for morality and ethics. Vedanta is all-inclusive and tolerant.
Vivekananda says that Vedanta does not reject any of the religions. Vedanta considers all religions as the necessary steps to preparation for Advaita.

The idea of a universal religion in the sense of a creed or ritual accepted to all is impossible. The only religion that is fit to be the universal religion is that which is broadminded and large enough to supply food for all.

“It must satisfy all the aspirations of all type of people in providing different yogas and paths for different people. In giving freedom to everyone to follow his own path, according to his nature and stage of growth, Vedanta also is fitted to be the universal religion. Anybody with any kind of belief, thus can find a place in it. It does not regard even the lower form of religious expression as wrong or unnecessary. On the other hand, it accepts them in their entirety, as necessary steps to reach the highest truth of Advaita”.

Vedanta alone can be universal religion because it alone is based on universal principles, unlike other religions which are based on religious experience of their founders. Being tied to a historical person as its founder and for its authority every other religion is confined to time and place. “No religion built upon a person can be taken up as a type by all the races of mankind”.

On that basis we can say that Advaita is the last and fairest flower of philosophy and religion. All religious thought in every part of the world are derived from the Vedas which is the true source of Hinduism.
'God' as the Common Basis for the Unity

All religions are based upon the concept of the oneness of God. God is indeed the one unifying principle of all religions. Different religions describe the same supreme being (God) in different ways.

The one supreme being is the substratum of all religions. God is the common source of inspiration. It is ultimate reality in so far as it is known and comprehended by the human mind. But since being is multidimensional and multifaceted, truth may be described as one infinite light that shines in various forms and colours.

Different conceptions of God found in different religions are different forms of expression of the same all-comprehensive being. They are divergent perspectives of the same reality, appropriate in different historical circumstances, and useful for different human societies at different stages of evaluation. God is the supreme being as revealed to the human soul.

God is the focal point of man's religious sentiment. God may be defined in different ways and by different names. But his function is to satisfy the hunger of soul. God is related to every man as spirit in man. For example, water might be called by different names in different languages but its basic function is to quench the thirst of man. Vivekananda says:

“One time a number of thirsty people went to drink water at the same fountain. One of them spoke Hebrew and referred to the water of the fountain as mayim. He
remarked how cool and refreshing mayim was. A German referred to the same water as wasser. A Frenchman referred to it as leau. A Russian referred to it as boda. A Chinese referred to it as sui. A Japanese referred to it as mizu. An Indian referred to it as pani. Thus different people speaking different languages as they did designated in different ways, the same substance which quenched their thirst.46

In the same manner, God is the one supreme being that is called by different names. God serves all people of this universe without any distinction of religion, caste, colour, class, creed and culture.

The aim of all religions, Vivekananda taught, was the spiritual integration of mankind. He said, “our minds are like these vessels, and each of us tries to arrive at the realization of God. God is like the water that fills the vessels of different shapes. In each vessel the vision of God takes the form of vessel. Yet he is one, he is God in every case”.47 His aim of attending the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1883 was to show that the apparent contradictions in different faiths were not real. It was for this catholic approach that he won the admiration of every delegate attending the parliament. After his address to the delegates, a man remarked, “Every delegate spoke of the God of his own religion. Vivekananda alone spoke of the God of all pleading for the unity of faiths”.48 Vivekananda said that human society would have made far greater advances, had there been no sectarianism, fanaticism and violence in the name of religion.”
Hinduism considered religion as the manifestation of the divinity in man. Hinduism stands for the belief

"that everybody is divine, is God. Every soul is a sun covered with clouds of ignorance, the difference between soul and soul is owing to the difference in density of these layers of clouds. We believe that this is the conscious or unconscious basis of all religions, and that this is the explanation of the whole history of human progress either in the material, intellectual or spiritual plane".  

Views on Hinduism

Swami Vivekananda presented Hinduism as the mother of religions – a religion which had taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. He often quoted the following two beautiful lines from Gita, the scripture of Hinduism to buttress this point:

"Whoever comes to me, through whatsoever form, I reach him".  
"All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me".

The religion of Hinduism with its high spirituality absorbs all sects. It gave space to discoveries of science, the low ideas of idolatry with many mythologies, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains. They all grow and have place in Hinduism.

Vivekananda says that Hindus received their religion through revelation. They believe that Vedas are without beginning and without end. Just as gravitation existed before its discovery and always would exist if all humanity forgets it, in the same manner Vedas with their unique laws eternally govern the spiritual world.

"The moral, ethical, and spiritual relation between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the father of
all spirits were there before their discovery and would remain even if we forgot them”.

Vivekananda says that Vedas teach that creation is without beginning or end. Science also proved that the total amount of cosmic energy is always the same. If at any time this energy did not exist then where did all energy manifest? Somebody says it was in a potential form in God. It meant God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic energy which would make God mutable. Every mutable thing has a compound and every compound must change and that change is called destruction. It means God would die because of destruction which is nonsense. So there never was time when there was no creation.

“Here I stand, and if I shut my eyes and try to conceive my existence – “I”, “I”, “I” – what is the idea before me? The idea of a body. Am I, then, nothing but a combination of material substances? No, the Vedas declare, I am a spirit living in a body. I am not the body. The body will die, but I shall not die. Here I am in this body; it will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past. The soul was not created; for creation means a certain future dissolution. If the soul was created, it must die”.

Vivekananda says that spirit never dies. Soul is not the material substance. When one body dies the soul changes to another body. So the Hindu believes that he has the spirit in him which the sword cannot pierce, fire cannot burn, water cannot melt, and air cannot dry.

“The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body, and that death means the change of this centre from body to body. The soul is not bound by the conditions of matter. In its very essence it is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter and thinks of itself as matter”.
Now the question arises what is spirit’s nature? Vivekananda answered that it is everywhere, the pure and formless one, the Almighty and All merciful.

In this context, Vivekananda quoted the song sung by the rishis of the Vedas: “Thou art our Father, thou art Mother, thou art our beloved friend, thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thou art He that beareth the burdens of the universe: help me bear the little burden of this life”.^^

According to Vivekananda, we can worship God through love. This doctrine of love is so declared in the Vedas:

“He is to be worshipped as the one Beloved, dearer than everything in this world and the next life”.^^

This doctrine of love was also taught by Lord Krishna. He says that a man ought to live in this world like a lotus leaf, which grows in water but is never moistened by the water. So man should live in this world but his heart should have the love of God and his hands busy to work good for other people of the world without any hope of reward in this world or next life. Love God for love’s sake.

“Lord, I do not want wealth or children or learning. If it is Thy will, I shall go from birth to birth; but grant me this—that I may love Thee without hope of reward, love unselfishly for love’s sake”.^^

Vivekananda narrates the story of one of Krishna’s disciples, an emperor of India, who was driven from his kingdom by his enemies and had to take shelter, with his queen, in a forest in the Himalayas. And there one day the queen asked him how it was that he, the most virtuous of men, should suffer so much misery. The king answered: “Behold, my queen, the
Himalayas – how grand and beautiful they are. I love them. They do not give me anything; but it is my nature to love the grand, the beautiful; therefore I love them. Similarly, I love the Lord. He is the source of all beauty, of all sublimity. He is the only object to be loved. My nature is to love Him, and therefore I love. I do not pray for anything; I do not ask for anything. Let Him place me wherever He likes. I must love Him for love’s sake. I cannot trade in love.\textsuperscript{58}

The most important thing about Hinduism is that Hindus do not believe in any theories. They say if there is a soul in him which is not matter, if there is a merciful Universal soul, a man can go to Him directly. Hindu says: “I have seen the soul, I have seen God”.\textsuperscript{59}

Vivekananda says that Hinduism does not believe in dogmas or doctrines, it believes in realization.

“The religion of the Hindus does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realization - not in believing, but in being and becoming. Thus the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God; and this reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus”.\textsuperscript{60}

Now the question arises what a man becomes when he attains perfection. Vivekananda’s answer is when a man attains perfection he enjoys infinite and perfect bliss. He achieves God that is the only one thing which gave him pleasure and bliss. This is common religion of all the sects of India. And perfection is absolute as it cannot be two or three. When a soul becomes perfect and absolute, it becomes identical with Brahman. The soul realizes itself as absolute existence, absolute knowledge and absolute bliss.
"..But then perfection is absolute, and absolute cannot be two or three. It cannot have any qualities. It cannot be an individual. And so, when a soul becomes perfect and absolute, it must become one with Brahman, and it will then realize itself as Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute and Bliss Absolute".  

Vivekananda says that there is no polytheism in India. A worshipper calls all the attributes of God as God himself. God has many qualities so we can call Him by any of his attributes. It is not polytheism. He says different names are not the names of different gods. God is one having many attributes.

"At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no polytheism in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images. It is not polytheism, nor would the name henotheism explain the situation. ‘A rose by any other name would smell as sweet’".

Another question is why the follower of Hinduism uses external symbol to worship or realize God. Vivekananda says that according to law of association the material image calls the mental idea and mental idea calls material image. That is why the Hindu uses an external symbol or idol when he worships.

"My brethren, if we can no more think about anything without a mental image then we can live without breathing. By the law of association the material image calls up the mental idea and vice versa. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell you that it helps to keep his mind fixed on the Being to whom he prays. He knows as well as you do that the image is not God, is not omnipresent. After all, how much does omnipresence mean to most of the world? It stands merely as a word, a symbol".
Hindus have connected the ideas of holiness, purity, truth with different images and forms but because of this difference of forms and images people devote their whole life to their idol and never progress from lower stage to higher.

“The Hindus have associated the ideas of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and other such ideas with different images and forms – but with this difference, that while some people devote their whole lives to their idol of a church and never rise higher, because with them religion means an intellectual assent to certain doctrines and doing good to their fellows, the whole religion of the Hindus is centred in realization.” \(^{64}\)

Unity in variety is the scheme of nature and Hindus recognize it. Every other religion having certain fixed dogmas and principle, tries to force society to adopt them. According to Vivekananda, “It places before society only one coat, which must fit Jack and John and Henery all alike. If it does not fit John or Henery, he must go without a coat to cover his body”. \(^{65}\)

In Hinduism those who wanted to realize divine nature through image or symbol can do so. But it is not necessary for everyone. And nobody has right to say that it is wrong to realize God through image or idol. Nor is it a compulsory factor in Hinduism. Hinduism states that Absolute can only be realized.

“To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a traveling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal. Every religion is only the evolving of God out of the material man; and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Why then, are there so many contradictions? They are only apparent, says the Hindu. The contradictions come from the same truth’s adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures.” \(^{66}\)
Vivekananda says that all religions of the world are same though it is realized differently by various people in various conditions. Because of this contradictions arise between different religions. But ultimately every religion has same goal and same God inspires all of them. It is the same light coming through glasses of different colours. And these little variations are necessary for purposes of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns. The Lord has declared to the Hindu, in his incarnation as Krishna:

“I am in every religion, like the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there”.

The Concept of Practical Vedanta

Swami Vivekananda relates his religious principle to the daily affairs of life. He regarded Vedanta as source and guiding principle of whole field of human life. In his famous speech on Practical Vedanta in London on 10th November 1896, he said:

“Vedanta therefore, as a religion, must be intensely practical. We must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives. And not only this. The fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of world must vanish; for Vedanta teaches oneness – one life throughout. The ideals of religion must cover the whole field of life; they must enter into all our thoughts, and more and more into practice”.

Vivekananda tried to present the practical aspects and implications of Vedanta philosophy. He gave emphasis on the fact that a man can seek salvation not only in the traditional way or in forest. A man can attain salvation without renouncing the world and taking to the life of a hermit.
Every human being can attain salvation by service to humanity and serving God in man. Wisdom is not the exclusive possession of hermits; it can be possessed by the kings as well who run the affairs of society. In this context, he gave the example of Svetaketu, a Brahman lad and the king Pravahana Jaivali.

“Svetaketu was the son of Aruni, a sage, most probably a recluse. He was brought up in the forest, but he went to the city of the Panchalas and appeared at the court of king Pravahana Jaivali. The king asked him, “Do you knew how beings depart hence at death?” “No, Sir”, “Do you know how they return hither?” “No, Sir”, “Do you know the way of the fathers and the way of the God’s?” “No, Sir”. Then the king asked other questions. Svetaketu could not answer them. So the king told him that he know nothing. The boy went back to his father and the father admitted that he himself could not answer these questions. It was not that he was unwilling to answer these questions; it was not that he was unwilling to teach the boy. But he did not know these things. So Svetaketu returned to the king with his father and they both asked to be taught these secrets. The king said that these things had hitherto been known only among kings; the priests never knew them. He proceeded, however, to teach them what they desired to know”.

According to Vivekananda, there are many stories in various Upanisads that proved that Vedanta philosophy is not only produced by meditation in forests but also by remaining busy in the daily affairs of life.

“Vedanta philosophy is not the outcome of meditation in forest only, but the very best parts of it were thought out and expressed by those brains which were busiest in the everyday affairs of lifes. We cannot conceive of any man busier than an absolute monarch, a man who rules over millions of people; and yet some of these rulers were deep thinkers”.

Now the question arises how can the Vedanta philosophy have practical application? Vivekananda says that there are many historical facts which show that the Vedanta has practical application. He gives the example of Bhagvad Gita (which is the most essential part of Vedanta philosophy) in which Sri Krishna taught to Arjun in the battle field of Kurukshetra.

"We come to the Bhagvat Gita - most of you, perhaps, have read it; it is the best commentary we have on the Vedanta philosophy - curiously enough, the scene is laid on battlefield, where Krishna teaches this philosophy to Arjuna. And the doctrine which stands out luminously on every page of the Gita is that of intense activity, but in the midst of it, eternal calmness".  

Vivekananda says that there are many Vedantic ideas that proved that a man who lived in the worldly life can attain wisdom and salvation. A life of intense activity with eternal calmness is indeed the goal of Vedanta. Inactivity in the sense of passive action is like clouds of earth. Real activity is that which is combined with eternal calmness. Eternal calmness cannot be agitated. In any situation, the work done with balance of mind and with eternal calmness is the best work and this is the secret of work to attain as a goal by Vedanta.

"This is the secret of work, to attain which is the goal of Vedanta. Inactivity as we understand it, in the sense of passivity, certainly cannot be the goal of Vedanta. Were it so, then the walls around us would be the wisest of things; for they are inactive. Clouds of earth, stumps of trees, would be the greatest sages in the world; for they are inactive".

Vivekananda says that man should work without passion. If a man has less passion he can work well because passion disturbs our mind and we cannot use as much energy as we can for better work. When the mind is
collected with calmness the whole energy of mind would be doing good work. An angry man never does better work. And who gives way to anger or hatred cannot be practical. He will break himself and do nothing practical. It is the eternal calm, balanced mind that does better work.

"I have been told many times that we can not work if we do not have passion which men generally feel for work. I also thought in that way years ago, but as I’m growing older, getting more experienced, I find its not true. The less passion there is, the better we work". 73

Vivekananda said that Vedanta always insists that every ideal can be realized by every one. There is not any restriction to the realization of this ideal because it is already realized that all the power of this universe are ours. There is no darkness of ignorance around you. Darkness never existed and body is weak. Those who are fools always cry that we are weak and ignorant and impure. Vedanta recognized faith in oneself. This is the reality of our nature.

"Vedanta insists not only that the ideal is practical, but that it has been so always, and that this ideal, this Reality, is our own nature. Everything else that you see is false, untrue. As soon as you say, “I am a little mortal being” you are saying something which is not true, you are giving the lie to yourselves, you are hypnotizing yourself into something vile and weak and wretched". 74

Vedanta recognizes no sin but only error. If a man thinks that he/she is weak, that he is sinner and a miserable creature, that is not true. We must not think we have no power to do this or that work.

According to Vivekananda, the Vedanta does not in reality denounce the world. It does not give us advice to negate the world.
“You can have your wife; it does not mean that you are to abandon her, but that you see God in the wife. So also you are to see God in your children. So in everything. In life and in death, in happiness and in misery, the Lord is equally present. The whole world is full of the Lord. Open your eyes and see Him. This is what the Vedanta teaches.”

Vivekananda says that oneness includes everything. If a man is mortal, an animal is also mortal. It is the same life from Brahman to amoeba. He says it is not right to say that we live two lives - one religious and the other, worldly. It is the same life where a man is religious and also engaged in ordinary worldly work. If he believes in that ideal, an ordinary man can live his worldly life and fulfill the ideal of religion, too. Religion enters into all his thoughts and shapes his practical conduct. According to Vivekananda:

“We should not also think that to make the ideal of the Vedanta practical means to drag the ideal down to the level of our life of blind passions and animal impulses. It is just the other way about. It really means that we are to make our ordinary life conform to the ideal, to elevate it to the level of ideal.”

Vedanta philosophy is highly practical. It should be carried into our daily life, national life and the home life. It should be realized in working for poor, weak and sick. For Vedanta says: “He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva, and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary.” The God of Vedanta is the God in the sick, poor and weak. It is not the God in symbol and images and not the God that we find in temple or church.
Vedanta philosophy is also practical in the sense that it promotes morality. It means Vedanta teaches that you all are prophets and you all must be prophets.

“Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha. It is feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God”.^78

Vivekananda says that, there are many systems or philosophies built by persons such as Buddha, Mohammed and Christ. Vedanta philosophy stands as the background of all these different religions. There is no fight between Vedanta and other religious systems in the world.

One principle that Vedanta teaches and that is found in every religion is that man is divine and whatever we perceive through consciousness is divine. There is no difference between man and man. All are alike divine.

According to Vivekananda, “There is, as it were, an infinite ocean behind, and you and I are so many waves, coming out of that infinite ocean, and each one of us is trying his best to manifest that infinite outside. So potentially, each one of us has that infinite ocean of Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss as our birth right, our real nature: and the difference between us is caused by the greater or lesser power to manifest that divine”.^79

Vivekananda says that according to Vedanta every human being stands testimony to the divine, and every teacher or prophet is helpful to every people. By helping him to move onward, the divinity is aroused that is within him. Vedanta has no quarrel even with those who do not understand
the divinity of man because every man consciously or unconsciously is trying to relate with that divinity.

According to Vivekananda there are many religions in this world that say that man who does not believe in any personal God is an atheist, but it is only in Vedanta where it is said that a man who does not believe in himself is an atheist.

"Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves first. As certain religions of the world say that man who does not believe in personal God outside himself is an atheist, so Vedanta says that man who does not believe in himself is an atheist. Not believing in the glory of our own soul is what Vedanta calls atheism". 80

Vivekananda says that Vedanta is to be found in all religions. In India or out of India, this idea has been expressed through mythology or symbology. Vedanta says that there has not been one religious inspiration. The divine nature has been the expression of that infinite oneness in human being and we all call it ethics or morality, which exists in every man.

According to Vivekananda, "there are moments when every man feels that he is one with the universe, and he rushes forth to express it, whether he knows it or not. This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality". 81

The whole philosophy of Vedanta is summed up in Tat Tvam Asi, "Thou art that". 82

Vedanta teaches that every man of religion is one with the Universal Being. That means every soul exists in your soul. If you hurt anyone you hurt yourself. If you love others you love yourself.
Vivekananda says that as soon as a current of hatred is thrown outside, and whomsoever else it hurts, it also hurts yourself; and if love comes out from you, it is bound to come back to you. For I am the universe, this Universe is my body. I am the infinite, only I am not conscious of it now; but I am struggling to get this consciousness of the Infinite, and perfection will be reached when full consciousness of this infinite comes.

According to Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta must allow this infinite change in religious thought, and try to bring every one to the same opinion because goal is one and same in every religion.

“As so many rivers, having their source in different mountains, roll down, crooked or straight and at last come in the ocean – so, all these various creeds and religions, taking their start from different stand points and running through crooked or straight courses, at last come unto THEE” 83

Vivekananda says that Buddhism, Christianity etc. are missionary religions and undoubtedly they civilized the world. Three hundred years before Christ, a Buddhist inscription says that all religions are same wherever they exist and no one should try to injure them or hurt them.

“In Buddhism, one of the most missionary religions of the world, we find inscription remaining of the great Emperor Ashoka – recording how missionaries were sent to Alexandria, to Antioch, to Persia, to China and to various other countries of the then civilized world. Three hundred years before Christ, instructions were given them not to revile other religions; ‘the basis of all religion is the same, wherever they are; try to help them all you can, teach them all you can, but do not try to injure them’. 84

Vivekananda says that Hindus never reject any religion and there never was any religious persecution by the Hindu. It is only in Hinduism
that we have a wonderful reference for all religions of world. Hindus welcomed those who were persecuted in their own countries.

“They sheltered a portion of the Hebrews, when they were driven out of their country; and the Malabar Jews remain as a result. They received at another time the remnant of the Persians, when they were almost annihilated; and they remain to this day, as a part of us and loved by us, as the modern Parsees of Bombay. There were Christians who claimed to have come with St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ; and they were allowed to settle in India and hold their own opinions; and a colony of them is even now in existence in India”.85

This is the great lesson taught by Vedanta. Every human being is struggling to reach the same goal. Why we reject the struggle of other if he is slower than others. There is no need to reject him and no need to revile him.

“When our eyes are opened and the heart is purified, the work of the same divine influence, the unfolding of the same divinity in every human heart will become manifest; and then alone we shall be in a position to claim the brotherhood of man”.86

Views on Visistadvaita and Dvaita

Vivekananda recognizes three stages in spiritual growth: Dvaita (dualism), Visistadvaita (qualified non-dualism) and Advaita (non-dualism). According to Vivekananda,

“That growth is gradual, step by step, and the recognition of this led them to harmonise all the preceding systems”.87

The spiritual growth of a man consists of a movement from lower to higher religious ideas. These stages of spiritual growth are progressive and
depend upon one’s subjective abilities. Each individual is not having same power. The religious progress of different individuals is not equal. They are at different stages of growth and they are all ultimately to reach the same goal of Advaita. According to Vivekananda,

“All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Visistadvaita, and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man”.  

Vivekananda says it is not only Madhva who prached the dualistic Vedanta but Christianity and Islam also belong to the same stage of Dvaita.

“This is the essential of religion: the Vedanta, applied to the various ethnic customs and creed of India, is Hinduism. The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism”.  

Vivekananda says that dualism is the first stage of religious evolution.

“This is first stage in religion, it is called dualism, the stage when man sees himself and God eternally separate, when God is a separate entity by himself and nature is a separate entity by itself”.  

Vivekananda says that dualist believes that God is also entirely separate from man.

“They believe in a God who is entirely separate from them, a great king, a high, mighty monarch, as it were. At the same time they make Him purer than the monarchs of the earth; they give Him all good qualities and remove the evil qualities from Him. As if it were ever possible for good to exist without evil; as if there could be any conception of light without a conception of darkness”.  

The dualist believes that God is the creator of the Universe and the universe is governed by Him. He is eternally separate from nature, separate from the human soul. God is eternal, nature is eternal and all souls are
eternal. Nature and souls are manifested and change but God remains same.

According to dualists,

“This God is personal in that He has qualities, not that He has a body, He has human attributes; He is merciful, He is just, He is powerful, He is almighty, He can be approached, He can be prayed to, He can be loved, He loves in return, and so forth. In one word, He is a human God, only infinitely greater than man; he has none of the evil qualities which men have. ‘He is the respository of an infinite number of blessed qualities’.

Vivekananda says that, dualist cannot explain the problem of evil, because there can be so many evils in this world? How it is possible that under the rule of a merciful God, repository of an infinite number of good qualities, so much evil prevails. According to Vivekananda,

“This question arose in all dualistic religions, but the Hindus never invented a Satan as an answer to it. The Hindus with one accord laid the blame on man, and it was easy for them to do so”.

Vivekananda says that the evils that existed in this world are because of our sins. We have caused all these evils. We see misery in this world because of man’s bad actions. It is the result of past wickedness of man. Man alone is responsible for this.

“The evils that are in the world are caused by none else but ourselves. We have caused all this evil; and just as we constantly see misery resulting from evil action, so can we also see that much of the existing misery in the world is the effect e.g. the past wickedness of man. Man alone, therefore, according to this theory, is responsible. God is not to blame. He, the eternally merciful father, is not to blame at all”. We reap what we sow”.

The second doctrine of dualists is that every soul has to attain salvation. Every soul reaches the eternal happiness. Soul would be free from
death and birth, good and evil and every soul in the presence of God enjoys Him forever.

“The one common idea of all Hindu sects is that all souls have to get out of this universe. Neither the universe which we see and feel, nor even an imaginary one, can be right, the real one, because both are mixed up with good and evil. According to dualists, there is beyond this universe a place full of happiness and good only; and when that place is reached, there will be no more necessity of being born and reborn, of living and dying; and this idea is very dear to them. No more disease there, and no more death. There will be eternal happiness, and they will be in the presence of God for all time and enjoy Him forever”.  

According to Vivekananda, dualism holds that there are three infinities, namely, God, matter and soul. Each of these is eternal and separate. But it is self- contradictory. Vivekananda argues that if there is God, that God must be both the efficient and material cause of the universe.

The second stage of spiritual journey is the Visistadvaita. It is based on the principle of unity. It accepts the view that Reality is one. It constituted three things: God, nature and soul. Matter and souls are considered as the body of God, and God their soul. Matter and God are not external to God but in God. In other words we can say that world (nature) and soul depend on God but God is independent and soul and matter are related to Him as body is related to soul. So nature and soul are the parts of God (ansa). Good creates the world of the matter which is His body.

According to Visistadvaita,

“The effect is never different from the cause; the effect is but the cause reproduced in another form. If the universe is the effect and God the cause, it must be God Himself – it cannot be anything but that. They start with the assertion
that God is both the efficient and the material cause of the universe; He Himself is the creator, and He Himself is the material out of which the whole of nature is projected.\(^96\)

Visistadvaitins say that these three existences, God, nature and soul are one.

"God is, as it were, the soul, and nature and souls are the body of God. Just as I have a body and I have a soul, so the whole universe and all souls are the body of God, and God is the Soul of souls".\(^97\)

So the God is material cause of this universe. World is the body of God. The body may be changed but it cannot affect the soul.

"Bodies come and go, but the soul does not change. Even so the whole universe is the body of God, and in that sense it is God. But the change in the universe does not affect the God. Out of this material He creates the universe, and at the end of a cycle His body becomes finer, it contracts; at the beginning of another cycle it becomes expanded again, and out of it evolves all these different worlds."\(^98\)

Visistadvaita also holds that God is personal.

"The God of the qualified non-dualists is also personal God, the repository of an infinite number of blessed qualities, only He is interpenetrating everything in the universe. He is immanent in everything and everywhere; when the scriptures say that God is every thing, it means God is interpenetrating everything".\(^99\)

Vivekananda says that, like dualism, Visistadvaita also becomes insufficient in furthering man's spiritual growth. It fails to solve the problem of evil in this whole world. Because if everything is the body of God and everything is interpenetrated by God then how can there be evil and misery in this world. He says if the world is body of God and evil and misery exist in this world it means God cannot be perfect and absolute.

"If the universe and the soul are parts of God who is the whole, God ceases to be the Infinite and ultimate, because
that which is constituted of parts are liable to
disintegration and destruction".100

Vivekananda says that idea of a personal God upheld by dualists and
Visistadwaitins is unsatisfactory because the existence of such a personal
God can never be proved. According to him:

“It can be almost disproved. There is not a shadow of
proof for his existence, and there are very strange
arguments to the contrary”.101

In Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta, on the other hand, the world is
believed to be unreal. It is an appearance, an illusion. The world appears to
be real because of Maya. The appearance of this world taken as real is due to
ignorance. Shankara said: “Brahman alone is real; the world is illusory and
the individual soul is non-different from Brahman”.102

Vivekananda says that Brahman is present everywhere and in
everything. According to him,

“The world of objects is not totally negated in Brahman. It
is not as in Sankara’s Advaita it is, that Brahman alone is
real and the world is false or illusory. (Brahma Satyam,
jagan mithya), but that in a sense the world also is real.”103

According to nondualist, God must be both the material and the
efficient cause of this universe. But this is nonsense. For God can never be
the material cause of this universe.

Nondualist also said that the universe is illusion. “This universe does
not exist at all; it is all illusion. The whole of this Universe, these Devas,
gods, angels, and all the other beings born and dying, all this infinite
member of souls coming up and going down, are all dreams”.104 But
Vivekananda does not agree with this view.
Advaitins believe in a higher phase of personal God, which is impersonal.

"Advaitists believe something more. They believe in a still higher phase of this personal God, which is personal impersonal. No adjective can illustrate where there is no qualification, and the Advaitist would not give Him any qualities except three – Sat, Chit, Ananda, (Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute). This is what Shankara did."  

Vivekananda says that Upnisads themselves accept it in their pronunciation of Neti, Neti. "Not this, Not this".

It must be clear that Hinduism for Vivekananda was Vedanta. Vedanta is based on the teachings of Upanisads which are regarded as the goal, the end of the Vedas.

Vivekananda considered it wrong to interpret the Upanisads as if they wholly teach either Dvaita, Visistadvaita or Advaita.

"This was a mistake committed even by great classical bhasyakaras (commentators) including Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva and they did it by text torturing".

According to Vivekananda, Upanisads do not have any one system of thought. He says Upanisads show that there are grades beginning with Dvaita, moving to Visistadvaita and finally reaching to Advaita. All the three Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita have place in Hinduism.

**Views on Buddhism and Jainism**

Buddhism is one of the most important religions of the world. It was a great spiritual movement that arose in India but that spirituality affected the civilization of the whole world.
When Buddha was born, India was in need of a spiritual leader. He was a prophet born among the priests. Priests prescribed the way of worship by which they could dominate the people. Prophets, on the other hand, taught the right way and asked the people to refrain from superstition.

“Buddha was the triumph in the struggle that had been going on between the priests and the prophets in India. One thing can be said for these Indian priests: they were not and never are intolerant of religions; they never have persecuted religion. Any man was allowed to preach against them—such was their catholicity.”

Vivekananda says that the Buddha was great preacher of equality. He was liberal in his thought and never persecuted any religion. The most tremendous truths preached by Buddha was the equality of men of whole world. He said that all human beings are equal and that there is no distinction between different human beings. Men and women have equal right to live and attain spirituality, whether he or she belongs to any caste, religion, community and nation etc. He removed the difference between priests and the people of other castes.

“He taught the very gist of the philosophy of Vedas to one and all without distinction; he taught it to the world at large, because one of his great messages was the equality of man. Men are all equal. No concession there to anybody. Buddha was great preacher of equality. Every man and woman has same right to attain spirituality.”

According to Vivekananda, Buddha always said every one has right to get salvation. Buddha opened the door of salvation for whole humanity. Buddha was the great Indian philosopher who never recognized caste.

“The difference between the priests and the other caste he abolished. Even the lowest were entitled to the highest
Vivekananda does not accept the split ideology of the Hindu priest who argued that Jainism and Buddhism did not belong to the Hinduism.

"Whether you take the Vaidika, the Jaina, or the Buddha, the Advaita, the Vishishtaadvaita or the Dvaita – there, they are all of one mind".\textsuperscript{110}

Vivekananda says the ideal of Hinduism can be only Brahmanism. It does not mean the Brahmanism by birth but by spirituality. Same thought also exists in Buddhism.

"I mean the ideal for the Brahminness in which worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present. That is the ideal of Hindu race".\textsuperscript{111}

Vivekananda says that the caste system is not a divine order but it is the invention of human mind. It is not eternal. Caste system has split the true spirit of Hinduism. When the world cycle turns, the evil of caste system will vanish and all the people become Brahmans again.

Vivekananda certainly disagreed with Buddhism in so far as Buddha was preaching only the importance of Moksha in human life. Buddha preached "Nothing is more desirable in life than Moksha; whoever you are, come one and all to take it".\textsuperscript{112}

Vivekananda said that Buddhism did not respect ‘Svadharma’ that is the necessary duties, which everybody has to fulfil in his life. He asked the Buddists if to follow moksha path it was necessary to avoid the worldly duties? In Hinduism, Svadharma meaning natural duties does not refer to worldliness but selfless realization of Dharma.
“You are a householder, you must not concern yourself much with things of that sort; you do your Svadharma” (natural duty).\textsuperscript{113}

Vivekananda strictly argues against the escapism of Buddhist creed. Buddhist pretends the ignorance about the Dharma. But the Hindu scriptures say:

“No doubt, Moksha is far superior to Dharma; but Dharma should be finished first of all”.\textsuperscript{114}

Vivekananda said the Buddhist monks make Dharma and Moksha alternative life styles. In this way, they are diverting people from their duties. But this apart, there was complete convergence of Buddhism and Vedic religion in contradiction to Hindu orthodoxy.

“The aims of the Buddhistic and Vedic religion are the same”, but the means adopted by the Buddhist are not right”.\textsuperscript{115}

In his famous speech before the Parliament of Religions in Chicago on the 26\textsuperscript{th} September 1893, Vivekananda confessed he was a Hindu but as a Hindu he has equal reverence for Buddha.

“I am not a Buddhist, as you have heard, and yet I am. If China, or Japan, or Ceylon follow the teachings of the Great Master, India worships him as God incarnate on earth”.\textsuperscript{116}

Vivekananda explains the relation between Buddhism and Hinduism:

“The relation between Hinduism (by Hinduism, I mean the religion of Vedas) and what is called Buddhism at the present day is nearly the same as between Judaism and Christianity. Jesus Christ was a Jew, and Sakya Muni was a Hindu. The Jews rejected Jesus Christ, nay, crucified him, and the Hindus have accepted Sakya Muni as God and worship him”.\textsuperscript{117}
Buddha never preached transmigration of the soul. According to Vivekananda, Buddha believed in one soul.

"except he believed one soul was to its successor like the wave of the ocean that grew and died away, leaving naught to the succeeding wave but its force. He never preached that there was a God, nor did he deny there was a God".¹¹³

But Vivekananda says that God exists, as a pure spirit. He is nearer to you as yourself. He is a soul. God is not separate from yourself. He is within you. In his lecture “Buddha’s Message to the World” delivered in San Francisco, on March 18, 1900 he said:

“The more you approach your real self, the more quickly delusion vanishes. The more all difference and division disappear, the more you realize all as the one Divinity. God exists; but He is not a man sitting upon a cloud. He is pure spirit. Where does He reside? Nearer to you than your very self. He is the soul. How can you perceive God as separate and different from yourself? When you think of him as someone separate from yourself, you do not know Him. He is you yourself”.¹¹⁴

In the teachings of Buddha, there is no God and no soul, simply work. Buddha preached work for work’s sake and for others not for one’s own self because self is a delusion. But Vivekananda said that Hindus can give up everything but they can never give up God and devotion. Hindus remain faithful to God and devotion.

“The Hindus can give up everything except their God. To deny God is to cut the very ground from under the feet of devotion. Devotion and God the Hindus must cling to. They can never relinquish these. And here, in the teaching of Buddha, are no God and no soul – simply work. What for? Not for the self. For the self is a delusion. We shall be ourselves when this delusion has vanished. Very few are there in the world that can rise to that height and work for the work sake”.¹²⁰
Vivekananda said that Buddhism spread fast because Buddha was the first man in history of humanity who devoted himself to the service not only for all human beings but all living beings. His intense love of all humanity or living beings makes him a unique figure in the history.

Vivekananda said that like Jesus the people did not understand him. The followers of Buddha did not follow the teaching of Buddha. There is no contradiction between the Hinduism and Buddhism. But there is contradiction with the lessons of Buddhism which was spread by his followers. He said that Buddha never preached against Hinduism.

"Only in the case of Jesus, it was the old people, the Jews, who did not understand him, while in the case of Buddha, it was his own followers who did not realise the import of his teachings. As the Jew did not understand the fulfilment of the Old Testament, so the Buddhist did not understand the fulfilment of the truth of the Hindu religion."

Vivekananda said that Hinduism and Buddhism are not separate with each other because Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism live without Hinduism. Contradiction of thought exists in only the Buddhists and Brahmins.

"Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism. Then realize what the separation has shown to us, that the Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist."

Vivekananda said that Buddha’s doctrine was about why is there misery in this world? His own answer was because we are selfish. We desire things for ourselves, that is the cause of misery. Now the question arises how we can vanash misery in our life, what is the way out? The giving up of the self. He says souls do not exist. Whatever we perceive is all that exists.
He says in the cycle of life and death there is nothing like soul, only a stream of thoughts.

“There is a stream of thought, one thought following another in succession, each thought coming into existence and becoming non-existent at the same moment, that is all; there is no thinker of the thought, no soul. The body is changing all the time; so is mind, consciousness. The self therefore is a delusion. All selfishness comes of holding on to the self, to this illusory self”. 123

Vivekananda claims that there is another way to look at the truth. In Upanisad there a great doctrine of Atman and Brahman. Atman, the self and Brahman, the God, are only one Reality. Because of Maya we make difference between self and God. There is only one self, not many. We perceive this self in many forms. For example, one man is another man’s self because all men are one. If a man hurts any other man, he hurts himself.

“In the Upanisads there is already the great doctrine of the Atman and Brahman. Atman, the self, is the same as Brahman, the Lord. This self is all that is; It is the only reality. Maya, delusion, makes us see it as different. There is one Self, not many”. Buddha aroused the feeling of intense love for all. It was the universal message taught by Buddha to whole humanity. 124

Vivekananda said the Buddha rejected the ceremonies and ritual as for him doing good to men and animals was the only way to get salvation. But, according to Brahmins, all ceremonies were equally work and a way to get salvation.

“Buddhists said that doing good to men and to animals were the only works; the Brahmins said the worship and all ceremonials were equally work and purified the mind”. 125

Somebody asked Vivekananda if Buddhists do not believe in any God or soul, how can their religion be derived from Vedas. Vivekananda
answered to him saying that Buddha found an eternal Moral law in a
supersensuous state.

"Buddha was more brave and sincere than any teacher. He said: believe no book; the Vedas are all humbug. If they agree with me, so much the better for the books. I am the greatest book; sacrifice and prayer are useless".\(^{126}\)

Vivekananda said that Buddha gave to the world complete system of morality. "He was good for good’s sake, he loved for love sake".\(^{127}\) Buddha was the only one who actually carried this teaching of Karma yoga into practice.

"He is the one man who ever carried this into perfect practice. All the prophets of the world, except Buddha, had external motives to move them to unselfish action. The prophets of the world, with this single exception, may be divided into two sects, one set holding that they are incarnation of God come down on earth, and the other holding that they are only messengers from God; and both draw their impetus for work from outside, expect reward from outside, however highly spiritual may be the language they use".\(^{128}\)

Buddha is the only prophet who said:

"I do not care to know your various theories about God. What is the use of discussing all the subtle doctrines about the soul? Do good and be good. And this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is".\(^{129}\)

Vivekananda said that Buddha, in the conduct of his life, acted absolutely without any personal motives. He was the greatest philosopher. He preached the highest philosophy of life.

"The whole human race has produced but one such character, such high philosophy, such wide sympathy. This great philosopher, preaching the highest philosophy, yet had the deepest sympathy for the lowest of animals, and never put forth any claims for himself".\(^{130}\)
He is ideal Karma yogi. He worked throughout his life entirely without motive. He is the greatest reformer the world has seen. He had the greatest combination of heart and brain.

“He is the ideal karma yogi, acting entirely without motive, and the history of humanity shows him to have been the greatest man ever born, beyond compare the greatest combination of heart and brain that ever existed, the greatest soul power that has ever been manifested.\textsuperscript{131}

Vivekananda said that Buddha was the first man who said:

“Believe not because some old manuscripts are produced, believe not because it is your national belief, because you have been made to believe it from your childhood; but reason it all out, and after you have analysed it, then, if you find that it will do good to one and all, believe it, live up to it and help others to live up to it”.\textsuperscript{132}

Vivekananda said that Buddhism did not try to prove anything about the Absolute Entity. In a stream water is changing. One wave goes, another comes; so we have no right to say that the stream is one. “Buddhists deny the one, and say, it is many”.\textsuperscript{133} According to Vivekananda what Buddhists call karma, we call the soul. According to Buddhism:

“Man is a series of waves. Every wave dies, but somehow the first wave causes the second. That the second wave is identical with the first is illusion. To get rid of illusion good karma is necessary. Buddhists do not postulate anything beyond the world”.\textsuperscript{134}

But Vivekananda says that beyond the relative there is the Absolute. He said that Buddhism accepts that there is misery and we get it because of wrong action. Our aim should therefore be to get rid of misery. Whether we get happiness or not, we do not know.

“Buddhism accepts that there is misery, and sufficient it is that we can get rid of this Dukha (misery); whether we get sukha (happiness) or not, we do not know. Buddha preached not the soul preached by others”.\textsuperscript{135}
But according to Hindus, soul is substance, and God is Absolute. In this manner, both Buddhism and Hinduism destroy the relative.

He says that present day Buddhism and Hinduism were growth from same roots though Buddha denied the authority of Vedas.

“Buddha is said to have denied the Vedas because there is so much Himsa (killing) and other things. Every page of Buddhism is a fight with the Vedas (the ritualistic aspect). But he had no authority to do so.”

Vivekananda says that in Buddhism there is no authority of God. In Hinduism God is everywhere. Vedas teach the God, both personal and impersonal. Hinduism cannot exist without God. This is the only way to get salvation.

“Buddha is expressly agnostic about God; but God is everywhere preached in our religion. The Vedas teach God – both personal and impersonal. God is everywhere preached in the Gita. Hinduism is nothing without God. The Vedas are nothing without Him. That is the only way to salvation. Sannyasins have to repeat the following, several times: I, wishing for Mukti, take refuge in God, who created the world, who breathed out the Vedas”.

Buddha ought to have understood the harmony of religions. He himself did not introduce the sectarianism. Modern Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism have branched off at the same time.

Besides Buddhism, Swami Vivekananda viewed Jainism, too, in its true perspective. He told that Jainism was a great religion which put forth the concept of Ahimsa and Truth as its main principles.

The philosophy of Jainism is based on the fact that there is no existence of ‘God’. However one should not consider Jainism as atheistic. It believes in the existence of a supernatural power controlling the universe. It
does not call it in terms of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara as in Hinduism. The priesthood has created the concept of God referring to creation and begetting some reward in heaven. It is really meaningless.

According to Jainism, there exist only the nature and living being.

“The Buddhists and Jains do not depend upon God; but the whole force of their religion is directed to the great central truth in every religion - to evolve a God out of man”.

Vivekananda says that Jains were highly praiseworthy. They preached non-violence and doing good to all to the extent possible. This is the real meaning of Karma which one should acknowledge. They spread out and followed this principle widely in practice and percepts. Jains never confined to their own welfare; instead they tried to protect other creatures even at the cost of their life.

Buddhists and Jains are not dependent on God but their religion had the supreme power of diverting the attention and concentration of people towards truth and converting human being into superhumans. Jainism paved the way for nonviolence and the religion stood on the basis of chastity and purity which flourished in the Indian subcontinent through the centuries.

Views on Christianity and Islam

Vivekananda, in his lecture “The Vedanta Philosophy and Christianity”, delivered at the Unitarian Church in Oakland, California, on February 28, 1900, said:

“Religion is fundamental in the very soul of humanity; and all life is the evolution of that which is within it, of necessity, expresses itself through various peoples and nation”.
Vivekananda says that the language of the soul is one. In this world there are many nations which are having many languages. People have different customs and principles of life and yet they are united in having some or other kind of religion. Religion is about soul which is common to all humanity.

"Religion is of the soul and finds expression through various nations, languages, and customs. Hence it follows that difference between the religions of the world is one of expression and not of substance; and their point of similarity and unity are of the soul, are intrinsic, as the language of the soul is one, in whatever peoples and under whatever circumstances it manifests itself".

One thing is common in all religions and that is the belief in the authority of an authentic book. Each religion claims that its own book is the only authentic word of God and the sacred books of other religions are false. The orthodox followers of the Vedas, for example, claim that Vedas are the only authentic word of God in the world. Whatever God spoke to human being and all creature of this world was through Vedas. Everything in the world exists because it is in the Vedas. The language of Vedas is the original language of God.

"The language of Vedas is the original language of God, all other languages are mere dialects and not of God. Every word and syllable in the Vedas must be pronounced correctly, each sound must be given its true vibration, and every departure from this rigid exactness is a terrible sin and unpardonable".

Vivekananda says that this type of rigidity is predominant in all orthodox religions, but this fight over books is indulged in by the ignorants
who are all same. The real nature of all religions is same, though it is expressed in different forms and in different languages.

Vivekananda says that Christians claim to believe in Jesus Christ but at the same time they reject the greater part of his teachings.

“It is an irrational claim to believe in the teaching of Jesus Christ and at the same time to hold that the greater part of his teachings have no application at the present time. If you say that the reason why the powers do not follow them that believe (as Christ saint they would) is because you have not faith enough and are not pure enough – that will be all right. But to say that they have no application at the present time is to be ridiculous.”

Vivekananda says that some Christians are so silly that they try to save the soul of hungry people but they do not try to save their body from hunger. In this regard, he said in his lecture, “Religion Not the Crying Need of India” delivered on 20th September, 1893.

“Christians must always be ready for good criticism, and I hardly think you will mind if I make a little criticism. You Christians, who are so fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen – why do you not try to save their bodies from starvation? In India, during the terrible famines, thousands died from hunger, yet you Christians did nothing. You erect churches all through India, but the crying need in the East is not religion – they have religion enough, it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats. They ask us for bread, but we give them stones. It is an insult to starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics”... I fully realized how difficult it was to get help for the heathen from Christians in a Christian land.”
Vivekananda said that like Christ Buddha too taught the universal brotherhood of man but while Buddhists practice this principle, the Christians only preach it but do not practice it. According to Vivekananda,

"The Buddhists have no place for future torment for men. In that they differ from the Christians who will forgive a man for five minutes in this world and condemn him to everlasting punishment in the next. Buddha was the first to teach the universal brotherhood of man. It is the cardinal principle of the Buddhist faith today. The Christian preaches it, but does not practice its own teaching."\(^\text{144}\)

Vivekananda was however a great admirer of the teaching of Jesus Christ, though he would like this kind of reverence for other's teacher to be reciprocated by Christians.

"I pity the Hindu who does not see the beauty in Jesus Christ's character. I pity the Christian who does not reverence the Hindu Christ."\(^\text{145}\)

Vivekananda said that the Christianity was dualistic Vedanta adapted to the people of Europe. There was indeed very little difference between the pure religion of Christ and that of Vedanta. Jesus Christ himself was an advaitin who realized the oneness of all existence, identified with his own self. So the religion of Christ should not be considered as Dvaita, though it is true that the religion taught by Jesus to common people gives the appearance of being Dvaita.

"In the religion of Christ there was little of crudeness; there is very little difference between the pure religion of Christ and that of Vedanta. You find there the idea of oneness; but Christ also preached dualistic ideas to the people in order to give them something tangible to take hold of, to lead them up to the highest ideal."\(^\text{146}\)
The dualism, as seen already, is the first stage of spiritual growth. It is implied in the saying “Our Father which art is in heaven”. But Advaita is implied in, “I and my father are one”. According to Vivekananda,

“The same Prophet who preached, “Our Father which art in heaven”, also preached, “I and my father are one”, and the same Prophet knew that through the “Father in heaven” lies the way to the “I and my Father are one”. There was only blessing and love in the religion of Christ; but as soon as crudeness crept in, it was degraded into something not much better than the religion of the Prophet of Arabia”. 147

“The life of Christ is the life of all the past. The life of every man is, in a manner, the life of the past. It comes to him through heredity, through his surroundings, through education, through his own reincarnation – the past of the whole race. In a way the past of the earth, the past of the whole world, stands impressed upon every soul”. 148

Vivekananda quoted the saying of Jesus Christ: “No man hath seen God at any time, but through the son” 149 and says that it is true. Now the question arises where should we see God but in the son? He says that the man you and I, the poorest of us, include that. He says that the light is everywhere but we see it most clearly in lamp. God is also omnipresent. So He can be seen when it is reflected in someone on the earth, that means the Prophet, the messenger of God. Vivekananda says that according to Christianity the Prophet means the man-God, God personified into man.

Vivekananda said that there are three ways in which man can perceive God. All forms of religion whether it is high or low, are just stages in the journey towards God. These three stages are taught by the great Teacher of New Testament (Jesus Christ).
Jesus taught: “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, and so on; a simple prayer, mark you, a child prayer. It is indeed the “common prayer” because it is intended for the uneducated masses. To a higher circle, to those who had advanced a little more, He gave a more elevated teaching: “I am in my Father, and ye in me and I in you”.150

Vivekananda said that same thing had been taught by the Jewish Prophet who said, “Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High”.151 This same stages you will find in Hinduism. It is easier for people to begin with first and end with last stage.

Vivekananda said that India needs help from Christ not from antichrist because antichrist does not act like Jesus Christ. Hindus would welcome the Christians very gladly, because the Christ’s disciples would do good work in India as many Hindu saints do.

“India requires help from Christ, but not from antichrist; these men are not Christ-like. They do not act like Christ; they are married and come over and settle down comfortably and make a fair livelihood. Christ and his disciples would accomplish much good in India, just as many of the Hindu saints do; but these men are not of that sacred character. The Hindus would welcome the Christ of the Christians gladly, because his life was holy and beautiful; but they cannot and will not receive the narrow utterances of ignorant, hypocritical, or self-deceiving men”.152

Vivekananda says that all men are different, having different mentality. So there are different religions for different men. If there were not different religions, religion would not survive. Every man requires his religion for his salvation. There is no need to look for others religion for one’s salvation. But historically religions struggled against each other for
superiority. He says why should one convert to another’s religion. In this regard, he said in his lecture “Christianity in India” delivered at Detroit on March 11, 1894:

“The Christian requires his religion; the Hindu needs his own creed. All religions have struggled against one another for years. Those which were founded on a book, still stand. Why could not the Christians convert the Jews? Why could they not make the Persians Christians? Why could they not convert Mohammedans? Why cannot any impression be made upon China and Japan? Buddhism, the first missionary religion, numbers double the number of converts of any other religion, and they did not use the sword”.

In comparison to Mohammedans and Christianity, Buddhism did not use sword to convert peoples.

“The Mohammedans used the greatest violence. They number the least of three great missionary religions. The Mohammedans have had their day. Every day you read of Christian nations acquiring land by bloodshed. What missionaries preach against this? Why should the most blood thirsty nation exalt on alleged religion which is not the religion of Christ? The Jews and the Arabs were the fathers of Christianity, and how they have been persecuted by the Christians? The Christians have been weighed in balance in India and have been found wanting. I do not mean to be unkind, but I want to show the Christians how they look in others’ eyes. The missionaries who preached burning pit are regarded with horror”.

Vivekananda said that if all religions focus on spirituality, no religion would clash with other religion. Every religion has the essential truth. It is possible that circumstance are changed but the central truth always remains same.

Those who are educated people of community retain the essential.

“If you ask a Christian what his essentials are, he should reply, ‘The teaching of Lord Jesus.’ Much of the rest is nonsense. But the non-essential part is right; it forms the
receptacle. The shell of the oyster is not attractive, but the pearl is within it."\textsuperscript{154}

Vivekananda says that Hindu never attacks the life of Jesus. He respects the teaching of Lord Jesus, but Christians do not know about Hindus, have not heard the teachings of Hinduism.

"Of the different philosophies, the tendency of the Hindu is not to destroy, but to harmonise everything. If any new idea comes into India, we do not antagonize it, but simply try to take it in to harmonise it, because this method was taught first by our Prophet, God-incarnate on earth, Shri Krishna. This incarnation of God preached himself first: "I am the God Incarnate, I am the inspirer of all books, I am the inspirer of all religions". Thus we do not reject any".\textsuperscript{156}

Vivekananda says that all religions are good as they are having the same essence. One thing however that is dissimilar between Hinduism and Christianity is the idea of salvation through Jesus’ blood.

"There is one thing which is very dissimilar between us and Christians, something which we never taught. The idea of salvation through Jesus’ blood, or cleansing by any man’s blood. We had our sacrifice as the Jews had. Our sacrifices means simply this: here is some food I am going to eat, and until some portion is offered to God, it is bad, so I offer the food. This is pure and simple idea. But with the Jew the idea is that his sin be upon the lamb, and let the lamb be sacrificed and him go scot-free".\textsuperscript{157}

This doctrine was never popular with us. Our Prophet says whenever evil prevails on earth, He will come and save human being. It is because He cares for humanity. That is the main reason why we never fight against any religion. We never say that only our way leads to salvation. Because we can see the holy people in all over world, whether he is Hindu or not. So it is not right to say that only our’s way leads to salvation.
"We never developed this beautiful idea in India, and I am glad we did not. I for one, would not come to be saved by such doctrine. If anybody would come and say, "Be saved by my blood", I would say to him, "My brother, go away; I will go to hell; I am not a coward to take innocent blood to go to heaven; I am ready for hell". So that doctrine never cropped up amongst us, and our prophet says that whenever evil and immorality prevail on earth, He will come down and support this children; and this He is doing from time to time and from place to place. And wherever on earth you see an extraordinary holy man trying to uplift humanity, know that He is in him". 

Further he said—

"Like so many rivers flowing from different mountains, all coming and mingling their waters in the sea, all the different religions, taking their births from different standpoints of fact, come unto Thee".

Like in the case of Christianity, Vivekananda's attitude towards Islam was also that of appreciation of many of its good points. He was especially attracted by the message of equality and brotherhood in Islam.

In his lecture "The Great Teachers of the World", delivered at the Shakespeare Club, Pasadena, California, on February 3, 1900, he said about the religion of Mohammed:

"What good can there be in his religion?" If there were no good, how could it live? The good alone lives, that alone survives; because the good alone is strong, therefore it survives. How long is the life of an impure man, even in this life? Is not the life of the pure man much longer? Without doubt, for purity is strength, goodness is strength. How could Mohammedanism have lived, had there been nothing good in its teaching? There is much good. Mohammed was the Prophet of equality, of the brotherhood of man, the brotherhood of all mussulmans".

Vivekananda said that Mohammed by his life showed that there should be perfect equality and brotherhood. There was no distinction of
caste, creed, colour, sex, religion, community, nation. All people have equal place. In Mohammedanism there is one merit that is sufficient for man. If a slave should become Mohammedan even he can marry the daughter of Sultan.

"The Sultan of Turkey may buy a Negro from the mart of Africa, and bring him in chains to Turkey; but should he become a Mohammedan and have sufficient merit and abilities, he might even marry the daughter of the Sultan".161

Vivekananda compares this attitude with the way the Negros and the American Indians are treated in America. He said that same kind of inequality prevails in India. If a missionary touches the food of an orthodox person what would a Hindu do? He will throw it away because for him it will be impure. It is our grand philosophy that we show off to the world but you can see our weakness in practice. The greatness of Mohammedans lies in the fact that they have perfect equality without any discrimination of class or caste.

Further Vivekananda says that Mohammedanism came with a message for the masses, that is the message to believe in one God.

"...The first message was equality..... There is one religion – love. No more question of race, colour, (or) anything else. Join it! The practical quality carried the day..... The great message was perfectly simple! Believe in one God, the creator of heaven and earth. All was created out of nothing by Him".162

Vivekananda was impressed by Mohammedanism also because in Islam the women have equal right like men.

"When Mohammed had become emperor over the large part of the world, the Roman and Persian empires were all under his feet, and he had a number of wives. When one day he was asked which wife he liked best, he
pointed to his first wife: “Because she believed (in) me first.” Women have faith... Gain independence, gain everything, but do not lose the characteristic of women!...”¹⁶³

Vivekananda says that the message of Islam was perfectly simple; believe in one God, and be united as one nation, one community.

“God is God. There is no philosophy, no complicated code of ethics. “Our God is one without a second, and Mohammed is the Prophet”. Mohammed began to preach it in the streets of Mecca... They began to persecute him, and he fled into the city of (Medina). He began to fight, and the whole race became united. (Mohammedanism) deluged the world in the name of the Lord. The tremendous conquering power!...”¹⁶⁴

Vivekananda said that if a man wants to do great work there must be great preparation for it. He gave the example of Prophet Mohammed. He says that after much prayer Mohammed got vision. About this Vivekananda said in his lecture, “Mohammed”, delivered on March 25, 1900, in the San Francisco Bay Area.

“We are always in hurry [But] if any great work is to be done, there must be great preparation....After much praying, day and night, Mohammed began to have dreams and visions. Gabriel appeared to him in a dream and told him that he was the messenger of truth. He told him that the message of Jesus, of Moses, and all the prophets would be lost and asked him to go and preach. Seeing the Christians preaching politics in the name of Jesus, seeing the Persians preaching dualism, Mohammed said: “ Our God is one God. He is the Lord of all that exists. There is no comparison between Him and any other”.¹⁶⁵

Vivekananda recommends a synthesis of Islam and Vedanta. He said,

“Therefore, I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind.”¹⁶⁶
AZAD’S THEORY OF RELIGIOUS UNIVERSALISM

Azad’s Vision and Mission

Maulana Abu al-Kalam Azad was one of the outstanding exponents of Muslim modernism in twentieth century India. He fought relentlessly against backwardness, narrow-mindedness, superstitions and fanaticism and paved the way for a modern approach to Islam. He stood for inter-religious brotherhood, pluralism and tolerance. The significance of his catholic vision and humanist mission can hardly be over-emphasised in the contemporary world. The history of modern Indian thought cannot be complete without an adequate reference to Maulana Azad and his contribution. Azad is remembered as a prominent leader of Indian Freedom Movement. In fact, in the galaxy of modern Indian leaders, Azad is an outshining example of both religious catholicity and political sagacity.

Azad’s early political career was governed by the religious teachings of Islam. But he was not a blind follower of the tradition. Azad declared, “I am a Musalman, and by virtue of being Musalman this has become my religious duty to fight for the rights of man”.

Through his powerful writings, Azad created a stir in the Muslim consciousness and convinced Indian Muslims to recognize the enormity of
their erroneous understanding of Islam. His aim was to make Muslims conscious of their duty towards their motherland and join the forces of nationalist struggle for liberation of India.

Along with Gandhiji and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Azad came forward as a great champion of Hindu-Muslim unity. He said in his inimitable words:

“Eleven hundred years of common history have enriched India with our common achievements. Our language, our poetry, our culture, our art, our dress, our manner and customs and innumerable happenings of our daily life, every thing bears the stamp of our joint endeavour.”

He had firm faith in Muslims of India sharing a common heritage with Hindus.

“As a Muslim, I for one am not prepared for a moment to give up my right to treat the whole of India as my domain and to share in the shaping of its political and economic life. To me it seems a sure sign of cowardice to give up what is my patrimony and content myself with a mere fragment of it.”

Azad’s nationalism found expression in the statement which he made before the court in 1921. He said that an awakened nation aspires to attain what it considers its birthright, and the dominant authority would not budge an inch from its position of unquestioned opposition. It might be retorted that the later party, even like its opponents, is not open to any blame inasmuch as it is merely putting up a fight for its own survival and it is quite an incidental matter that its existence happens to be inimical to perpetuation of justice. However, historians will judge the matter and surely their
judgment would be in favour of freedom fighters of India, who are putting up an indefatigable fight for justice and freedom.

Expressing his firm faith in the non-violent methods, Azad said:

“In this war of liberty and justice I have adopted the path of non-violent non-cooperation. Opposed to us stands an authority armed with the complete equipment for oppression, excess and bloodshed. But we place our reliance and trust, next to God, upon our own limitless power of sacrifice and unshakable fortitude”.

“It is my definite conviction that India cannot attain success by means of arms, nor is it advisable for it to adopt that course. India can only triumph through non-violent agitation, and India’s triumph will be a memorable example of the victory of moral force”.

Azad attached great importance to communal harmony and to him Hindu-Muslim unity was essential for bringing freedom. While addressing a provincial assembly of the Khilafat Movement at Agra on 25th October, 1921, he referred to “Hindu-Muslim cooperation as the covenant of the Prophet Mohammad, entered between the Muslims and other residents of Medinah for the purpose of establishing a working alliance for common defence”. Azad used the key phrase ‘Ummat-i-Wahida’ (single nation) for a ‘joint Hindu-Muslim Nation’. Maulana Azad was essentially a religious man but he was rational, liberal and modern in his thinking and scientific and historical in his outlook.

Religion and Islam

Maulana Azad was essentially a religious man but he was rational and modern in his thinking. He extensively wrote on the nature of religious consciousness. He tried to demonstrate that Islam which was presented to
Arabs was, in essence, a rational and universal religion acceptable to all communities of the world.

With his scientific and historical outlook, Azad wrote his famous commentary on the Qur’an known as Tarjuman-ul-Qur’an. One of the distinctive features of this commentary was to show that Islam emphasized not so much on dogma and law but on the spiritual elevation of whole humanity. All religions teach the same universal truth for the welfare of mankind. Eternal truth of all religions is something common to all. The object of religion is well being of mankind, but the condition of mankind varies from age to age and country to country. Essence of religion lies in the worship of one God and right conduct. All religions teach brotherhood of people so do not divide yourself, worship Him only.

Azad interpreted religion as service of humanity. He believed in the essential unity of purpose of all religions which was self realization of man.

He quoted the Arabic saying, “Man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa rabbahu” which meant “He who knows himself knows God”. This he compared with Gita which says : “Here today behold the whole universe, moving and unmoving and whatever else thou desirest to see, O Gudakesa (Arjuna), are unified in my body”.

As a great scholar of Islam, Azad presents the real meaning of religion. In Tarjuman-al-Qur’an, he tried to work out his conception of Din or religion. For Azad one of the crucial functions of religion was to unite mankind by exhorting it to transcend the divisions of history, culture, race,
language and colour. The primary purpose of religion is that the entire mankind serve but one God and live together in mutual love and affection.

In the light of the Qur’anic teachings, Azad pointed out that devotion to God and righteous living constitute the essence of religion. The Qur’an, according to Azad, underlines the essential elements of religion in one of the verses of *Sura al-Baqrah*. The verse reads as follows:

“Righteousness is not that you turn your faces (in prayer) towards the east or the west; but righteousness is this, that one believeth in God, in the last day, in the angels, in the Books and in the prophets, and for the love of God giveth of his wealth to his kindred and to the orphans and to the needy and to the way-farer, and to those who ask and to effect the freedom of the slave, and observeth prayer and payeth the poor-one and is of those who are faithful to their engagements when they have engaged in them, and endureth with fortitude poverty, distress, and moments of peril – these are they who are true in their faith and these are they who are truly righteous”.

In the commentary, Azad repeatedly emphasizes that the real intention of religion is to assert the oneness of God and the unity of mankind. In his own words:

“The unity of man is the primary aim of religion, the message which every prophet delivered was that mankind were in reality one people and the one community, and there was but one God for all of them, and on that account they should serve Him together and live as members of but one family. Such was the message which every religion delivered. But curiously the followers of each religion disregarded the message, so much so that every country, every community and every race resolved itself into a separate group and raised groupism to the position of religion”.

The real religion was thus devotion to God and righteous living. It was not an exercise in group formation. Whatever the race or community or country one belonged to, if only one believed in God and did righteous deeds, one was the true follower of the Din (religion) of God. All the prophets of Allah preached the unity of all religions and the cardinal values of universal brotherhood.

Azad tried to reconcile religion with reason. His religious insight helped him formulate his view on unity and integration. He believed that the root of all religions is one. Religious teachings have two parts, one is the eternal essence and another is external form. The eternal is called faith by the Qur’an that is the source of religion and external is called the rules of conduct or the shariah.

Azad claims that “The religion of the worlds differ not in the principle that is eternal truth, but the rules of conduct, ways of worship etc. This difference was inevitable, because the object of religion is the well being of mankind and as the conditions of the mankind changed with the age and country, therefore, every religion is different in its outward form. This outward form reflects the spirit of the age and country in which it was taught, and it suited the age and country”.11

Azad believed in the unity of religions and in the unity of mankind. This means that in the multifarious diversity of mankind there is a hidden unity.
For Azad, a religion was essentially a source of moral inspiration and spiritual edification. All religious beliefs and values were meant to be life integrating rather than dividing the global society and civilization. Religion is committed to the betterment and amelioration of human society.

“For him religion was a force to integrate human society rather than to disintegrate it. It stood for service of humanity, not for creating tensions and divisions. He firmly believed that India cannot do without some sort of religious education because the mould of Indian mind is basically religious. He illustrated both in his thought and in his action that the religious spirit was basically humanitarian, cosmopolitan and stood for welfare of all mankind”.

For Azad, religion has been one and same everywhere. The message of all prophets was same. They preached belief in one supreme God and exhorted human beings to live righteously. The prophets of all times have emphasized oneness of God.

The message which all the prophets delivered was that mankind should follow one way, the way of God, Al-Din, and should not differ from each other in respect of that way. So the Qur’an says, “To you (the Prophet of Islam) hath he prescribed the faith which He commended unto Noah, and which we have revealed to thee, and which we commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus saying, observe this faith, and be not divided into sects therein”. The purpose of the religion was unity of mankind rather than sowing discord amongst people. God has created us as human beings and
welded us into one single human community. It is man who divided himself into so-called racial groups or sects. All such distinctions are man-made and cannot be ascribed to the universal mercy and justice of God.

Maulana Azad had an integrated and balanced approach towards understanding and articulation of religion. He was a traditionalist as well as a modernist. For him there is no conflict in modernity and tradition. He made a critical survey of all trends of thought, past and present. He came to the conclusion that human thought was a continuous process of stimuli and responses. This process cannot be bifurcated into past and present or modernity and tradition. In view of the same, Azad developed a critical and analytical approach and appropriated a high degree of methodological clarity during the early years of his intellectual struggle.

Azad was deeply impacted by Sir Syed's rationalist approach to Islam. He was fascinated by Sir Syed's hermeneutical reconciliation between religion and science. However, very soon, Azad's approach to religion took a different turn. He came to realize that religion and science are essentially incommensurable and any grounding of religious faith on scientific lines would be utterly confusing and misleading. There was no point in trying to work out a reconciliation between religious beliefs and scientific theories.
Scientific theories are an ongoing process and it would be ridiculous to go on attempting such a reconciliation every now and then. Azad’s appropriation of Islam was essentially existentialist rather than scientific or scholastic. Azad was clearly conscious that science cannot meet the requirements of the human soul although it may lead to great material advancement. Philosophical theology was also an inadequate basis for appropriating religion. Azad brought out his approach to religion in the following lines:

“Philosophy will open the door of doubt but would never be able to close it. Science will provide proof but will not be able to give faith. But religion gives us faith, though not the proof. Here to live in this world one does not need only proved or established realities but faith also. We cannot rely only on things which we can prove. There are things we can not prove but have to believe in them.”

Azad’s basic orientation to Islam and religion in general stemmed from his understanding and interpretation of the Qur’an. Especially, his universalistic interpretation of religion originated from, or at least, was authenticated and reinforced by his masterly analysis of the first Surah of the Qur’an, i.e. Surah-al-Fatihah. While working out a full volume of his commentary Tarjuman al-Qur’an on seven verses of the Surah, Azad brings out one of the most cogent interpretations of religion or Din. The Surah, according to Azad, brings out the most universal conception of God apart from His Universal Providence, Universal Mercy, Universal Justice and Universal Guidance to man. The Lord or God to be celebrated according to this Surah is not a racial or communitarian or sectarian God, but Lord of all
the worlds; the Lord who is the source of sustenance, mercy, justice, and guidance to the entire mankind. The believer and the devotee in this Surah is exhorted to seek guidance from His Lord with a view to showing him the straight path, the path of those with whom Lord has always been pleased and not the path of those who have incurred divine wrath. For Azad this straight path sought by the devotee from His Lord is the path trodden by all the righteous people across space and time. This path again is not communitarian, sectarian, racial or denominational. It is the straight path leading to universal benevolence, mercy and justice for the entire cosmos.

In the light of numerous Qur’anic injunctions, Azad underlined that religion or Din did not consist in organisation of groups and formation of sects. It is not Din or real religion to be a member of Jewish, Christian or Muslim community. Belief in one single Supreme God and righteous living, which are the real criteria of true religion, were relegated to the backstage by the followers of different religions. The Qur’an does not accept these man-made limits or encirclements. A person who is sincere in his beliefs and actions is qualified to attain salvation. According to the Qur’an, religious exclusivism is an undesirable state of mind. Jews, Christian and other communities or sects were deeply characterized by this attitude of exclusivity. All religious groups claimed exclusive rights on eschatological salvation. For Azad this exclusivistic mindset was more a function of individual and social psychology than that of any religious ideology. Azad quoted the following Qur’anic verse with a view to substantiating his point of view:
Moreover the Jews say, “The Christians lean on naught”. “On naught lean the Jews”, say the Christians. Yet both read the scripture. So with like words say they who have no knowledge (of the scripture). But on the day of requittal, God shall judge between them as to that in which they differ”.  

In the light of above Qur’anic verse, the significance of Azad’s hermeneutical response becomes clear. The fundamental contention of Azad is that the Qur’an is a confirmatory Book. It confirms all the previous prophets and messages. This is the universal vision of religion. The Jews, Christians and other religious groups lost this original vision. Therefore, the Qur’an reminded mankind of the universal vision of religion. The Qur’an has not come to add another religious group to the already existing scores of groups. The Qur’an merely exhorts mankind to be ever-cognizant about the universal vision of religion over which no religious group as such has any exclusive rights. According to the Qur’an, this vision is the vision of Abraham:

“The Jews say: “Be a Jew”. The Christians say: “Be a Christian. You will be on the right course” Say: Nay, (We follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not one of polytheists”.  

According to Azad, one of the central purposes of the Qur’an is to restore this Abrahamic vision. On the basis of this vision, the Qur’an wants to unite the people of the book and by implication the entire mankind. The basic purpose of religion is spiritual transformation of man. What is called Shari‘ah or law is instrumentally important for accomplishing such a
spiritual transformation. For Azad, *Shari’ah* or law is significant in its own way. However, the eternal and universal vision of religion or *Din* has priority over legal injunctions or practices of worship and rituals etc.

The greatest feature of the latest religion i.e. Islam does not consist in any special structure of *Shariah* but in its proclamation of the fundamental truth that God is one and mankind is one community. The Qur’an accepts all the scriptures. It specifically instructs its believers not to make any distinction between various prophets. This religious pluralism is, in fact, a revolutionary breakthrough in the annals of human history.

Azad’s religious catholicity and pluralistic outlook make him a modern mind of high order. His belief in the essential unity of all religions has great ethical and political implications. All people who sincerely believe in one single Supreme God and act righteously, are entitled to salvation. In view of this religious horizontalism, Azad did not opt for Hindu-Muslim separatism during the decades of his participation in the Indian Freedom Struggle. He did not deem religion to be the basis of nationality. However, he did not succeed in persuading his co-religionists to fall in line with his ideology of Indian nationalism. Nevertheless, despite overwhelming pressures, he stood for Hindu-Muslim unity. All the horrors of Partition left him unshaken in his commitment to humanist and modernist beliefs and values. His approach transcended the barriers of caste, creed and colour. The imperatives of contemporary world society seem to be vindicating the religious modernism of Azad.
Monotheism and Universalism

According to Azad, the Qur’anic argument is that all human being are equal because this human form is given to all by God. It is the true element which firmly joints us in a community. But, because of ignorance, people divided themselves in the name of race, community, customs, nation, religion, culture etc. On such bases human beings distanced and kept themselves isolated from each other. In this situation, except God there is nothing which can bring all human beings together again and remove ignorance and discrimination. Azad thus said in his *Tarjuman al-Qur’an*

“The Qur’an says that there is, and that is the thought of one common God for one and all. However numerous the groups into which you have divided yourselves, you cannot divide God into as many pieces. The One God of all ever remains one, and is one. You have all to bow at His threshold. Despite your internal differences, you are all linked into but one chain. Whatever your so-called race, your homeland, your nationality, and whatever your circumstances in life or sphere of activity, if only you all resolve to serve but one God, all these differences will lose their sting. Your hearts will be united. You will begin to feel that the entire globe is your home and that all mankind is but one people, and that you all form but a single family – ‘Ayal Allah, the ‘family of God’.”

According to Azad, it is clear that the distinctions are man-made. In the eyes of God all human beings are one. Regardless of their community or nation, if all human beings resolve their internal differences and serve to the God, all differences will be banished. We will all feel that entire world is our home and entire humanity is same. Once the hearts are united the existence of differences will completely vanish from this world.
Azad says that Qur'an does not allow any sectarianism in religion. It always opposed the prejudices of groups. It always tried to bring all mankind in one way of life, the way to God or the way of truth. Din of God is not new invention. Din existed throughout the time. The way to God is that to which all prophets invited all human beings. According to Azad,

“There is nothing in the Qur’an on which so great a stress is laid as on this view of life. It is repeatedly made clear that it does not favour any exclusive group religion. On the other hand, it asserts that it has come to put an end to all groupism and bring all mankind to one path of life, the path of truth, which knows no newness, but by its very nature has had to remain the same throughout the course of time, the path to which all prophets have invited mankind.”

Azad says that religion has been one and same everywhere. The message of all prophets was same. They preached belief in one supreme God and advised human beings to live righteously. The prophets of all times have emphasized oneness of God. He quotes the following verses of Qur’an to prove his point:

“To you (the Prophet of Islam) hath he prescribed the faith which He commended unto Noah, and which we have revealed to thee, and which we commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: “Observe this faith, and be not divided into sects therein”.

Azad says that the above verse of Qur’an says that the aim of the Islam is to convey the message of God to all mankind through prophets (messengers of God). Qur’an says:
"Verily we have revealed to thee as we revealed to Noah and the prophets after Him, and as revealed to Abraham, and Ismail, Issac and Jacob and tribes, and Jesus, and Job and Jonah, Aaron and Solomon; and to David gave we Psalms".20

"Of some apostles we have told thee before: of other apostles we have not told thee".21

"O ye apostles: Truly this your religion is the one religion, and I am you lord".22

Azad says that in Islam the basic principle of Qur’an is to recognize all prophets. All the prophets taught the same way, and all paths are shown by them are one and same. According to him,

"The first doctrinal principle of the Qur’an is to recognize the founders of all religions and endorse their teaching which at the basis was but one and the same, and to conform to the way shown by them".23

Azad says that God has created us as human beings and firmly joined us into one single human community. It is man who divided himself into so-called racial groups or sects. All such distinctions are man-made.

"The Qur’an calls upon everyone who cares to follow the way laid down by God to accept without discrimination all the prophets and all the scriptures revealed to them and the basic truth which they all contain, and to accept it wherever found in whatever language it is expressed".24

Azad says that Qur’an disapproves of the tendency of regarding one prophet as superior to other, or accepting one prophet and rejecting another. He says that Qur’an is the message of God to men through the prophets who appeared from time to time. So no one is superior over others.

'We make no difference between them in above verse recurs in several other places in the Qur’an just to mark its disapproval of the tendency of regarding one prophet as
superior to another, or of accepting one prophet and rejecting another, as the bearer of truth”.

Further Azad says that,

“When the Qur’an states that Al-Islam or the path of acquiescence, or obedience or of conformance to the way of God is the only religion favoured of God and was the religion which every prophets preached, every other way or religion is bound to be groupism of some sort and not the universal way of God”.

Azad supports this with the help of following Qur’anic verse:

“And whoso seeketh as religion other than the way of surrender (Al-Islam), it will not be accepted, and he will be a loser in hereafter (in consequence)”.

Hence, according to Azad, the religion of two people, the Jews and Christians, was the same, and the Old Testament was the common heritage of both. Their division into two groups led to mutual conflict and hatred. One condemned the other and denied salvation to it.

According to Azad, Islam proclaimed the unity of all religions. He further says that the difference in legal codes, ceremonials, rituals, practices and the form of worship observed in different religions should not make us oblivious to the unity of all religions. The difference of legal norms, rituals, practices and the form of worship do not eliminate their essential oneness. Various religions differ in methods, norms and criteria. These differences are not difference in Din. Azad quotes the following verse of Qur’an in this regard:
“To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If God had so willed, He would have made you all of one pattern, but He would test you by what He hath given to each. Be emulous, then, in good deeds”.28

Azad says the Hidayat (guidance) is for everyone. It is not for any particular community or region or race. According to him,

“The Jew claimed that revelation was exclusive to them and that to no one else was vouchsafed this privilege. They thought that no one else possessed the truth and that, therefore, none else was favoured by God”.29

Azad quotes the following verse of Qur’an in this context:

“Others of the people of the book say: “And believe in those only who follow your religion” (But you) say: “True guidance is guidance from God” – that to others may be imparted the like of what hath been imparted to you will they wrangle that with you in the presence of that Lord? Say: “Plenteous gift are in the hands of God. He imparteth them unto whom He will, and God is bounteous wise”.30

He says that the way of God has been one and same everywhere. It cannot differ from itself in any circumstance. It has addressed itself to humanity with one and the same message.

“ According to Azad, Al-Huda, is the universal guidance of Divine Revelation vouchsafed to one and all from the beginning without distinction. It (Qur’an) says that even as instincts, sense and reason are provided to man without distinction of race or colour or circumstances, the directive force of divine guidance is meant to afford guidance to every one without distinction of race or colour or circumstances, and has to be distinguished from all other forms of so called guidances which have become exclusive preserves of particular communities and have divided mankind into a variety of religious groups. It gives to this universal guidance of Revelation the name of Al-Din, or the religion, or the way of life
appropriate to nature and the function of man, or Islam”.^31

Azad says the history has forgotten this important lesson of Qur’an that the aim of religion is to unite the mankind and not divide it. Every prophet or founder of religion tries to unite mankind. Azad believes

“that there has been no founder of religion who has not emphasized the observance of a single religion by all mankind and has not discouraged differences therein. The aim of everyone of them was to gather those who stood divided. It was never meant to keep them isolated from each other. The primary purpose was to see that all mankind served but one God and lived together in mutual love and affection”.^32

“And truly this your religion is one religion; and I am your Lord”.^33

According to Azad, Islam addresses the entire humanity. It is not for any one particular race or community but for all. He says:

“The way of God has been one and the same everywhere. It cannot differ from itself in any circumstance. It has therefore addressed itself to humanity in one and the same fashion. The Qur’an says that the way of the prophets or of those who delivered the divine message, whatever the time or clime they belonged to, was therefore one and the same, and that one and all preached but one and the same universal law of goodness in life. And what then is this law? It is the law of “belief and righteous living, of belief in one supreme Lord of the universe and of righteous living in accordance with that belief”. Any religion other than this or conflicting with it is not religion in the strict sense of the term”.^34

As Qur’an says:

“And to every people have we sent an apostle Saying: Serve God and turn away from Taghut (Forces for mischief and disorder)”.^35
“No apostle have we sent before thee to whom we did not reveal: “Verily there is no God beside Me: Therefore serve Me”.”

Azad says that the message of God was delivered by many prophets but message was one and same. It was not for a particular community or people. It is for entire humanity. The message of God has universal application. It is for humanity rather than for any special place or nation. According to him,

“The message of these prophets was one and the same and was not meant for any particular clime or country or people. It had a universal application for mankind as a whole wherever they lived. The Qur’an states that there is no corner of the world occupied by man where this universal message was not delivered”.

He quotes the following verses of Qur’an:

“Nor hath there been a people unvisited by a warner”.

“Assuredly, Thou (O Prophet) art a warner. And every people hath had it guide”.

“And every people hath had its apostle. And when their apostle came, a rightful decision took place between them and they were not wronged”.

**Deviation, Distortion and Return**

According to Azad, no teaching can acquire the reputation of greatness, so long as the personality of the teacher does not itself display the quality of greatness. But there are limits to greatness of personality. It is the herd that may have stumbled, because they could not draw the boundary line for it. The result was that the founder of a religion or of a school of philosophy was hailed sometimes as an Avatar, sometimes as the son of
God, and sometimes as the partner of God, and where this was not possible, he was, at any rate, offered the honour and devotion usually offered to God. The Jews for instance, although they did not take to image worship, they did erect statues over the remains of their prophets and endowed them with a holiness such as was associated with places of worship. There was absolutely no room for image worship in the teaching of Buddha. In fact, his last testament which has reached us was: "see that you do not worship my ashes. If you do, the path of salvation will be closed for you". But what his followers have actually done is all before us. They not only erected places of worship over Buddha’s ashes and relics but, as the means for propagation of his religion, they spread images of him throughout the world. The fact is that a larger number of images of Buddha exist today in the world than of any other personality or deity. Likewise, as we know, the real teaching of Christianity concentrated on the unity of God; but within one hundred years of its advent, Christ himself was raised to the position of God.

Azad emphasizes that the religion revealed by God was but one for all mankind, and that therefore every deviation from this was a clear aberration. According to him, the basic teaching of the Qur’an is that Islam or Al-Deen al Islam is the name of that fundamental spirit of religion which had gradually been engulfed by forces of history and where reality had been dimmed in the mist of human superstition and man’s habit of myth making.

Azad says that "all religions as originally delivered are true" but this point has been forgotten by the followers of all religions. Each one claims
that religions of others are false. This element of falsehood in religion comes from the human mind because humanity divided himself into separate groups in the name of language, nation and community. Azad emphasized that

“the real religion was direct worship of one God, without any mediating agency, and that this was the main teaching of all prophets, and that every belief and practice which conflicted with it was therefore a deviation from it and indeed a denial of it.”

The Qur’an thus says:

“And they say none but Jews or Christians shall enter Paradise”; This is their wish. Say: “Give your proofs if ye speak the truth”. But they who set their face with resignation Godward, and do what is right - their reward is with their Lord; no fear shall come on them, neither shall they grieve”.

Azad believed in essential unity of religions. He always speaks in the light of Qur’anic teachings. He tried to unite all human beings on the basis of common principle that is unity of God. In other words, we can say that Azad reanimates the message of the Prophet Mohammad himself.

“Azad’s faith in the essential unity of religions is but the product of that intellectual lethargy which cannot appreciate real difference. He speaks in the Qur’anic language and invites all mankind to unite on the basis of that common principle without which a higher religion is inconceivable i.e. the unity of God. In other words, Azad revives the real message of the prophet Mohammad himself. But at this place there is a parting of ways between him and so-called revivalists. The revivalist tries to revive not only the message but also makes a hopeless attempt to revive the institutions which were once linked up with the message or the particular expressions of the
message at a historical time and which lose the validity with the passage of time".⁴³

Azad gave the example of Prophet Jacob who was given Din of God. He was born several centuries before Jesus. So it is clear that Din of God was not the preserve of any group like Judaism or Christianity. Din of God existed before the contrivance of any religious group. Qur'an says that the way of worship to God and righteous living is the message of original Din.

“The Prophet Jacob from his death bed enjoined on his children that they should remain attached to the Din of God that he had himself followed. What was the Din that he meant here? It was certainly not Judaism or Christianity or any groupism, for they all arose after him in the name of Moses and Jesus who were born several centuries after Jacob. So it must be clear to you that there prevailed long before the rise of your newly devised groupisms, a path of salvation much higher than yours, the Din meant for all mankind, says the Qur’an, the way of devotion to God and of righteous living”.⁴⁴

In this regard, Azad quoted this Qur’anic verse:

“Or were you witnesses when death visited Jacob, when he said to his son: “What will you serve after me?” They said: “We shall serve thy God and the God of thy fathers, Abraham and Ismail and Isaac, one God only, and to Him do we submit”.”⁴⁵

But the advice was set aside and mankind divided itself into rival groups, each obsessed with the thought that it was superior to every other.

Azad says that Qur’an does not negate the faith of others but removes the superiority over others’ faiths. Qur’an emphasizes the unity of human being and brotherhood which is based on the unity of God. Qur’an
believes in the unity of religion. That means it rejects every form of
groupism which gives emphasis on one’s own religion as the only true one.
According to him,

“Qur’an does not cancel the validity of the earlier faiths
but only removes the voils of racial and group prejudices
and emphasizes the unity and brotherhood of man based
on the unity of God. The Qur’an was opposed to
groupism or sectarianism. It proclaimed the unity of
religion. If this was conceded to, it would have knocked
the bottom out of every form of groupism which
emphasized that truth lay with one’s own group and with
no other”.46

Again Azad said that the Qur’an also says that there is no need of
any institution or any mediator for true devotion to God. But the followers
ignored this true spirit of religion and developed different institutions in the
name of devotion to God. In this way, they harmed the real essence of
religion that is direct devotion to God. The mankind, in other words,
deviated from original Din.

“The Qur’an asserted that religion lay in direct devotion
to God without any intermediary agency. But the
followers of the other faiths had in one form or another
developed the institution of idolatry in the name of
devotion to God. They did profess that true devotion to
God was direct, needing no mediating agency, but they
would not give up the practice which they had inherited
from their forbears and to which they were deeply
attached”.47

That is why, the Qur’an repeatedly calls upon all those who have
responded to its message not to divide themselves into sects or return to the
darkness from which the Qur’an had taken them out. It points out that it has
brought those who were fighting each other to path of devotion to God and
has welded them into a brotherhood. It has lined up in a single file those who once hated each other – the Jews, the Christians, the Magians, and Sabaeans, who are all now recognize together the founders of the faiths which they severally professed.

“And hold fast, all of you together, to the cable of God, and do not separate. And remember God’s favour unto you: how ye were enemies and He united your hearts so that ye become as brothers by His grace; and (how) ye were upon the brink of an abyss of fire, and He did save you from it. Thus God maketh clear His revelations unto you, that haply ye may be guided”.

“And be ye not as those who separated and disputed after the clear proofs had come unto them. For such, there is an awful doom”.

“And he commandeth you, (saying): “This is My straight path; so follow it”. Follow not other ways, lest ye be parted from His way. This path He ordained for you, that ye may ward off (evil)”.

Azad says that Jews believe that hell fire would not touch them if their people were to go into hell. He believed that purgatory of hell is necessary as a way to purify the people from sin.

“The Jews went so far as even to think that hell fire would never touch them. They thought that even if any one from among them was thrown into hell, it would be done not by way of punishment but only to clean the stain of his sin, before he is received in the heaven. The Qur’an refers to this attitude over and over again, and asks the Jews to state how they did know that every member of their group was exempt from meeting in the life hereafter the consequences of his action in this, or where from had they got their title to salvation”.

Azad says that Qur’an declares that those who do good work with good intention, God rewards them and those who do evil deed God will
punish them. So the reward and punishment will be given by God on the basis of man's own actions and this reward and punishment is not only for Muslim or any particular race. It is for all.

"The Qur'an announces that he who does good, good is his reward: and he who does evil, evil is his reward. Poison brings death whether the person taking it is a Jew or a non-Jew; and milk promotes health whosoever takes it. Likewise, in the sphere of inward life, every action produces a like effect, this law of life does not alter for any particular race or person, says the Qur'an".52

Islam has made faith and deed the sole means of salvation, and not affiliation to any particular group.

Unity and Plurality of Religions

According to Azad, Qur'an makes it clear that a man can attain salvation through righteous living. Salvation cannot be attained by performing ceremonies or rituals. A man is not purified by water. There is only one way to purify the self - by the true worship and doing good action. In other words, we can say that through righteous living and devoting himself to service to mankind, man can attain salvation. Azad says:

"The Qur'an ... points out that salvation cannot be gained by performing a mere ritual and that on the other hand salvation comes through righteous living. One must be baptized not by mere water but by the touch of God or by putting on the 'colour of God' over his thought and action".53

Similarly, the same idea is repeated over and over again in the second chapter of the Qur'an. Din, the way of God, is the law of action fixed
for man. Man but receives what he earns. That is the law, the *Din*, the path of salvation. One does not gain salvation on the strength merely of belonging to an illustrious or ancient race or tribe or claiming a number of prophets as born among one’s people.

“They were a people who have passed away, and for them is what they earned, and for you what you earn”.

Salvation attained through worship to God and righteous living is the reward of God to man. Salvation is not fixed for any religious group or community. It also does not come through certain customs and ceremonies. The followers of the religions could not understand this principle and deviated from original truth. The truth is that God opened the door of salvation for every human being.

“The Qur’anic assertion was that salvation was the result of devotion to God and righteous living and did not rest on any racial or group affiliation or on the observance of any custom, ritual or ceremonial. The acceptance of this principle would have opened the door of salvation for every human being and this the followers of the faiths of that time would not concede”.

Azad says the purpose of the *Din* as divinely specified was to set mankind on the path of devotion to God and of righteous living. He says that every human thought or action possesses a certain peculiarity and must produce like result. A good result proceeds from a good thought or a good deed, and an evil results from an evil thought or an evil deed. But mankind disregarded this fact of life. They divided themselves into races,
communities, countries, and came to observe customs and manners of
diverse character. The result was that man did not lay stress on faith and
action as the basis of salvation as much as one’s group interest that differed
from the interests of another group. That came to be the test of truth in
religion and the determining factor for salvation. Exclusivism came then
into vogue everywhere denying salvation to all except those who belonged
to one’s own group. In fact, hatred of another religion replaced devotion to
God and righteous living.

*Din* is not fixed for any group. It is for all mankind, for all those
who believe in God and do good deeds, whether he is a Christian or Jew or
of any other community. But Jews and Christians invented a code of
conduct exclusive to themselves. The Jews draw a line that is called Judaism
and those who come in this circle are believed to be suitable for salvation.
The same is the case with Christianity.

“*Din* or the real religion was thus devotion to God and
righteous living. It was not a name for any group
formation. Whatever the race or community or country
one belonged to, if only he believed in God and did
righteous deeds, he was a follower of the *Din* of God,
and salvation was his reward. But he was the Jews and
Christians devised a code of conduct exclusive to
themselves. The Jews drew a circle around them and
called it Judaism, and come to hold that he who was
within that circle was fitted for salvation, and he who
was outside of it was doomed. Likewise, the Christian
drew a circle round them and called it Christianity and
observed a like attitude in respect of themselves and
others. The concept of faith and righteous living was
thus relegated to the background. One might be an
ardent devotee to God and practise intensely righteous living, but if he happened to be outside of the circle of Judaism or of Christianity, no Jew or Christian would regard him as the ‘rightly guided’. On the other hand, one might indeed be a wicked person, salvation was his, if only he was regarded as a regular member of their group. With them the path of belief in God and righteous living was not the path of true guidance or Hidayat”.56

Further, Azad says:

“The Qur’an here addresses very straight questions to the Jews and Christians. Your group formation cannot be traced beyond the Torah and the Evangel, the Old and the New Testaments, and group formation are based on them only. If such is the fact of history, were there or were there not before them any people who followed any revealed path of guidance? If there were any what was the way they followed? What was the way which the succession of your own patriarchs and prophets lived up to? What was the religion or the way which Abrahm himself bequeathed or passed to his own son and grandsons?”57

Qur’an asks the question very intensively to the Jews and Christians why your group formations are limited and why they cannot go beyond the Old and the New Testament. If it is a true fact of history of your religion, what happened before the advent of your religion; whether or not people followed any path of guidance or Hidayat? The question arises what was the way people followed? And what was the way that was followed by Abrahm himself and followed by his son and grandson. The answer of this question is obviously that the Din of God existed when God created world.

“At the time of the advent of the Qur’an, the religious consciousness of the different peoples of the world had not overstepped the group stage. Even as mankind was divided on the economic and social basis, into races, tribes and families, so was it divided on the religious
basis as well, each religious group claiming that its own religious variation was the true religion and that salvation was only for those who professed it”.

Azad says that the conflict between different religions existed earlier too but it had not crossed beyond the group stage. People were divided on the economic, social, national and tribal lines. The main cause of the isolation of people of world was that each one claimed his own religion was the only true religion that had exclusive potential to provide salvation. It is clear that they drew a circle around themselves keeping out those who go outside of it. Such outsiders could not get attain salvation. According to Azad,

“The criterion of truth was the character of the ceremonial and of the customs and manners which the followers of a religion observed, such as the form of worship, the ceremonial attendant on sacrifices, the type of food permitted or prohibited, and the outward mode of dress and manner of living”.

Since the outer form of living with each religious group was different from that of every other, the followers of each group decried, on that account, the religion of every other as false. But the Qur’an came forward to re-present to the world at large the universal truth sponsored by every religion.

It was stated that all religions were divinely revealed and upheld but one truth enjoining belief in One True God and righteous living in consonance with that belief. But it also made it clear that their followers had deviated from that truth and needed to be brought back to it. It therefore set its face against every form of sectarianism that had arisen in consequence.
It advanced the view that even as the laws of Nature regulated and sustained the machinery of the universe, even so there was a spiritual law of life which regulated and governed the life of man, and that this law was one and the same for every one. The greatest error into which mankind had fallen was to forget and disregard this spiritual law of life and to divide mankind into rival camps.

The primary aim of religion was to keep mankind united and never to promote disunity. The greatest tragedy of man was that he turned an instrument of unity into a weapon of disunity.

"The Qur'an came to distinguish religion from its outward observance. The former it called Din and the latter Shar'a and Minhaj. Din was but one and the same everywhere and at all times and was vouchsafed to one and all without discrimination. It respect of the outward observance of Din, there was variation and this was inevitable. It varied from time to time and from people to people, as seemed pertinent to every situation. Variations of this nature could not alter the character of Din or the basis of religion. That was the truth which the Qur'an aimed to emphasize. Its complaint was that din had been neglected and the variation in Shar'a and Minhaj or the outward form of observance idealized and made the basis of mutual differences among mankind".60

Qur'an announced in very clear terms that its call was but to proclaim that all religions were true and that their followers had disregarded the truth which they embodied. Should they return to this forgotten truth, the task of the Qur'an was fulfilled. The act will be regarded as indeed the acceptance of the Qur'an. The truth common to all of them was but what it calls Al-Din or Al-Islam.
Religious differences have given rise to mutual hatred and hostility. How are we to eradicate this evil? The way out is not just to admit the contention of every group that their religion is true. That by itself will not end the strife, for the contention in each case is not merely that one's own religion is true but that every other religion is false. Therefore if every contention is to be admitted, the result will be that we shall have to submit that every religion is both true and false, and that will be an untenable position. If that were done, we shall have to scrape off all religions. If at all there is to be a way out, it is the way the Qur'an suggests, and it is simply this. Regard all religions as originally delivered as true. Point out that the basis common to them all, viz., the Din, has been neglected paving the way to the rise of group religions. It is now for the followers of each group to retrace their steps and return to the original basic teaching of each religion, the Din common to all. If that were done, says the Qur'an, all disputes will be set at rest, and every one will begin to see that the way of each religion is but one and the same viz., the one Din or way meant for all mankind, and to which the Qur'an gives the name of Al-Islam or the way of peace, translated literally, or of devotion to God and righteous living.

All links of human unity have been snapped by man himself. The entire mankind was but one people; but it has divided itself into several races. It was but one community, but it has converted itself into numerous communities. All had but one home, but they have carved out for themselves
countless homes. All belonged to but one order, but they have divided themselves into diverse classes – rich and poor, high and low, and so on. In such a situation, what link may be forged to set aside these distinctions and bring all mankind together once again? The Qur’an says that such a link is possible to forge and that is a return to devotion to one God. That is the only way to restore the forsaken sense of humanity to mankind and revive the idea that for all of us there is but one Providence, and that we should all in unity bow our heads at His threshold only, and develop a feeling of unity and solidarity such as shall overcome and dispel from our midst all differences that have arisen in the course of history.

From this it is clear that all those forces which cause divisions among mankind are not on straight path: they are factors for disintegration. The path that lies away from these, the *Sirat al-Mustaqim* or the straight path, is the only path which aims to bring together the dispersed humanity and restore unity to them.

In short, the follower of the Qur’an is one who trades the straight path, the path not chalked out for any particular group or race or community, but the universal path of God’s truth which has found expression everywhere and at all times and which transcends all geographical and national boundaries.
Concept of God in Different Religions

When the Qur'an was delivered, there were five national groups into which mankind divided himself. The Chinese, the Indian, the Magian, the Judaic and the Christian. The Qur'an addresses the last two directly while its appeal to other organized and unorganized religions is only indirect. The basic message of the Qur'an is that Allah sent His messengers to different parts and to different people of world to teach them about the worship of one single Supreme God. Even the older tribal pagan societies were not unaware of this simple message of monotheism.

According to Azad, all the semitic and non-semitic tribes in West Asia, Africa, Assyrians, Sumerians etc. believed in oneness of God.

"...a study of Semitic groups of languages – Hebrew, Syriac, Aramic, Chaldean, Himyarita and Arabic – discloses that a special style of word formation and of sound had been in vogue among the Semitic peoples to denote the Supreme Being. The alphabets A, L and H combined in varied forms constitute the term by which this supreme Being was to be styled. The Chaldean and Syriac term ‘Ilahia’, the Hebrew ‘Ilaha’ and the Arabic ‘Ilah’ are of this category. It is the Ilah in Arabic which assumed the form Allah and was applied exclusively to the creator of the Universe."

Among the non-semitic organized religions, Hinduism is most ancient and has had a very complicated history vis-à-vis its concept of God. Broadly, it has two parts: one is its philosophy of absolute unity of God and other is religion that is so manifestly polytheistic.
According to Azad, “Hindu philosophy presents such deep and intricate problem of spiritual contemplation and raises the human mind to such great heights that we scarcely find parallel for it in the religious ideology of ancient peoples. But the religion as practiced gave to human ingenuity a free hand to create an endless variety of demigods, so much so, that every stone becomes a god, and every tree claimed godhead, and every object turned into an object of worship”.

So the philosophy of Hinduism has great heights while the religion has very low depths of mind. Azad emphasized the concept of Unity of God as found in Rigveda.

“The idea of one God was silently gathering strength, so much so, that the number of demi-gods began gradually to dwindle down. These were assigned to three different spheres – earth, air and sky. This arrangement later on gave rise to the concept of a god of gods, the concept known as Henotheism. This concept, in its turn, assumed a more definite form, the form of an all-pervasive being called sometimes Varuna, sometimes Indra, and sometimes Agni. Finally the idea of a Supreme Creator of all the universe emerges under the name of Prajapati, or Visvakarman”.

Azad says that in the early slokas of Rig Veda we find the concept of nature-worship but the concept of one God is also rising side by side. The monotheistic idea is particularly evident in the slokas of 10th Mandala of Rigveda. There we can see it clearly that the concept of polytheism was changed into monotheism. At last, it gets fully recognized in its formula of “Ekam Sat”, which means that One God alone is the reality and the truth: The creator is one though we notice multiplicity in His existence because of the multiplicity of nature.
Azad draws attention to the pantheistic concept of Ultimate Reality in Hinduism. In this belief, the God cannot be defined or be known except in the form of neti-neti (not this, not this). In other words, description is possible only through the negative attributes of God. The God cannot be defined through positive attributes. That means while it is possible to speak of what God is not, it is not possible to speak about what God is.

But though this is general position of Hinduism in Upanisads, there is also found attribution of positive qualities to Brahman in the form of Iswara. Azad says:

“It was only when the Upanisads gave Brahma the form of Iswara and thus made the Absolute put on the veil of finitude, it becomes possible to attribute to Him qualities as reason or fancy suggested. It was in this way that the pantheistic concept of God furnished a personality endowed with attributes (Saguna)”.

Azad says that in this aspect of Hinduism, God is one and without parallel. None is like Him. He is Creator. He is the Protector. He is the Destroyer. He is above all the limitation of space and time. He is eternal.

“He is Light, Perfection, Beauty, the Absolute, Pure, the Almighty, the Most Merciful and the Most Loving, and the object of true love and affection”.

Apart from mainstream Hinduism, Buddhism, too, had a very peculiar approach towards God. For while it is generally believed that Buddha did not believe in God, it is also well known that he did not deny God’s existence either. Many therefore point out that the silence of Buddha does not mean the negation by him of God. According to Azad, actually Buddha wanted to negate the attributes of God. Negation of attributes of God means
that human beings are helpless to define or understand God. Azad interprets Buddha’s silence about God in another way also. He says that Buddha’s silence about the God was because of wide practice of idol worship by the people in the country. Lastly, it is also a fact that the followers of Buddha made the sage himself into a God whom they worship as devotedly as any other religious believer.

“It is generally believed that Buddhism does not inculcate a belief in God. But strange as it may appear, its very followers, in due course, installed Buddha himself in the position of God, and devised a system of devotion to his image so intensive that we scarcely find for it a parallel in the annals of image worship”.  

Azad says that Buddha rejected the worship of images. He emphasized that man cannot attain salvation through worshipping gods. Salvation can be gained only through knowledge or good action. The rejection of attributes and images of God by Buddha is the rejection of Brahmanic religion.

Coming to Semitic religions, Azad says that the attributes of God Jews emphasized were His power and majesty.

“The Judaic concept of God vacillated between the anthropomorphic and the transcendental. The element of terror was dominant in Him, as also that of vengeance. The repeated personification of God giving an entirely human touch to His form of address, the intensity of anger and revengefulness displayed by Him, and His primitive behaviour are the most common attributes with which He is endowed in the old Testament”. 

In Judaism, further, the relation between God and man are like the relation between husband and wife. The husband could ignore certain
mistakes of his wife and would forgive her, but if she loves any other person she cannot be forgiven. Same is the position of God in Judaism with regard to His chosen community i.e. the Jews. Azad says:

"He regarded the family of Israel as His favourite wife. Since the entire race was given this honoured position, any infidelity on her part was naturally very galling to Him. It was upto Him to deal out condign punishment whenever she showed signs of unfaithfulness. In fact, one of the Ten Commandments runs: "thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image or a likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under earth".\(^\text{68}\)

"Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I am the Lord, thy God. I am a jealous God visiting the inequity of the father upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me".\(^\text{69}\)

As against Judaism, Christianity laid emphasis on love and compassion as the chief attributes of God. In this religion, God appeared like a father full of love for His children. Love, mercy and forgiveness are the message of Christianity.

According to Azad, "Christianity, with its message of love of God and man on the one hand and the concepts of trinity, atonement and image worship on the other, presented the spectacle of a form of monotheistic polytheism".\(^\text{70}\)

In contrast to Judaism and Christianity where God was conceived in human form, Azad says that Qur’anic concept of transcendental God is more rational and refined. Before the advent of Qur’an, man had not risen to be uncomfortable with divine anthropomorphism. In Judaism the attributes of God are intensely human. Christianity also emphasizes the universal mercy
of God being in the nature of relationship of father with his son. But when we look at the Qur’anic concept, we find it to be entirely free from any anthropomorphic distortion. Here Azad quotes the following Qur’anic verse:

“Nought is there like Him”.71
“No vision taketh Him in,
but He taketh in all vision”.72
“Say : he is God, the One only:
God, on whom all depend:
He begetteth not, nor is He begotten;
And there is none like Him”.73

According to Azad, “when the Qur’an was delivered, the element of terror predominated in the Judaic concept of God. The Magian concept presented the forces of light and darknesses as two distinct entities to be equally venerated. Christianity no doubt emphasized love and kindness, but the significance of recompense for action was relegated to the background. Likewise, the followers of Buddhism, too, laid stress on love and kindness, but justice did not receive proper recognition”.74

It could therefore be said that among the various religions of the world only Islam restores the true balance between mercy and justice of God.

“The Qur’an afforded a concept of mercy and beauty which, on the one hand, allowed no room for terror and, on the other hand, gave adequate recognition to the law of requital in human action. It rested recompense on justice”.75

Qur’an expressed it in following words:

“Say : Call upon God (Allah) or call upon the God of Mercy (Al Rahman) by whichever ye will invoke Him: he hath most excellent and most beautiful names”.76
Azad says that the Qur'anic concept of God is perfect and definite. If God is unique in His essence, He must be unique in his attributes, too.

Azad agrees that compared to many other religions, Jews and Christians had a higher concept of the Supreme Being or God. But it is also a fact that the Jews believed that God was like the gods of other religions. He was an absolute dictator. If He was happy, He would confer blessing on Israel. But if He was angry, He would punish them and bring ruination upon them. The Christian belief was also very crude. Through the doctrine of original sin the entire humanity became sinner because of the sin of Adam. It was to atone for this original sin that Jesus allowed himself to be hanged on the cross.

“Among the Jews and the Christians, the concept of Deity had, no doubt, been raised a little higher. But the essential character of the earlier common belief still clung to them. The Jews believed the God was, even like the deities of others, an absolute dictator. If He was pleased with them, He would style Himself as the God of Israel; if displeased, He would wreak His vengeance and because of their ruination. The concept of the Christians was no better. They believed that because of the original sin of Adam, his entire progeny or mankind had become an object of divine displeasure and that consequently Christ had to atone for this original sin through his own crucifixion and effect the redemption of man”.  

Azad says that the Qur'an takes up this problem of reward and punishment in a different light. Every action has reward or punishment. The result of the good action is rewarded. It means the reward of good action is the favour of God. In the same manner the result of bad action is punishment which means the disfavour of God. There is nothing irrational or absolute about the reward and punishment. Qur'an says that reward designates haven.
This means the comforts of heaven are for those who do good action. The punishment designates hell, which means those who do evil action will go to the hell for those actions.

Every thought, feeling or action has its inevitable reaction. Qur’an says that everything in the phenomenal world or in the inner life of man produces a result which is peculiar to it. For example, the nature of fire is to burn and the nature of water is to produce coolness. In the same manner, every type of human action produces a result peculiar to it. The Qur’an calls it recompense, requittal, or justice.

“Deem they whose earnings are only evil, that we will deal with them as with those who believe and work righteousness, so that their lives and deaths shall be alike... In all truth hath God created the heavens and the earth, that he may reward every one as he shall have wrought, and they shall not be wronged”.

Azad says that it is significant that word ‘reward’ used for the good action and punishment for evil action is called in Qur’an as Kasb or “earnings”. Man earns his reward by doing good action or earns punishment by doing evil action.

“God will not burden any soul beyond its power. It shall enjoy the good acquired, and shall bear the evil to acquire which it hath laboured”.

Azad further says that all religions invite mankind to do good action and keep away from evil. Consequently, good action provides happiness and salvation to man.

“He who doth right – it is for himself; and he who doth evil – it is for himself: and thy Lord will not deal unfairly with His servant”.
Qur’anic eschatology therefore strikes a balance in the attributes of God. It emphasizes both the mercy of God (rahmat) as well as the justice God (a’dl). Justice or adl is an Arabic word that means ‘to make even’. It is also used in the sense of ‘scale’ which measure both parties as equal. Justice introduces balance in life. According to Azad, this principle brings equality and beauty in the affairs of everyday life.

“The principle of justice introduces therein the element of balance or beauty by eliminating every ugliness lurking therein. For, if one should look deeply into this aspect of life, it will be realized that it is the force of justice that is responsible for whatever order or beauty there is in life.”

**Concept of Jihad**

The most controversial issue in any discussion of Islam is its conception of jihad. It is generally interpreted as holy war. In Islamic tradition jihad does not mean holy war. It is wrongly associated with the idea of holy war against the unbelievers.

The word jihad in Arabic is used with a wider meaning in Qur’an and Hadith. It is derived from the root ‘jhd’ which means ‘to strive’ or ‘to exert oneself’. Jihad is then to exert in the way of doing what is good and avoiding what is evil. As Qur’an says,

“To those who perform Jihad for us, we shall certainly guide them in our ways, and God surely is with the doers of good”.

Azad gave the wider ethical meaning of jihad to make a forceful case for fighting injustice. According to Azad, an ethical concept of life entailed
love, service and respect for humanity, irrespective of any religion or racial differences.

Qur’an enjoined Muslims to practice amr bil ma’ruf wa nahi anal munkur, i.e. commanding the good and prohibiting the wrong. Jihad, then, for Azad meant,

“Commanding the good was impossible without prohibiting the wrong whose other name was jihad if sabil allah (jihad in the way of God)”.

Muslims are described as the best community in Qur’an because they were expected to destroy instability and injustice. They would be replaced by another more deserving community if they failed to act against the forces of disequilibrium. Muslim were enjoined to follow the middle path to establish a just and virtuous society.

“Give full measure when ye measure and weigh with a balance that is straight: that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination”.

This duty had been compromised by the confusion caused by two apparently contradictory verses of Qur’an.

“Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, they are the ones to attain felicity”.

This verse suggests that the duty is limited to a select group. But Azad takes this verse of Qur’an as incumbent on all.

“Ye are the best of peoples evolved for mankind enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah. If only the people of the Book had faith it were best for their among them; are some who have faith but most of them are perverted transgressors”.
Seeing no contradiction in the two verses, Azad rejected that only particular people or only the ulema can preach the good and prohibit wrong.

According to Azad, “this was a ‘dangerous error’ which had cost Muslims dearly. The obligation to preach the good and prohibit wrong was the duty of the entire community and required exertions (jihad) in understanding the Qur’anic message. By restricting it to a small group, Muslims had lost the universal vision of Islam. He attributed the primary cause for the decline of all religions to the assumption of godly authority by the religious leaders. Islam had tried avoiding any rulers who rule on the people and making the preaching of good and prohibiting of wrong binding upon all believing Muslims.

A religiously inspired ethics could not rest on belief (i‘tiqad) alone but demanded proof in right actions spreading good and removing wrong. This was the essence of jihad because non-peaceful actions are needed for the sake of peace.

The concept of jihad meant that when deviation from the prescribed path assumed the form of war, the devotees of truth and keepers of tawhid (unity of creation) should also have the sword in their hands. This was jihad against external enemy. Azad identified three kinds of jihad.

1. Verbal proclamation commanding good and prohibiting wrong.
2. Giving property and goods for the cause.
3. The actual waging of war and fighting (qital).
Azad refused to restrict jihad to a spiritual struggle but disagreed with those advocated the indiscriminate killing of infidels. The idea of Muslims to murder all non-Muslims was against the letter and spirit of Qur’an.

Azad says that Islam only sanctioned the right to fight those who oppressed the weak.

“In a treatise on the Islamic conception of war, Azad amplified the difference between temporal warfare and jihad. The Qur’an referred to the human bestiality and bloodletting on display in the killing fields of Europe as harb, fitna, qital and jidal. Unlike wars in which human beings were mercilessly slaughtered and subjugated, the purpose of jihad was to establish peace, tranquility, and freedom. A means to stopping bloodshed and restoring the dignity of man, jihad was the exact opposite of war as qital, harb, or fitna. This was why the Qur’an used harb to refer to the political wars fought by the prophet against those who broke treatises or by taking compound interest acted like highway robbers. These temporal wars had nothing to do with jihad. A warrior taken by his own success cease to be a jihadi as there is no room for self-praise or arrogance in jihad fi sabil allah. The worldly conqueror wreaks havoc in the places he conquers while the true jihadi is moderate in his treatment of the vanquished and thinks only of winning God’s favor”.87

In Khilafat Conference at Agra 25th August, 1921 Azad said,

“Islam prohibited Muslims from killing their co-religionists. They were also forbidden to forge friendship with those who were killing and oppressing Muslims. The Qur’an distinguishes between two kinds of Muslims, those who fight and oppress Muslims and those who donot. Muslims were bound by their faith to fight the aggressor with all the means at their disposal and befriend those who did not fight them. It followed the Muslims should fight for the removal of the illegitimate British government in India by uniting with their countrymen”.88
Azad says that the Qur’anic text has dispelled the dark clouds that had been made to hover around it and highlighted its great utility. In the Qur’anic text four aspects of it have been presented:

“Judge, therefore, aright between men and yield not to any inclination of thy own, lest it cause thee to turn aside from the way of God”. 89

“They but follow their fancies and indulge in their guesses”. 90

“What thinkest thou of him who hath chosen to worship his own desires?” 91

“And (those who) have refrained themselves from lust (in every form)”. 92

Thus the jihad is against the evil self. A Muslim has to resist all temptations and eradicate the evil that is in him; then alone he can move onwards in his spiritual journey.

The second phase is jihad fillah. This consists of drawing nearer to God, to love Him and to understand His ways.

“(Remember), whoso strive for Us, will We surely guide them in our Ways”. 93

“And strive strenuously in the cause of God in a manner worthy of striving for Him”. 94

The third phase is jihad bil-mal and the fourth phase is jihad bin-nafs. Usually both of them go together in the Qur’anic text.

“The true believers are they who believe in God and His apostle, and thereafter falter not in their belief, and who strive with their wealth and their persons in the way of God. Such are the sincere!”. 95

“Have faith in God and His Apostle and strive in the cause of God with your wealth and your own lives. This will be well for you if only you realize it”. 96
Azad says that jihad is a spiritual discipline of a very high order. It is incompatible with aggression or injustice to anybody irrespective of caste and creed.

"Remember, that for the Hindus the struggle for the country's Independence is a part of patriotism. But for you it is a religious duty and a part of the crusade for Allah. He has designated you Mujahids or crusaders; the scope of Jehad or crusade includes every effort made for truth and justice". 97

Jihad means to break the shackles of human oppression and bondage.

"Do not be afraid of anyone, except God, if you are a Momin". 98

According to Azad,

"Islam does not sanction any form of government unless it is based on freedom (azadi) and democracy (jamhoriyat). Islam has been revealed to mankind to restore the lost freedom of the human race. It has established the supremacy of haq (truth) and denied the right to any except Allah to hold sway over the human race. It has introduced the concept of equality among human beings and forbidden any differentiation on the basis of race, colour, nationality". 99

Azad says that Islam stood for peace. There is no absolute sanction for violence in Islam:

"There is a sanction for organized act of war if it is waged to establish justice. The foundations of non-violence were firmly grounded in the Islamic shariat". 100

Islam never preached to suppress one's co-religionist. Addressing the Khilafat Conference he said,

"If I recognize any work as my life work, it is this... If the Muslims of India would like to perform their best religious and Islamic duties... then they must recognise that it is obligatory for the Muslims to be together with their Hindu brethren and it is my belief that the Muslims
in India cannot perform their best duties until in conformity with the injunctions of Islam, in all honesty, they establish unity and cooperation with the Hindus.”

**Views on Nationalism**

Azad’s conception of nationalism is based on the idea of a community sharing a territory, history and the culture. As a political concept it refers to a collective consciousness and a notion of social order. It recognizes one group of people from another and makes it possible for a large number of them to unite to lead their lives and undertake their collective responsibilities.

The collective consciousness has three stages – (i) nationalism, (ii) patriotism, (iii) humanism or universalism. In the first nationalist stage man realizes that the boundaries of human association and areas that he had created were not actual and natural. They are only man-made. Although true relationship is only one and the entire earth is man’s native land, nationalism was a higher stage in the development of human relation and joint feelings. It is higher than the bond of family relations, and the feelings for the people of the same village and city. Nationalism of Azad composed of three major parts: swaraj, communal harmony and non-violence.

Azad, under the influence of liberalism, was not basically anti-British. He admitted that in the whole history of the country, there had been no government which developed so much regard and respect for the liberties of the people, without distinctions of their caste, creed and community. Yet he would support of the native rule as against the rule of a foreign power.
Azad says that Swaraj would not mean change of rulers but it would provide an opportunity to establish justice, liberty and equality for one and all in the country. Justice and slavery could not live together. Aim of Swaraj is “every kind of faith, every kind of culture, every mode of living was to be allowed to flourish and find its own salvation”.  

Azad’s feeling of nationalism and opposition to British rule was deeply rooted in his faith in Islam. In his book *Qaul-e-Faisal*, he thus wrote:

> “Islam does not sanction any form of government unless it is based on freedom (azadi) and democracy (jamhuriyat). Islam has been revealed to mankind to restore the lost freedom of the human race. It has established the supremacy of and denied the right to anyone except Allah to hold sway over human race. It has introduced the concept of equality among human beings and forbidden any differentiation on the basis of race, colour or nationality”.  

The second element of Azad’s nationalism is communal harmony. According to Azad, communal harmony means active participation of all the communities in the freedom struggle. It also means the unity of people which should come through religion. Azad holds that the religious interest of every community should be well safeguarded. Love and tolerance are the basic elements of harmony. Every religion declared the truths of human brotherhood and opposed communal and racial prejudices.

Azad believed in composite nationalism. He did not encourage the brand of politics which was based on religion. Because in India there are so many religions. This multiplicity of religion would divide the people on artificial lines. He says Swaraj is not possible without communal harmony. He held that everything should be subordinated to the national unity.
Azad’s nationalism was essentially for the well being of both Hindus and Muslims. He did not want the partition of country. He believed in unity of Hindus and Muslims.

Azad used the key phrase “Umma-i-Wahida” for joint Hindu-Muslim nation. He interpreted Umma-i-Wahida as one nation. He holds that inspite of religious, racial and other differences India is one nation. The composite nation for Azad was not an idea. His aim was the creation of a permanent nation, which binds people irrespective of caste, colour, creed and religion. Azad believed in united nationalism with complete harmony among all human beings.

Non-violence is the third element of Azad’s nationalism. He holds that the message of Islam is peace for all mankind. It does not support war. Jihad does not imply war but patience. Its aim is to end injustice. Jihad is to command what is good and avoid what is evil?

Azad says that non-violence provided an effective strategy for the struggle for freedom, a struggle by the people of all classes. It contributed towards the enrichment of Indian nationalism.

Nationalism of Azad was not only based on the interest of the people but a wider knowledge of human affairs. He says nationalism was never chauvinistic or irrational. It was democratic and progressive. It was not dogma but rooted in patriotism.

Azad says that internationalism is not possible without nationalism. Nationalism is meant for the benefit and service of humanity as a whole.
For Azad, the spirit of nationalism implied the unity of religion as based on the unity of God and the unity of whole humanity. It means that in the multifarious diversity of mankind is hidden its unity. His ideas of the unity of religion was the basis of national integration.

Islam’s destination was humanism and its goal was perfection of humanity in its evolutionary progression. Islam did not recognize the artificial affiliations of race, country, nation, colour and language. It called man to the one and only relationship of the natural bonds of brotherhood among humans. According to Azad,

“for mankind, scattered all over the world, it was necessary to be divided, it was inevitable that there be some means of introduction to make one group distinct from another. All these units were simply means of introduction; he is an African, he is an Arab, he is an Aryan, he is Mongolian. This way the groups were recognized. But there were no distinctions in this classification, nor was it a real division. There was only one real distinction, the distinction made by one’s deeds and endeavours”.

Azad says that the entire mankind essentially belongs to one race and one family. In fact, there is no difference of race for all race is one race, no difference of place because God creates the whole world for all human beings. Azad quotes many Qur’anic verses which declare the unity of mankind. The verses of Qur’an reveal that the origin of all human beings is one. The differences are the result of turning away from the path of righteousness and from divine worship.

The importance of unity and brotherhood in Islam is proved by the fact that the prophet said:
“God, our Lord and the Lord of the Universe; I confess that only you are the Lord of Universe; I confess that Mohammad (peace be upon him) is no more than your slave and your messenger. God, our Lord and the Lord of the Universe; I confess that all your people are brothers, and whatever differences they may have created among themselves, you have created them as one human race”.

According to Azad, there are four obstacles in the way of universal human brotherhood. They are race, country, colour and language. Humanity has historically divided into these units. Islam denies all four categories which divided humanity.

“Islam not only denies all four, it makes a clear and categorical declaration against them, leaving no room for doubts and vacillations. About ‘race’ it clearly states that all belongs to the same race. About ‘country’, it says, whether an Arabi (Arab) or an Ajmi (Persian), all inhabit the same God-created land. About ‘language’ and ‘colour’ it proclaims that they are the signs of God’s wisdom and power. The climate of one place begets one colour, that of another, a different one. Different languages are spoken in different places. These dissimilarities, however, are not the basis of distinction and differences among mankind”.

Moreover, Islam developed a system of conduct. It cannot coexist with distinctions of race and nation. Daily rules of conduct and prayer include items which are practical demonstration of unity. Namaz, zakat (obligatory payment of a portion of the income to the poor), Roza (fasting), Haj (pilgrimage to Mecca) are all for the generation of moral upliftment and unity. The same spirit works behind them all. Islam is the total system meant for the implementation of human brotherhood.

“The call of Islam was a call to ‘humanism’ and human brotherhood; hence its bias against all prejudices that resulted from racial and national distinction”.
Chapter - 5

CONCLUSION

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Swami Vivekananda were the two outstanding exponents of universal religion and religious pluralism in twentieth century India. They fought relentlessly against backwardness, narrow-mindedness, superstitions and religious fanaticism in their respective religions and paved the way for a modern approach to religion. They stood for inter-religious brotherhood, pluralism, and tolerance. The significance of their catholic vision and mission can hardly be over-emphasised in the contemporary world. The history of modern Indian thought cannot be complete without an adequate reference to these two outstanding figures. They are the outshining examples of both religious catholicity and political sagacity in modern Indian thought.

Universal religion, according to them, provides a common platform for all religions. They stress upon the essential unity of all great world religions. Universal religion gives respect to all religions without deviating from one’s own religion. They believe that all the spiritual pathways lead to the one and same goal. There is no conflict or incompatibility between universal religion and different historical religions, for it is the common universal essence of them all.

For Vivekananda, religion in essence is man’s way of living in the name of truth. He was a strong follower of Hinduism. But it does not mean
he thought that Hinduism is superior to all other religions. He used the term Hinduism in a very broad sense. He does not mean by it the creed or rituals but the fundamentals of Hinduism. He says that Hinduism as religion is neither creed nor doctrine. It is only the realization - the realization of truth.

He argues that every recognized religion of the world has its own philosophy, which is unique to itself and which enables it to differentiate itself from the other religions. But the question is if each religion differs from the others at its most basic philosophical level, how can it be possible to have one universal philosophy? Moreover, it is also observed that each one claims its superiority on others in a very rigid manner. Sometimes the people say those who do not follow my religion, they cannot attain salvation. They must go in hell because only my way is the true and right one.

Now, if the conflict of religions arises on account of the fact that different religions have different philosophy, mythology and rituals, the religious harmony can be attained only by having a universal religion that rises above these differences.

Vivekananda is aware that it is a difficult task because different religions gave emphasis on different qualities of religion. So it is much difficult to find the common elements. For example, Islam gave emphasis on universal brotherhood, Hinduism on spirituality, Christianity on self-purification. It is difficult to compare these several elements of religions. Thus, it is difficult to find any universal elements in respect to religion but
we also knew it that they exist. If we explore we will find it within the differences but then our approach has to be not that of exclusion but inclusion. We must seek unity within the diversity.

We must first of all know that we all are human beings and that we are not equal. We are not equal in our physical strength because one man is stronger than other, some have more power and some have less power and some are men and some women. There are many differences between us. But along with these differences we have one element which is common in all of us. We all are human beings and belong to one humanity. Vivekananda says that the universal element that runs through all the various religions of the world, which can be said as common to all religions is in a general way the faith in God.

Vivekananda asserts that unity in diversity is the scheme of universe. Two different things are apparently different, but may be similar in a particular sense. Men and women are different with each other but as a human being they are same. As living beings men, animals and plants are all one. In this manner different religions talk of different aspects of the same truth. They all are talking about the same God. In Him we are all one. God is the only one ultimate reality of this universe. Every religion, consciously or unconsciously, is struggling towards the realization of this unity that is God.

Religion, as Azad believes it, is a great motivational force. He says that Qur’an emphasised that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God, because this human form is given to all by God. This is the true element
which firmly joints us in a community. But, because of ignorance, people divided themselves in the name of race, community, customs, nation, religion, culture etc. On such bases human beings distanced and kept themselves isolated from each other. In this situation, except God there is nothing which can bring all human beings together again and remove ignorance and discrimination.

The greatest feature of Islam is that it does not consist in any special structure of Shariah but in its proclamation of the fundamental truth that God is one, and mankind is one community. The Qur'an accepts all the scriptures. It specifically instructs its believers not to make any distinction between various prophets. This religious pluralism is, in fact, a revolutionary breakthrough in the annals of human history.

According to Azad, one of the central purposes of the Qur'an is to restore the Abrahamic vision. On the basis of this vision, the Qur'an wants to unite the people of the book and by implication the entire mankind. The basic purpose of religion is spiritual transformation of man. What is called Shari'ah or law is instrumentally important for accomplishing such a spiritual transformation. For Azad, Shari'ah or law is significant in its own way. However, the eternal and universal vision of religion or Din has priority over legal injunctions or practices of worship and rituals etc.

According to Azad, it is clear that the distinctions among humans are man-made. In the eyes of God all human beings are one regardless of their community or nation. If all human beings resolve their internal differences
and serve the God, all differences will be banished. We all will feel that entire world is our home and entire humanity is same. Once the hearts are united the existence of differences will completely vanish from this world.

Azad says that Qur’an does not follow any sectarianism in religion. It always opposes the prejudices of groups. It always tried to bring all mankind in one way of life, the way to God or the way of truth. Din of God is not new invention. Din existed throughout the time. The way to God is that to which all prophets invited all human beings. Azad says that religion has been one and same everywhere. The message of all prophets was same. They preached belief in one supreme God and advised human beings to live righteously. The prophets of all times have emphasized oneness of God. Islam does not favour any exclusive group of religion. On the other hand, it asserts that it has come to put an end to all groupism and bring all mankind to one path of life, the path of truth - the path to which all prophets have invited mankind.

Azad says that Qur’an disapproves of the tendency of regarding one prophet as superior to other, or accepting one prophet and rejecting another. He says that Qur’an is the message of God to men through the prophets who appeared from time to time. So no one is superior over other.

According to Azad, Islam proclaimed the unity of all religions. He further says that the difference in legal codes, ceremonials, rituals, practices and the form of worship observed in different religions should not make us oblivious to the unity of all religions. The difference of legal norms, rituals,
practices and the form of worship do not eliminate their essential oneness. Various religions differ in methods, norms and criteria. These differences are not difference in Din. It addresses the entire humanity. It is not for any one particular race or community but for all.

Azad emphasizes that the religion revealed by God was but one for all mankind, and that therefore every deviation from this was a clear aberration. According to him, the basic teaching of the Qur’an is that Islam or Al-Deen-al Islam is the name of that fundamental spirit of religion which had gradually been engulfed by forces of history and where reality had been dimmed in the mist of human superstition and man’s habit of myth making.

For Vivekananda, too, universal religion stresses the nonsectarian and non-discriminating spiritual values common to the great religions of the world. It goes to the common roots of all religions. It seeks to appreciate their common denominator. It cautions against the common enemy of man’s peace, prosperity and progress. It identifies the common dangers and roadblocks that obstruct the spiritual path of all mankind.

Furthermore, the non-discriminating outlook of universal religion is all-pervasive. In refusing to discriminate between man and man, it not only transcends sectarian and theological differences, it also pulls down the barriers between the religious and the nonreligious. It seeks to bridge the gulf that separates theists and atheists, gnostics and agnostics, skeptics and mystics. It affirms that the fundamental spiritual potentiality is same in all human beings, regardless of their superficial beliefs and tenets. Beliefs and
tenets are, in ultimate analysis, mental formations, determined by the accidental circumstances of history. So they reflect neither the deepest essence of man’s being, nor the essential structure of the Supreme. They are practically useful and pragmatically valid tools of man’s self-adjustment to the changing environment. In his inmost essence, the individual human is a spiritual entity, a center of creative freedom. He is neither a mere creature of circumstances, nor a plaything of random forces. His essence lies much deeper than ideas, dogmas and creeds. It is the abiding spirit in him that ultimately counts.

Vivekananda, too, believes that such a religion already exists but we have lost it because of external divergences of religion. These external conflicts affect the essence of religion. Behind the external differences there is essential sameness. Thus though universal religion already exists such as universal brotherhood existed in man, people fail to notice its presence in their lives. Those who really feel the universal brotherhood, they don’t try to make sects for it but they try to spread out it in whole world. They have sympathy and love for all mankind.

The idea of a universal religion does not mean that one doctrine should be followed by all mankind. It is impossible. There will not be one universal mythology or one set of rituals accepted by all religious. There can never be a time when all will accept the same thought. If ever it happens that would mean the world is not progressing. Sameness and perfect balance will create an unmoving world. Because diversity is the first principle of
progressive life. If we all think same thought it would be dangerous for the world. So the differences of thought must remain, otherwise soul of our progress or the soul of our thought will cease. But as we recognized the necessity of variation for the progress of world, we also recognized unity in nature. We must recognize variation because only through this variation we can learn about something from different points and that this thing while being different from different points of view is nevertheless one and same.

Vivekananda believed in the diversity and plurality of religions. But yet, on the other hand, he places at the top the Vedantic Hinduism in its advaita form. He argues that Vedanta alone can be the universal religion because it alone is based on universal principles while other religions are based on the religious experience of their founder and confined to time and places. All people of the world can come together only through principles not through persons.

Azad also says that the Qur'an cites the identification of one scripture with another scripture. It says that the teaching of one prophet confirms the teaching of other. One scripture does not deny other.

On the other hand, Vivekananda holds that there can not be one universal rituals. He says that Veda is the source of all knowledge. All that is called knowledge is in the Vedas. Every word is sacred and eternal... without beginning and without end. The Vedas were the first to find and proclaim the way of Moksha. All means are not good but the right and correct means is that of the Vedas. The means adopted by Buddhist is not
right because they do not accept the Vedas, whatever the great teachers like Buddha, Christ and others taught they took it from Vedas.

Vivekananda was saying that all the doctrines and practices of any religion that do not agree with Vedantic Hinduism are to be rejected.

But the Qur’an asserts that there is no revealed scripture which does not lay stress on the need to follow the way of God. The Qur’an calls upon every one to show whether the messages delivered before of the Qur’an differed in any manner from the message it delivered. Qur’an says that the teaching of one religion endorses the teaching of other. One does not deny the other. In all of them there are several teachings which are common and which serve as a point around which everything resolves. For when one and same idea is stated and emphasized at different times and places, the natural conclusion that forces itself for attention is that there is something real and abiding about it.

So Islam never rejects the authority of other scripture. This is the reason why the Qur’an refers to the message and commandments of the scriptures delivered before it. It bears to the similarity and oneness of their teaching.

But in regard to religion and scripture Vivekananda wants to establish the superiority and absoluteness not only of the Vedanta but of advaitic Hinduism.

Azad holds that when Qur’an was delivered, the followers of the prevailing religion took the outward forms of religion and gave whole
emphasis on rituals but the rituals are not the religion. Ritual is outward aspect of religion. The spirit was something superior to it, and that alone was Din or religion. Din in reality was devotion to God through righteous living. It was not an exclusive heritage of any single group of people. On the other hand, it was common heritage of all mankind.

That is why the Qur’an lays such great stress on the need for tolerance. In this manner, Islam has universal approach towards every religion giving equal status to all.

Salvation, is common concept for both Vivekananda and Azad’s approaches to universal religion. Azad holds that Qur’an makes it clear that a man can attain salvation through righteous living. Salvation cannot be attained by performing ceremonies or rituals. There is only one way to purify the self and that is by the true worship and doing good action. He says salvation is not fixed for any religious group or community. The truth is that God opened the door of salvation for every human being.

According to Vivekananda, too, Moksa has been declared to be the goal of life. It literally means deliverance. Thus it delivers from all types of pain, worldly as well as other worldly. In other words, Vivekananda said that liberation can be best defined as freedom and freedom is linked with equanimity.

Vivekananda said that liberation can be achieved by all the three paths namely, Jnana yoga, Karma yoga and Bhakti yoga. In his own view, however, Karma yoga was the best way to realize liberation.
But although Azad and Vivekananda both accept the salvation for all human being there is the difference that in Islam there is only one way to achieve salvation that is through worship of God and righteous living. Vivekananda shows three paths for salvation.

Both Vivekananda and Azad said universalism and humanism are not in conflict with nationalism. Vivekananda emphasised the foundation of spiritual nationalism in India. He wanted the reawakening of self-pride and self-confidence in each and every Indian. His approach to nationalism was indigenous, spiritual and humanistic. He made inward inspection. He gave a positive approach to the Indian nationalism.

Vivekananda said that religion is the soul of Indian nationalism. He said that the people in India pay more attention to religious freedom and give less importance to political and economical independence. This is because of the fact that religion is more important to them than politics.

Vivekananda was an ardent patriot but also a true internationalist. He never confined himself in the four walls of country. His love for humanity knew no geographical boundaries. He denounced exclusiveness and recommended the exchange of thought and inter-communication between India and all nations of the world. He gave emphasis on the harmony and good relationship among all nations. Vivekananda said that unity in variety is the plan of the universe. We are all a part of the humanity but as individuals we are distinct from each other.
As a man one is separate from the woman but as a human being a man is one with woman. So all tribes, nations, races have distinct identities but all are part of the world. He was a true believer of world unity. Unity is knowledge and diversity is ignorance.

Universal brotherhood of man is the very important element of his nationalism. He believed in equality and mutual cooperation among the nations. Universal brotherhood can establish itself only through religious harmony and cultural exchange. He says that the rich nations should help poor nations. Then the international friendly relation would be a reality because day by day different religious sect are creating conflict and destroying the feeling of brotherhood.

Vivekananda believed in the equality among all nations. He opposed the British rule in India. Because all nations are equal, nobody is superior to another. No nation has right to rule others. He never favoured war and conquest.

Vivekananda preached religious humanism as the basis of world unity. He said every individual is a part of God. God is to be recognized by every one. It is a common belief that the service to mankind is service to God. Every body should help other human beings.

Vivekananda’s humanism was based on his spiritualism. Spiritualism gave an identity to man and established the equality of man. For him human being is the greatest creation in the entire world. Human life is most precious and valuable. Man is superior to all other being on earth.
Vivekananda says that religion is a science and every effort should be made by the individual to establish the truth. Every individual has right to apply his reason to know the truth. He said the concept of adhikarvad, untouchability, suppression of women’s right are all against the commands of a civilized society or nation or the teachings of religions. Because of blind faith and superstitious practices there is war in every society. He says that a society or nation should be remodeled with the help of reason. Man should apply his rationality and break those laws that promote orthodoxy and dogmatism. A nation can grow spiritually when superstition is vanished.

Vivekananda says that every problem of society can be solved if people live life of honesty and integrity. Success of man depend upon ethics. Everyman can not be completely honest or perfectly selfless but by trying to be good he will get success. Vivekananda said that the essence of all prayers and worship is to be good for others. Service to mankind is service to God.

According to Vivekananda, there could be no peace or progress without the truth and justice.

Similarly, Azad’s nationalism was also humanistic. He was not anti-British but he said Islam does not support the superiority of one people to others. His feeling of nationalism was deeply rooted in his firm faith in Islam because Islam does not support any form of government unless it is based on freedom and democracy.

Azad’s nationalism supports communal harmony among all communities. It also means the unity of all people should come through
religion. Love and tolerance are the basic elements of harmony. Every religion preached the truth of brotherhood and opposed the racial prejudices.

Non-violence is a basic element of Azad’s nationalism. He says that the message of Islam is peace for all humanity; it does not support war. Its aim is to end injustice. It was not only based on the interest of only one community. For Azad nationalism stands for the benefit and service of humanity as a whole.

For Azad the true spirit of nationalism implied the unity of religion as based on the unity of God and unity of whole humanity because his idea of the unity was the basis of national integration.

Azad says that Islam supported humanism and did not recognize the prejudice of race, nation, country. It called for only one relationship between man and man, that is, brotherhood. Islam denies the absolute distinctions of race, country, colour and language in the way of achieving universal human brotherhood.

Now, taking into consideration the views of all the thinkers and writers discussed above the essence of universal religion can be summarized in the form of ten imperatives. These are the ten commandments of higher spiritual fulfillment of the individual.

Ist Imperative: Oneness of God: The first imperative of universal religion is the concept of the oneness of God. It is to take God as a common basis for unity. God is the unifying principle of all living religions of the world. The
One Supreme Being is the substructure of all religions. God is common source of inspiration.

Different conceptions of God found in different religions are the different forms of expression of the same Supreme Being. They are appropriate in different circumstances, and useful for all human societies at different stages of evolution.

All religions of the world are like different ways leading to the same goal. They are like different boats carrying human beings across the river of life. An enlightened person keeps away with all sectarian quarrels, conflicts, prejudices and conceptual disputes. He emphasizes the universal spiritual values of existence. He should concentrate upon basic spiritual doctrines common to the all living religions of the world.

We can say that God is the centre point of man’s religious emotions. God is defined as that which is capable to satisfy the hunger of all souls. God is One Supreme Being that serves as the light, life and love. God is one and same for whole humanity. But it is true that each religion emerged in different circumstances and different socio-cultural backgrounds. Different peoples express their religion in different theological terms and because of this they represent different aspects of the same reality.

For instance, in Judaism the Supreme was revealed as Yahweh; in Zoroastrianism as Ahura Mazda; in Christianity as the Heavenly Father; in Islam as Allah; in Hinduism as Iswara; in Buddhism as Sunyata; in Taoism as Tao. “There is one Being that sages call by different names”, says Veda. Yahwey, Ahura, Mazda, Heavenly, Father, Iswara, Sunyata, Allah etc. are different names given to the same ocean of creative energy. Different names
are a matter of different languages, used by different people but the eternal essence are same that is one supreme Being or God.

**II nd Imperative : Equality of Prophets :** The second imperative of world religion is the concept of equality of all prophets. The founders of the world’s religions are all divine personalities. God sent those divine persons for the welfare of the whole mankind. They fulfill the purpose in the province of man’s religious evolution.

The founders of great religions like Buddha, Moses, Krishna, Christ, Mohammed etc. have equally enlightened the world. Each one has importance in respect to his own specific spiritual mission. If we said that one is superior to another it will be unwise and unjust with them. The aim of prophets was unity of mankind rather than creating discord amongst people. It is only because of ignorance that people divide one from the other prophet.

All prophets become prophets by virtue of their elevation of the universal truth above their individuality. That is why, their historic importance lies in the fact that they served as symbols of the Supreme. But whereas the Supreme is one without a second, symbols are by their very nature many without number. Whereas the supreme is absolute, symbols, in order to be effective, are necessarily relative. Whereas the Supreme is complete and perfect, symbols by reason of being relative, cannot help being incomplete and imperfect. So religious devotion withers on the wayside when it fails to reach out beyond the symbol to the supreme reality.

It is the sign of religious immaturity of people to say: “our master uttered the last word of truth. His teaching is absolute and final” or to say:
“Our Messiah alone is the Son of God. Other religious leaders are at best perfect men or illumined teachers”. Or to say: Our Prophet is the last and therefore the most perfect of all messengers of God. Or to say: Our Saviour is the complete incarnation of God, other Saviours being only incomplete incarnations.

The basic task of world religion is to expand man’s mental horizon and to lift man out of the marshes of sectarianism. No dogmatism stands in the way of the man as he begins to have a sense of participation in the world civilization.

**IIIrd Imperative : Love of Humanity** : The third imperative is the concept of universal love and compassion. It depends upon the assertion that God inhabits in the heart of all men without distinction of class, colour, creed and race and nationality.

The Supreme is inhabited equally in all human beings because God is basically partless and indivisible. Just as the moon is reflected in different waves, the entire universe is present in all human beings in its undivided essence. Every human being has essential value and purity of his own - that is to develop his potential and make its own contribution to civilization.

The doctrine of human equality implies that each individual has an essential value and dignity of his own. Each one has a right to live and fulfill the best within him. All people should be given equal chance for the fulfillment of their basic potentiality. Every individual is indeed great in his own position.

So the relation between the love of man and the love of Supreme is one of mutuality. The vision of Supreme opens the gates of pure universal
love. On the other hand, the practice of universal love and service of man leads to the realization of the Supreme.

The spirit of universal love flows from the vision of Supreme. This vision of Supreme is not confined in the limits of the caste, creed, nation, culture and human species. It embraces the entire living creation.

IVth Imperative: The Spirit of Toleration: The fourth imperative is the conception of toleration as a spiritual attitude.

Toleration is a positive attitude of the mind. For example, somebody says, “God exists”. It means a man trying to express his deep conviction that such higher values as truth, beauty, justice, love etc. are grounded in reality and ultimately prevail in life. But his opponent says, “God does not exist”. He is rejecting the anthropomorphic notion of God. Now the question arises: how can a religious person love a man who outrightly denies God? How can a theist tolerate an atheist?

It is by virtue of openmindedness, openheartedness of love that we can understand other people. It is through sympathetic feeling or understanding that we can help them.

Vth Imperative: Self-Understanding: The fifth imperative is based upon the basic spiritual need for self-understanding. It is about the fact that self is the key to understand the mystery of ultimate reality.

As Socrates said, “know thyself”. Or, as the ancient sages of India said, “Realize your own inmost self”. Jesus, too, says: “what shall it avail ye if thou gaineth the whole world but loseth thine own soul?”.

According to Nietzsche, “Follow not me but your self”. The great scientist Einstein similarly says, “Be true to yourself”.
A person cannot attain happiness if he cannot make others happy. Whenever one understands his own self, he attains salvation. True salvation lies in the state of productive self-existence.

Ontologically, one’s own self is the key to know the essential structure of the universe in which we live. Our mind is like a mirror capable of reflecting the whole world. When a person is good the world looks good to him. When he is happy, the world seems happy. On the other hand, if a person is evil-minded the world looks like a hell.

Spiritually, the self is one’s only point of immediate contact with the Supreme Being. The self is related to the Supreme as spark of fire is related to the flame. When a person becomes aware of his own self he directly realizes supreme Being within himself.

VIth Imperative : Middle Path : The sixth imperative is based upon the concept of middle path. It holds that the path of truth is the path of harmony and balance. The world is the stage for ever-new creation. It spreads the festival of light and colour, of sound and vision, in which life invites living creatures to participate. The self is the unifying center of all life experience. It carries the creative movement of life to higher level of consciousness.

In order to perform this creative function it is desirable for the individual to aim at the wholeness of being. He must follow the middle path between asceticism and epicureanism. Human personality is an indivisible whole of reason and passion, of flesh and spirit, of body and soul, of the conscious and the unconscious. The deepest springs of creativity can be
released by properly harmonizing these two inseparable aspects of personality. Only the person made whole can become holy in the true sense of the term. The full growth of personality breaks through to a new emergent value on the basis of inner harmony and wholeness. The individual self is united with the Supreme. It is reborn on the cosmic planes of consciousness.

**VIIth Imperative: Love of Nature:** The seventh imperative is based upon the concept of nature as the nursing mother spirit. It holds that it is by intelligently following the guidance of nature that the height of spiritual glory can be achieved.

Close contact with nature in her silent chambers is always revitalizing. It recharges the batteries of life. It restores strength to the weak, health to the sick, wholeness to the broken mind, and serenity to the soul. No synthetic products of human ingenuity – no pills and drugs – can serve as a substitute for the healing power that belongs to nature.

Nature is like mother to her child. With her protective love she holds the child close to her bosom. But in due time she makes the sacrifice and allows the grown up child to stand on his own in physical separation from the mother. In the same way, nature secretly guides the course of development of the individual by the force of physical instincts, and the drives of the unconscious psyche. He later discovers freedom. He discovers also a whole new world of higher values. It is nature that has been patiently preparing him for this new discovery. Those who rebel against nature prematurely in the name of spirit, make a long detour and suffer much.
There is a famous saying in India that in order to enter the kingdom of spirit, one has to obtain a passport from nature. There is no antagonism between nature and spirit. The duality of instinct and reason, of flesh and soul, falls within the dialectical growth engineered by nature herself as the evolutionary impetus of spirit.

**VIIIth Imperative: The Omnipresence of Truth:** The eighth imperative is based upon the concept of the omnipresence of truth. It holds that a worldwide openmindedness is the basic condition of spiritual growth.

Spiritual growth makes an individual a citizen of the world. It develops world orientation. Spirituality generates in him the urge to recognize truth. Truth is like the sun which shines equally upon all, upon entire world. Like sun, truth is also hidden in the mythologies and religion of all countries of the world. The understanding of truth can open gates of spiritual insight.

No particular religious system has a monopoly upon God. No particular philosophical school can be taken as the last world of wisdom. No particular culture can be said to have monopoly upon God. Those who try to prescribe fixed value system or thought commit spiritual murder.

It is the great privilege of man to be able to draw freely from the vast cultural heritage of the human race and to follow world’s masterminds including the founders of all different religions. The religion of modernism consists in developing the spirit of world citizenship. The light of truth is streaming in from all sides of the universe. It is creative assimilation of worldwide human heritage.
The different religious principles and dogmas acknowledge their limitation in expressing the fullness of spiritual truth. A spiritual instructor must be broadminded and place the welfare of all human beings above their creeds. Their fundamental concern should be to help them to choose elements of nourishment from different dogmas and creeds. It should help individuals to grow in conformity with suitable creed and then grow further. It is their search for truth beyond all creeds.

World orientation is a vital principle of creative spiritual growth. It is the principle of gathering chosen element of spiritual nourishment from all cultural sources. It develops the multiplicity into all living unity. The doctrine of unity is supplied not by any fixed dogma or creed but the evolving spirit in man.

**IXth Imperative: Devotion to Higher Values**: The ninth imperative is based upon the concept of high values. It upholds the idea that the meaning of life lies in the realization of higher values.

The endeavour to attain values adds new dimension to man’s life. The struggle to the pursuit of higher values gives meaning to his existence. Without this urge, the life leads to an endless path of darkness and worthlessness. Gloom and despair surrounds his consciousness. But as man embodies value, life gains importance and meaning. He enters a new horizon of happiness and prosperity.

Now the question arises what makes life meaningful? Every man cherishes the value of happiness. He feels joyful on the fulfillment of his healthy desires. He also treasures values such as love, honour, power and
important position in society. Freedom, equality and justice appeal him. He longs for unity, peace and progress. He engages himself in the pursuits of scientific exploration, artistic creation, philosophical contemplation and other such cultural values.

The multiplicity of higher values is attained only with the affirmation of Being. In attaining awareness of Being, man experiences oneness of all existence. His experience of the Being springs out love and wisdom from his consciousness, which is the matrix of all higher values.

Every great religion of the world is the outcome of truth-vision of some great individuals who made a direct relation with the Being. True mysticism embodies such direct vision. Direct contact with the eternal evokes great wisdom and compassion. It enables new values to appear on the mental horizon.

Universal religion believes that every man can establish a direct contact with the eternal by virtue of the creative spark within him. After all, the eternal is the ultimate ground of his existence.

**Xth Imperative : Evolutionary Participation :** The tenth imperative is about the idea of evolutionary participation. It rests upon belief that the world is a real and meaningful outcome of the creative urge that flows from deep beneath.

Universal religion upholds the trueness of the universe in which we live. The world is not an unreal dream, nor a futile nothing. The Being has also bestowed it with all-creative agility. And as the Being is much diversified, it is also eternally important.
Universal religion thus embodies a true and dynamic outlook towards the world. It fills the world-spirit with a view to conquer new frontiers in knowledge, love and progress.

In medieval times, man’s encounter with the Divine reduced religion merely to the questions of hereafter, the heaven and the hell, angels and demons, etc. Man pursued the ultimate goal either as continued personal existence in the sphere of the supernatural or as the exotic enjoyment in the supra-cosmic silence. The encounter of man with the Divine was a significant point in the spiritual evolution of mankind. It pulled the man out of the bondages of worldly matrix and filled in him the active awareness of the values of eternity. It gave him the essential identity of the ontological sense of the Being.

Man’s disattachment with worldly bliss inclined him to the view that the world is either evil or unreal. He invented the idea that monastic life is the best and surest way to salvation. The materialistic values gave way to the values of poverty, chastity and obedience in the West and of desirelessness, ascetic renunciation and static contemplation in the East.

Complete union with the Being evolves a feeling of love and oneness among the living creatures. It produces the spirit of universal love and compassion. This feeling is not the outcome of the inner need for penance and punishment but is the free sense of responsibility flowing from love and from the affirmation of self in all (sarvatma-bhava).

Another aspect of complete union with the Divine worth mentioning here is the evolutionary aspect of the Being. The world is not merely real but a meaningful plan of evolution. The unique qualities and unprecedented
values flow from the endless depths of the Being, which bring constant changes and abrupt mutation.

The ingredients or imperatives that make up the composite called the universal religion indicate towards one fundamental concern. And that is to unite the different religions and their followers around the idea of one God and devotion to him and realization of Him. This was the central message of Vivekananda as well as of Abul Kalam Azad. It is true that a Vedantic minded Vivekananda will emphasise the absolutistic dimensions of God while Azad, under the influence of Islamic monotheism, will give greater credence to the theistic aspects. But both will agree that without faith in God neither religion nor universal religion is possible.

It is also to be noticed that even though Vivekananda was more inclined towards the absolutist conception, he could not be dismissive, except at places, of a personal God to whom man’s devotion was due. After all he was a disciple of Ramakrishna who always regarded the Vedantic path of realization dry and felt happy being a simple devotee of a more personalized form of Divine as Krishna or Kali. He also self-avowedly kept this personal religion and personal God as his personal religion while preaching the impersonal Vedantism to his western audience. On the other hand, similarly, Azad’s own personal religion was theistic but he also had many great statements to make in support and praise of such mystics as Mansoor Hallaj and Shamsh Tabrez who were the epitomes of the pantheistic heterodoxy.

Vivekananda and Azad, in this respect, were following the legacy of their predecessors like Kabir and Dara Shukoh and Ramakrishna of medieval
times and Tagore, Sir Syed and Iqbal of modern times. All these great minds were the worshippers of God in one form or other and considered the realization of His being the sole motif of their lives. All of them considered the ritualistic and dogmatic aspects of religion to be secondary and God-realization to be primary.

Where they differentiated themselves from their more orthodox co-religionists was especially their message that the ‘paths’ are not necessarily to be same in order to realize God. There may be as many paths as possible but the goal has to be the same. Vivekananda, following the instruction of Gita, thought the paths of devotion, action and knowledge all to lead to that same goal. Similarly, Azad said that different prophets of different times had different Shariah but that did not prevent them to be called equally as the prophets or realized personages.

All in all, the universal religion in their hands had these twin motifs: the realization of God as the summum bonum of human life and the central concern of religion and, secondly, the unity of mankind through the unity of religions.

These were, undoubtedly, noble sentiments and certainly a progress and diversion from the more orthodox positions that carried some sort of narrow-mindedness and bigotry with them. But it must also be fully recognized that while maintaining their position of liberality and broadmindedness, they ignored either willfully or through carelessness - some vital difficulties with which the idea was beset. This was also besides some serious contradictions their position implicated and entailed.
It should first of all be realized that the difference that underlies a theistic and a pantheistic God is not merely theoretical difference. A God with attributes and a God that is without attributes are not just two notionally different conceptions but implicate two entirely different ways of life such that to observe the rules of one kind is in exact opposition to the rules that accrue from the other. The pursuit of an absolute, attributeless God generates the lifestyle of asceticism, ecstasy and ethical irresponsibility. A saint lives the life of renunciation and is not bound by the societal norms. He transcends the religion and morality.

On the other hand, theism, especially in its purer forms, entails disapproval of renunciation and recommends living life of social engagement and struggle. Rejecting the idea of dichotomy of flesh and spirit or sacred and profane, life in the world with remembrance of God and responsibility is considered as the only right path to realization. It also means that the life of irresponsibility and renunciation is unacceptable and obstacle to the realization of God. The stricter versions of monotheism especially would disapprove the ways involving of sexual promiscuity as a means of attaining salvation or spiritual perfection.

In other words, there are, according to monotheistic religions, paths which instead of leading to heaven, may rather be really the road to hell. Similarly, when a believer in the absolutist God recommends the path of knowledge as the only means of liberation, he also excludes the paths of devotion and action as the means to attain that same goal. The Vedantins, even while indulging in karma, have always also thought it to be a lower form of
religion fit only for the non-initiates and not exactly leading to liberation or moksha. Even Vivekananda at places admitted theistic religions to be the lower forms of religiosity to be abandoned at some stage of life.

These considerations certainly go against the much flaunted view of all religions being of equal merit or all paths leading to some goal. In fact, if the idea is pressed, while some paths may take man to the goal of liberation, some other paths may be a sure means of further entanglement and bondage. Further, what for one party is a meritorious path of salvation, is for the other party a source of fall and failure.

When, for example, Azad said that in Islam, Shariah could change without affecting the core principle of God-realization, he could mean by Shariah only a few laws and norms of political kind and not the ethical norms as such. The punishment of theft may for example vary in the cases of Shariah given to different prophets. But that did not mean any prophet could approve or tolerate idolatry or sorcery or tantra type of sexo-yogic practices accepted in many pagan religions. Islam- and Christianity too – are so strictly opposed to idolatry that the idea of equality of religions just cannot hold in their case at least.

In tradition there are of course the mysticised versions of Islam which are given greater importance by the believers – both Muslim and non-Muslim – of the credo of religious universalism. But it is also a fact that these are overtly violative of the original religion preached by messangers. Similarly, Christianity can shed the dogma of Christ as the sole savior of humanity only with much internal pain and injury to itself. The recent compromises on this
point seem more to be in the nature of buckling down under the pressure of secular and liberal milieu of present age rather than a voluntary disavowal of a lately realized error.

In the Hindu ethos, the presence of multiple gods and goddesses allow to a certain extent the accommodation of a higher creator God in its pantheon. But, again, a careful and closer study of tradition reveals that there has been much discomfort with this master creator God (called Brahma). In fact, every endeavour was made to ridicule or dismiss Him. On the one hand, various gods and goddesses were presented as rivals to Him and, on the other hand, this presence was neutralized by making Him extra-transcendental. The idea of Brahman as attributeless being /non-being was certainly a neutralization of Brahma as a master-creator God.

To sum up, the prescription and the principle that all paths are equally effective for realizing God does not go far enough. And that after travelling a certain distance, the believer of this principle falls back in treating one’s own religion to be the only right path or at least the superior path for realization of truth and attainment of salvation/liberation. The paths other than one’s own are considered inferior or untrue.

But much though these difficulties bedevil the idea of universal religion, it remains a noble idea and a great advance on the earlier approaches. It certainly opens new vistas and provides new perspectives for the study of religions both as historical-social reality and one’s personal-existential commitment. It, in any case, helps in shedding dogmatism, bigotry, illiberality and intolerance. It also undoubtedly serves as a source of catholicity and inter-
religious harmony. The bottom line message is that even if one considers his own path to be true and other's as false, he can yet have peaceful co-existence with the travelers of other paths.
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**Chapter - IV**


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