

**MODERNITY AND RELIGIO-SPIRITUAL FAITH: A STUDY OF  
SELECT DEVOTEES OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in Partial Fulfillment For the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**ANANYA DAS**



**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEM  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI-110067  
2008**



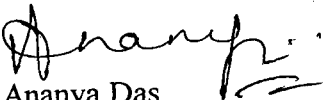
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI - 110 067

Centre for the Study of Social Systems  
School of Social Sciences


28<sup>th</sup> July, 2008.

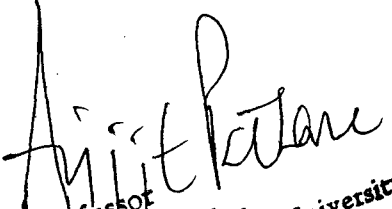
**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Modernity and Religio-Spiritual Faith: A Study of Select Devotees of the Ramakrishna Mission**”, submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is my own work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

  
Ananya Das

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
Prof. CSSS  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067  
(Chairperson)

  
Professor  
CSSS  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067  
(Supervisor)

***DEDICATED TO***

***Aai, Aja, and Puri Ma.***

## *ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*

Production of anything concrete requires co-operation from several quarters. This help may come in several forms. When it is a task requiring immense mental calisthenics, patience and silence of others and a handy word of encouragement is what is required the most. In this regard I would like to thank my parents and my siblings for listening to all my frustrations and wooly thoughts without irritation and complaints. My family has always been the pillar on which I could recline at any moment of my life. This was proved yet again. Thanks Bou and Nana. Thanks Mae, Rocky, and Dicky. Thank you for bearing with the intermittent frustrations and disillusionment that crossed my mind's eye in the course of the dissertation.

I cannot express enough gratitude to my supervisor Professor Abhijit Pathak whose calm disposition and eager co-operation at the time of need made my work easier. He was my mentor and motivator throughout the exercising journey. Sir has been a cult figure for me since my M.A. days and his thought is motivating enough for me to be sincere in any intellectual endeavor of my life.

My deep gratitude for the members and staff of the Ramakrishna Mission, Puri for their ready and kind co-operation and for allowing me to conduct my field studies in their Mission.

Honestly this work would have been difficult and taxing without the refreshing company of my gang from the wild- Shwets and Aru. Thanks a lot guys for being so understanding in your attitude towards me and for being there to listen to all my problems and complaints. You guys actually kept me spirited. Samidha and Binayjyoti-thank you both for listening to all my anxieties over phone and giving the necessary advices. My thanks also go to my room mate and friend Silps for being so encouraging and also for bearing with all the nuisances that I created in the room. Thank you Amruta for being so cute and sweet. A word of thank to Saswati nani for helping me in formatting and Nisha for bearing my cribbing.

Thanks to some of my relatives who have been enthusiastic about everything I did and always believed that I would give my best to it.

## ***CONTENTS***

<i>Title</i>	<i>Page No</i>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER I: MODERNITY AND RELIGIO-SPIRITUAL FAITH: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER II: INDIA IN TRANSITION: SITUATING THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>CHAPTER III: FAITH IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES: A DIALOGUE WITH SELECT DEVOTEES</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>137</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The real struggle to sculpture a world sans religion began with Enlightenment. A few centuries have walked past this historic period. Yet religion in a variety of forms is still perched in the collective conscience of the mass. The tall claims of an extremely objectified modern world have been made uneasy by the irrefutable evidence of the emphatic existence of religion either in the public or the private sphere. It can be said that the contemporary world is akin to a pulley that see-saws between religion and technology. The prominence of religio-spiritual faith in modern man's life cannot be overemphasized. Its various dimensions can be seen as 'power', a 'source' of power, a 'victim' of struggle for power. The last point alludes to the various dastardly acts of violence and terrorism that is happening in the name of religion. As a source of power religio-spiritual faith is emotionally re-assuring to the beleaguered modern man. How is it so? In what form it performs such a function? Is it effective? If yes, to what extent? These are the various questions that form the mainstay of the entire dissertation.

### *A Brief on the Dissertation*

In this dissertation an attempt has been made to understand the sociological significance of the domain of religio-spiritual faith in the age of modernity. In order to provide a concrete focus to the work at hand a study has been made of the Ramakrishna Mission- a modern religio-spiritual organization that emerged at a crucial juncture of India's socio-cultural history .i.e. the late nineteenth century. It was the century when India was encountering colonial invasion and there was widespread effort on the part of the new intelligentsia to re-define and re-interpret our religions and traditions in order to fight the cultural politics of colonialism. To further substantiate the arguments the Ramakrishna Mission of Puri- an important pilgrimage for the Hindus- has been studied. In the study an interaction has been made with select devotees of the mission. Further an attempt has been made to relate the socio-philosophical arguments to be elaborated in the further course of this work with the empirical findings.

The sociological relevance of a research project of this kind can be comprehended better by a studied glance of the huge body of knowledge that emerged in Sociology in order to understand the location of religion in modern times. Modernity as a project, as social scientists often argue, emerged out of historic enlightenment in the eighteenth century Europe. It was a project that aimed at restructuring the world through scientific reasoning, technological mastery over nature, faith in human agency and the power of individuation, liberal democracy with a culture of critical debate and free enquiry and the foremost of all- growing rationalization, secularization, and belief in historical progress. It was assumed that there was a universal thrust in the modern project and it would also lead to growing secularization of the world and steady decline of religion. However social scientists since the days of Emile Durkheim have repeatedly argued that the relationship between modernity and religio-spiritual faith is more complex, subtle, and nuanced. Far from withering away religion assumes new dimensions and even in a modern, technocratic, secular world there is a vast domain of religio-spiritual faith that manifests itself through all sorts of religious associations, new religious movements, meditation, yoga practices, alternative lifestyles, and quest for charismatic and cult figures.

In India this debate has acquired yet another dimension. Unlike in the West, in India secularization has never been considered as an antithesis of religion. In stead modernity has led to a new reading of religion- how its essence of spiritual oneness would be rescued from institutionalized religion, its witch craft and the dogmas and how it would be creatively linked and experienced for bringing out the message of togetherness, social activism, and re-construction. From Swami Vivekananda to Mahatma Gandhi one could observe this assertion of religio-spiritual faith for reconstructing our society and regenerating our minds.

It is not necessary to equate religio-spiritual faith with conventional, formal, institutionalized religious behavior i.e. visiting a temple, practicing certain rites and rituals etc. Instead by religio-spiritual faith is meant more of a world view emerging out

of an awareness of the spiritual unity of life. It is more about faith in a transcendent power, and realization of the limits to man's excessive pre-occupation with the finite, temporal, material domain of existence. It is a quest for something deeper, finer, and sublime, and universal. It is this faith which was being talked about by many spiritual leaders and philosophers. What distinguished people like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, etc was the centrality of this faith-not adherence to any fixed dogma.

This dissertation assumes special sociological significance in the sense that an attempt has been made to examine the nature of this complexity and to reflect how even in this turbulent times people are negotiating with the domain of faith. While a sociological look at the Ramakrishna Mission would enable to understand the genealogy of this entire process, an engagement with select devotees would throw further light on how in recent times the mission continues with its activities and faith re-asserts itself.

Basic to the dissertation are the following inquiries:

First it tries to locate the changing nature of religio-spiritual faith and to reflect on modern man's notion of this faith. In talking of modernity it should be emphasized that the context is India. Hence an understanding of the change has to be made keeping in view the cultural context.

Second it attempts to give an account of modern man's existential anxieties and the extent to which faith and spirituality aids him in dealing with such anxieties. In this study the role of the Ramakrishna Mission to this effect has been assessed.

Third, it seeks to delve into the question of how modern man accommodates science and spirituality in his life. Or does he at all accommodate? Can one be modern yet spiritual at the same time? These questions are also dealt in the entire course of the dissertation.



In a nutshell, it can be said that the dissertation gives a sociological and historical account of the changing nature of religious faith and an empirical account of the modern man's response to and dependence on faith and various spiritual manifestations.

#### *METHODS OF ENQUIRY*

Generally every dissertation is primarily about theoretical and conceptual questions. However, in this dissertation a humble attempt has been made to relate this theoretical quest with some field data. The Puri branch of the Ramakrishna Mission has been chosen for the purpose. The purpose behind choosing Ramakrishna Mission lies in its historical and social importance. The Mission was established at a time when Hinduism was threatened by alien cultural and religious forces. Its chief aim was to rejuvenate the Hindu faith and disseminate knowledge of greater spiritualization. Thus its mission of seva was considered a part of this spiritualizing mission as according to its founder Swami Vivekananda being good and doing good is the whole of religion. Two centuries separate the inception of the Mission from its current existence. Now two centuries later we are again dwelling in a situation of crisis- a crisis of faith. As has already been stated this is one of the consequences of modernity. Thus it is in this context that the Ramakrishna Mission was chosen as a subject of enquiry. Keeping in view its historical significance it would be interesting to find out its contemporary relevance in helping people thirsty of religio-spiritual quest in the changed set up.

It should however be kept in mind that the study is not an exhaustive, ethnographic field work- the way a cultural anthropologist or a sociologist spends significant amount of time in the field and makes a detailed study. The time allotted for writing the M.Phil dissertation does not permit to make such an elaborate field study. So the present field study can be visualized as kind of 'field sensitization' engagement. In the course of the study frequent visits were made to the Ashram (October- December). Inter alia the researcher met some of the Swamijis, attended the prayer meetings, and interacted with seventeen devotees. Technically speaking no random sampling has been made to identify these devotees. The *snowball sampling* method was used for choosing the sample of

study. The method acquiring information from the respondents was more like an informal, dialogic conversation. There was no formal interview schedule used for the purpose of the study. Rather a formal introduction was made by the researcher to the sample respondents. Then the purpose of the field study was narrated. It was only after this elaboration that the respondents agreed to converse. All these conversations took place in the living room of the Ashram. After each conversation extensive notes were taken. This process of informal dialogue is quite enabling. It relaxes the environment, breaks the wall between the sociologists and the respondents and allows the respondents to speak more freely. This is not to say that this method was entirely devoid of any mistakes but nevertheless this conversation enabled the researcher in grasping the pulse of the devotees' minds. To borrow from Max Weber 'empathy' was acquired to make sense of and understand the meanings these devotees attach to the world.

#### *BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE CHAPTERS*

The various questions raised in this introductory chapter have been dealt with in a systematic way in three main chapters. It has been capped by a conclusion.

To start with, the first chapter has been named 'Modernity and Religio-Spiritual Faith: A Sociological Exploration'. This chapter starts with a brief on the philosophical transitions that took place in the eighteenth century Europe. The study of history is incomplete without referring to its intellectual dimension. The eighteenth century forms the corner stone of Europe's intellectual history. It is described as the period of the Enlightenment. The root of this phase in history can be traced to the seventeenth century revolutions in the realm of philosophical ideas. There was a growing consciousness among the then intelligentsia regarding the corruption that has gripped the church and the way it exploits the commoners. Thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Alexander Pope debated on the vagrancy of the church, the need for a rational way of looking at every aspect of life and accepting those doctrines of the Bible which are in consonance with reason. This tradition of thought gained prominence (*with individual variations in ideas, of course*) in the eighteenth century. Hence the absolutism of religion and a religious God

was challenged by the philosophers of the time. This in turn had huge political consequences. It is so because the state and the religion of that time propped up each other and worked in nexus with one another. This thereby resulted in the French Revolution. However the focus of the chapter is not so much on the political as on the religious development and changes that occurred in the eighteenth century. So in the first part of the chapter the ideas of the major philosophers of the century have been sketched out keeping in mind their pertinence to the sphere of religious studies. This discussion starts with Descartes and culminates with Kant. Descartes has been mentioned because his influence on the philosophy of the time is very evident.

In the second part of this chapter the line of thought has traveled from eighteenth century philosophers to nineteenth century thinkers and sociologists. The problem of locating the form, role and importance of religion has been dealt with in this part. This attempt has followed the writings of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. From these classical perspectives attention has been shifted to the changing attitude towards religious faith with the emergence of the Secularization thesis. Chiefly, the ideas of Bryan Wilson have been discussed in this case. In the third part an attempt has been made to bring forth the crisis in religious faith in modern times and how it negotiates with science and technology to sustain itself. The various spiritual forms that it has taken are also the subject of discussion. Peter Berger and Clifford Geertz have been referred to in these discussions.

The second chapter is set up in India. India was never insulated from the outer world. In fact India's history is dominated by foreign invasions, the process of accommodation and assimilation as profoundly observed between the natives and the invaders in each phase of history. However it was only with the British invasion that India was exposed to the concepts and the fact of modernity and modern science and technology. The condition of India before the advent of British is folklore for the Indian masses of the contemporary period. She was highly steeped in illiteracy and superstitions. The majority of the population was highly exploited by the supposedly chosen few .i.e. the Brahmins. All this was enabled in the name of religion which was unquestioningly accepted by the majority

of the population. There was a mortal fear of God. This chapter tries to locate the way western impact affected religious belief and faith in India. It also provides a bird's eye view of the reactions and counter reactions to this challenge from an alien nation to India's culture and civilization glory. The prominent figures in this struggle viz. Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, etc and their thoughts have been studied in some details. This chapter also deals with the secularization debate in India as contrasted from the West. Last, but most importantly, the changes observed in religious faith in modern India, the nature of these changes etc has also been talked of in this chapter. In this context, the Ramakrishna Mission has been dealt in great details to serve the purpose of the study. The Mission was established in a different socio-political scenario. Moreover the debates, discussions and the beliefs on the subject of religion had an entirely different color. In this part the factors that gave rise to the establishment of the Mission has been touched upon. Its importance during the time of its establishment has also been dealt with. More than a century separates the establishment of the Mission from its current existence. Hence it is of interest to note the way the Mission has sustained itself in an entirely different religio-spiritual set up. Its role and importance in the changed scenario has been studied with some effect. Further elaboration on this aspect is provided in the third chapter. The topic of the second chapter is *'India in Transition: Situating the Ramakrishna Mission'*.

The third chapter is the umbilical cord of the entire dissertation. In this chapter a report of the findings of the fieldwork conducted for the purpose of the present study has been elaborated in great details. A reflection on the findings has also been dealt with. The field work was in the form of an interview of select devotees of the Ramakrishna Mission situated in Puri. Through this experience an attempt has been made to decipher the importance of religious faith in modern man's life, his conception and understanding of 'what is religious faith?', the way the Mission helps in answering their anxieties and retaining their faith, and their views and opinions on commercialization of faith, spiritual centers, and its impact on our lives. This chapter, thus, serves the two fold functions of establishing the views and attitudes of common person on the question of religion and religious faith and its importance in his/her life. Second it tries to situate the importance

of the Mission in helping the modern human in his/her quest for spiritual realization. This chapter has been entitled '*Faith in Contemporary Times: A Dialogue with Select Devotees*'.

In the end a suitable conclusion has been provided.

## CHAPTER I

### MODERNITY AND RELIGIO-SPIRITUAL FAITH: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

The epistemological trajectory of the study of religion is both interesting and amusing. It is interesting to reflect on the perceived relevance of religious faith, the continual polemics between the believers and non believers, the struggle to reason out religious faith and belief, the possibilities of a world which knows no God, the radical wish of science replacing religion. This tradition of skepticism and questioning religious faith germinated in the seventeenth century. Its philosophical manifestations flowered in the early eighteenth century. This ultimately led to the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century. Religion was dealt with a critical eye, thereby, heralding in the abstract sign of modernity. Amusement lies in the fact that religion has survived modernity and rationality. 'How has it been so?', 'why has it been so?' This chapter has traced the various streams of voices and thought on religion and the possibility and rationality of a religio-spiritual faith in the modern world. It begins with an account of the history and philosophy that dominated the eighteenth century. This part culminates with a brief on the major *philosophes* of the century. This would provide an insight into the visions regarding religion among the intellectuals of the century. Gradually a sociological viewpoint is provided of the location of religio-spiritual faith in the sphere of modernity. This interpretation includes the thinkers spanning two centuries- the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. This section discusses the fate of religious faith in the labyrinth of the intellectual and practical applications of the concepts and practices of secularization, science, technology, and consumerism- the hallmarks of modern existence.

#### *MODERNITY AND ENLIGHTENMENT PROJECT IN THE WEST*

The seventeenth century witnessed rapid development in the field of science in England. Many historians loosely term this period as the century of Scientific Revolution. Such a

scientific movement at that time has been attributed to several factors. The most important of these are the economic stimulus afforded by the new technical problems encountered in the fields of industry, navigation, and war<sup>1</sup>. The other was the religious drive of the Puritans towards the performance of 'good works', amongst which were included the useful applications of science<sup>2</sup>. It was in the first half of this century that industrial and ideological problems caught the fancy of English scientists. Thus science started moving away from its association with the problems of navigation and mercantile enterprise. In this period Francis Bacon stressed the value of science for the advancement of industry and the building up of a new world view<sup>3</sup>.

One of the most important developments that occurred in the seventeenth century was the change in the concept of hierarchy. This concept was rooted in the idea that the world was peopled by a graded chain of beings, stretching down from the Deity in the Empyrean heaven at the periphery of the universe, through the hierarchies of angelic beings inhabiting the nine heavenly spheres concentric with the earth, to the ranks of men, animals, and plants, of the base terrestrial sphere at the centre of the cosmic system. Furthermore a sharp qualitative difference was drawn between the entities of the terrestrial and celestial domains of the universe. The natural motions of the bodies composed of the four terrestrial elements were rectilinear, such motions having a beginning and an end like all terrestrial phenomena. On the other hand, the natural motions of the heavenly bodies, composed of a more perfect fifth element, were circular, as motion in a circle was noble and eternal. In such a view of the world, the government of the universe was thought to be such that the universe was hierarchically ordered. It is essential to note at this instance that the Calvinists in theology and the astronomers in science reacted against this conception that the universe was hierarchically ordered. Such a conception of celestial hierarchy of angelic beings, had justified the existence of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Church government on earth. Calvin took strong exceptions to such theorizations. He noted:

---

<sup>1</sup> S.F.Mason, 'Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England', in C.Webster(ed), *The Intellectual Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, London and Boston, 1974, p.197.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> B.Farington, *Francis Bacon: Philosopher of Industrial Science* (London, 1951).

*“To the government thus constituted some gave the name of Hierarchy- a name, in my opinion, improper, certainly one not used by Scripture. For the Holy Spirit designed to provide that no one should dream of primacy or domination in regard to the government of the Church.”*<sup>4</sup> He further argued there was no ground for subtle philosophical comparisons between the celestial and earthly hierarchy. He tended to minimize the role of angelic beings in the government of the universe and to assign to the Deity a more absolute and direct control over His creatures. He also contended that not only the Deity governs the universe more directly but also He had predetermined all events from the beginning. Such a viewpoint was indeed a criticism of the idea that the universe was peopled by a graded scale of creatures. In the broader perspective it was a criticism of the concept of hierarchy which was the kernel of the idea. Thus Calvinist theory contended that He governed directly as an Absolute Power by means of decrees decided upon at the beginning. These decrees were nothing other than the laws of nature, the theological doctrine of predestination thus preparing the way for the philosophy of mechanical determinism. It is interesting to note that as the Calvinist were moving away from the hierarchical conception of the government of the universe towards an absolutist theory of cosmic rule, the early modern scientist were effecting similar transformation in natural philosophy.

To start with, Copernicus in his heliocentric theory<sup>5</sup> had implicitly at least, given a blow to the gradation of elements. He assigned to the earth and its four elements the circularity of motion which had hitherto been the prerogative of the celestial bodies. Continuing with the novel insights in the astronomical world, Johannes Kepler showed in 1609 that the earth and the planets moved in elliptical orbits around the sun. This connection became more explicit as he located the domicile of the theological Ruler of the universe in the central power of the world of the natural philosophers. Such a change in cosmic

---

<sup>4</sup> S.F.Mason, ‘Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England’, in C.Webster(ed), *The Intellectual Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (London and Boston, 1974), pp.200-201.

<sup>5</sup> This theory contends that the Sun is in the centre and all the planets including the earth move around it in an anti-clockwise direction. Prior to this theory the belief was that the earth was in the centre of the planetary system and did not move. All other planets as well as the Sun moved around the earth in a clockwise direction. This theory was known as the geocentric theory.



evaluations from the hierarchical to the absolute was effected not only in the philosophy of the larger world, the macrocosm, but also in the theory of the lesser world, the microcosm of the human frame. In this context, the Scientific Revolution and the Protestant Reformation found their most intimate and direct connection.

Many changes were brought in the conceptions regarding the functioning of the human body. Servetus was the first to contend that there was only one blood in the human body and not two kinds of blood as previously conceived. He further said that the soul itself is the blood and supported his view with texts from the Old Testament. Such a view implied that man was wholly mortal, the soul perishing with the body. This ideological innovation of Servetus enabled him to suggest that the blood 'circulated' from the right to the left chamber of the heart through the lungs. He thus dispelled the embedded notion of the time that only the cosmic world moved in circle and the earthly elements followed a rectangular path. It was William Harvey who generalized and proved experimentally the theory of the circulation of the blood. All these developments had an influence upon the theology of one of the protestant movements of the English Civil War period, the Mortalists, so termed because they held that the soul of man perished with the body. This doctrine served to carry further the attack upon the concept of hierarchy which had been initiated by the Calvinists and the scientists. Calvin and the astronomers had questioned the existence of the celestial hierarchies but the Mortalists doubted the reality of the terrestrial hierarchies of men, animals, and plants.

In England during the 1630s John Wilkins attempted to overcome the greatest single obstacle to the union of science and Calvinist theology- the early protestant practice of interpreting the Scriptures literally- and to integrate his science with his theology by means of the doctrine of the plurality of worlds. This doctrine of the plurality of the worlds was first established by Giordano Bruno. In bringing together his science and his theology, Wilkins applied Calvin's thesis that the angelic beings were superfluous in the government of the universe, to the particular case of the motions of the heavenly bodies. Wilkins general contention was that nature was essentially economical and frugal in her operations. He also felt that Nature does not use tedious and difficult means to perform

that which can be accomplished by shorter and easier ways. Such a notion with its Calvinist flavor was of particular importance in modern science. It provided the root concept of the various 'minimum' and 'conservative' principles governing motion and change in nature, which were developed, often with theological justifications, by the scientists of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These various voices of discordance with the commonly accepted viewpoints of the time regarding man, nature, and God were met with resistance from the orthodox quarters. Bruno was accused of heresy and was thus burnt to death. Galileo<sup>6</sup> was also kept under house arrest for many years. Both these philosophers and mathematicians believed in and propagated the heliocentric theory advocated by Copernicus.

After the periods of the Civil Wars<sup>7</sup> and the Commonwealth<sup>8</sup>, the Bible and the works of the ancient and medieval philosophers were no longer, in England, taken as authoritative upon matters relating to the structure of the world. When Newton's *Principia* appeared in 1687, it encountered little religious opposition in England. It was Wilkins and the men of his generation who had borne the brunt of the Anglican resistance to science, and had made apparent the elements common to the new religion and the new science. The physicotheological system of Newton, like its immediate predecessors, enshrined the concept of cosmic absolutism, although, in the Newtonian system, the Deity was more of a privileged observer of the universe than a privileged ruler. If the universe were governed entirely by laws laid down in the beginning, then there was no need for Divine intervention in the day to day running of the world. The English puritans of the mid-

---

<sup>6</sup> Galileo was one of the foremost scientists of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He was born in Italy. Among his major contributions to modern science can be enlisted the invention of telescope. Through it he discovered the four largest moons of the Jupiter, the lunar craters, and the various phases of the Venus.

<sup>7</sup> Civil wars generally refer to the religious struggles with extreme socio-political implications that tore apart most of the European continent. It generally started as a bloody struggle between the Protestants and the Catholics. The Protestants challenged the ecclesiastical preaching disseminated by the Catholics. They also stood against the authority of the state of the time which was considered impregnable. These phenomena spanned from late 16<sup>th</sup> to early 17<sup>th</sup> century with different countries witnessing large scale violence at different periods of time. The culmination of the war in England happened with the dethroning and execution of Charles I.

<sup>8</sup> Commonwealth of England was established after the execution of Charles I. England became a Republic and its method of rule was on the lines of the welfare of the common man and not a certain class of the society.

seventeenth century developed the idea latent in Calvin's teachings that the Deity was bound by His own ordinances, so that God could not do that which is contrary to the Rule of Nature. Thus in the systems of natural philosophers the role of the Deity was changed similarly from that of the Ruler of the universe to that of the observer of cosmic events.

These developments of the seventeenth century eventually rippled in to the eighteenth century. The above discussions regarding the developments in science and religion in the seventeenth century was made to provide a background to the greater philosophical rumblings on the question of faith and God that preoccupied the intellectuals of the eighteenth century. Hence it is not a complete account of the happenings in the seventeenth century. Those developments which are pertinent to an understanding of the eighteenth century perceptions of science and religion have been discussed.

Any study of the genesis and development of modern science is incomplete without a reference to the ideas of Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes. Hence a small attempt has been made to elucidate the Baconian idols and Descartes' meditations.

### *Baconian Idols*

In the development of the method of natural science the lines of empiricism and of mathematical theory converged: in philosophical generalization the two came forward in an independent attitude. The programme of the *experience philosophy* was laid down by Bacon, but the method which formed its fundamental thought was not carried out by him in the fruitful manner which he had anticipated. The form in which Descartes brought together the scientific movement of his time to establish rationalism anew by filling the scholastic system of conceptions with the rich content of Galilean research was much more comprehensive. From these resulted far reaching metaphysical problems, this in the second half of the seventeenth century called forth an extraordinarily vigorous movement of philosophical thought- a movement in which the new principles entered into manifold antithetical combinations with the principles of medieval philosophy.

According to Bacon, everyday perception does not offer a sure basis for a true knowledge of Nature. In order to become an experience that can be used by science it must first be purified from all the erroneous additions that have grown together with it in our involuntary way of regarding things. These perversions or falsifications of pure experience are termed as '*idols*' by Bacon. He presents this doctrine of these fallacious images in analogy with the doctrine of fallacious conclusions in the old dialectic. The idols are as follows:

1. *Idols of the tribe or idola tribus*: These refer to the illusions that are given in connection to human nature in general. It is inherent to the human species to suspect an order in things and an end in it as well. In doing so this species makes itself a measure of the outer world, blindly retaining a mode of thought which has once been excited by impressions and the like.
2. *Idols of the cave or idola specus*: This idol is rooted in individual disposition. By reason of such an illusion every individual by his natural disposition and his situation in life finds himself shut into his cave.
3. *Idols of the market or idola fori*: This refers to the errors which are everywhere brought about by intercourse among men, especially by language and by adherence to the word which we substitute for the idea.
4. *Idols of the theatre or idola theatri*: This refers to the illusory phantoms of theories which human beings credulously receive from human history and repeat without subjecting them to any judgment of our own.

In this connection Bacon finds an opportunity to direct a most violent polemic against the rule of authority, against the anthropomorphism of earlier philosophy, and to demand a personal examination of things themselves, an unprejudiced reception of reality. However Bacon does not get beyond these demands. His ideas on how the '*mera experientia*' is to be gained and separated from the enveloping husks of the idols are extremely meager. Another major contribution of Bacon to the history of science is the method of induction. He proclaimed that induction was the only correct mode of elaborating facts. With its aid movement is to be made towards general cognitions

(axioms), in order that we may ultimately from these explain other phenomena. In this activity the human mind, among whose constitutional errors is hasty generalization, is to be restrained as much as possible. It is to ascend quite gradually the scale of the more general, up to the most general.

All these contributions are definitely enriching to the field of philosophy and advancement of science. However Bacon did not give any concrete answer as to the way in which his theoretical innovations are to be practically applied. All that he presaged therefore received with Galileo a definite significance usable for the investigation of Nature, by means of the mathematical principle and its application to motion.

#### *Descartes' Meditations*

To those methodological thoughts of Bacon et al Rene Descartes added a postulate of the greatest importance: the method of induction or resolution should lead to a single principle of highest and absolute certainty, from which afterwards, by the method of composition, the whole compass of experience must find its explanation. Descartes has by an inductive enumeration and a critical sifting all ideas, pressed forward to a single, certain point, in order from this point to deduce all further truths. The first task of philosophy is *analytical*, the second is *synthetic*.

Rene Descartes is held to be the father of modern philosophy and chief architect of the modern approach to the relationship between religion and science. The entire development of the European philosophy, in all its diverse tendencies, has been dependent, directly or indirectly, on the Cartesian legacy. He outlined the first version of a new method of thinking based on mathematics. His aim was to use mathematics as a model for developing a fully unified form of human knowledge. He applied this method in his '*Treatise on the World*'. The classic carrying out of his thought is presented in the '*Meditations on First Philosophy*'. In this book the philosopher portrays his struggle after truth in a dramatic dialogue with himself. In this book Descartes uses logic and

mathematics to prove each of the observations that he has made. The meditations are as follows:

Truth can be reached only by the method of doubt. Only that is true which is presented to our mind 'clearly and distinctly', leaving no room for doubt. Judgment on any matter where an inkling of doubt is found should be suspended. Sense perception does not provide any indubitable knowledge; since we cannot be a priori certain that we are not dreaming or that we are not being deceived by a malicious demon. But the very act of doubting and therefore the fact of thinking cannot itself be doubted. Doubt itself proves that I as a thinking conscious being exist. The proposition *cogito ergo sum* is true as often as I think or pronounce it. Moreover the certainty of Being is contained in none of my activities except the consciousness. For instance, that I go to walk I can imagine in my dream. I am conscious cannot be merely my imagination as imagination is itself a kind of consciousness. *Cogito ergo sum* can be admitted as the basis of knowledge.

Our mind has a natural light whereby it is capable of acquiring knowledge on most important issues without relying on sense perception. We have in our mind a natural idea of God, or a perfect being. Our individual self consciousness knows itself to be finite and therefore imperfect. It could not have fabricated this idea as a more perfect thing cannot be produced by a less perfect. The very presence of this idea is a proof of the actual existence of a perfect being. This psychological argument for God's existence, like the ontological argument in the traditional version, implies nothing about God's presence and signs in this world. God's first function, in Descartes construction, is to assure the reliability of human knowledge: being perfect, God cannot deceive us, therefore we can rely both on our commonsense belief in the reality of the material world and on our intellectual intuition. We can thus affirm the reality of the material world.

The above two meditations talk a lot. To this belong all truths of mathematics. But here belongs also the ontological proof for the existence of God. For with the same necessity of thought with which the geometrical propositions with regard to a triangle follow from the definition of the triangle, it follows from the mere definition of the most

Real being that the attribute of existence belongs to him. To possibility of thinking God suffices to prove his existence.

Descartes conceived the material world, or extension, in strictly mechanistic terms. All processes are explained by the laws of mechanics. Living organisms behave in accordance with the same principles that govern artificial automata; there is no specific realm of life. Human beings are endowed with an immaterial soul which is the seat of all sensations; animals having no soul are no more than mechanisms, and their reactions are just mechanical movements. In human beings organic processes should be distinguished from psychological events in the soul. The human organism does not differ from other mechanisms; its death is a physical phenomenon, whereas the separation of the soul is not the cause but the effect of death. The two substances-soul and body- that make up the human being cannot affect each other. Therefore the question of how we can realize, in perception, the mechanical impacts of other things in our bodies and cause movements of our body by the sheer act of will becomes difficult to solve.

It can be said that the cogito, accepted as a kind of epistemological absolute, is in Descartes' work an implicit challenge to the authority of tradition and an appeal to look for truth only in the reason of thinking individual. It implies that the only object that is directly and indubitably accessible to one's mind is its own activity; wherever else we start our beliefs will be exposed to doubt. The impact of Descartes philosophy was felt throughout the early French Enlightenment. Its general rationalist and determinist approach laid the foundation of eighteenth century materialism. On the other hand, its skeptical side and the cogito were crucially important in the rise of modern materialism.

### *THE ENLIGHTENMENT: philosophy and philosophes*

The genre of philosophical moorings in the eighteenth century was revolutionary. A whirlpool of ontological and epistemological debates on religion and science was espoused by great *philosophes* of the time. The engagement with the question of religion, reason, science, and faith formed its most important feature. These debates definitely drew its succor from the seventeenth century as has already been discussed. This intellectual movement was affiliated with the rise of the bourgeoisie and the influence of modern science. It promoted the values of intellectual and material progress, toleration and critical reason as opposed to authority and tradition and tradition in matters of politics and religion. This movement and the entire century in general have been referred to as the period of '*the enlightenment*'. The Enlightenment was characterized by a highly critical attitude towards religion, more specifically, the Christian faith and the authority of its churches. The revelation and all the Christian scriptures were subjected to scrutiny of the reason. Rationality gained a new ground. Thus with it the seeds of modernity were implanted. Such a line of thought not only questioned the scientific credibility of revelation but also enrolled in its pages many different interpretations of religion as it is and it should be for the welfare of the common man in general.

The basis of Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was given in the general features of a secular view of life, as they had been worked out during the Renaissance by the fresh movements in art, religion, politics, and natural research. While these had found their metaphysical formulation in the seventeenth century, the question which came to the foreground in the eighteenth century was how man should conceive, in the setting of the new *Weltanschauung*<sup>9</sup>, his own nature and his own position. In the presence of the value set upon this question, the interest in the various metaphysical conceptions in which the new *Weltanschauung* had been embodied retreated more and more decidedly into the background. All the doctrines of the Enlightenment which offer such a vehement polemic against speculation are, in truth, working from the beginning with the metaphysics of the

---

<sup>9</sup> *Weltanschauung* refers to a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint.



sound commonsense which at last raised its voice so high, and which ultimately only assumed as self evident truth that which had fallen to it from the achievements of the labor of the preceding centuries.

The beginnings of the philosophy of Enlightenment was in England where in connection with the well ordered conditions which followed the close of the period of the revolution, a powerful upward movement of literary life claimed philosophy also in the interests of general culture. From England this literature was transplanted to France. In France the opposition of the ideals which it brought with it to the social and political status, worked in such a way that only was the presentation of the thoughts more excited and vehement from the outset, but the thought themselves also take on a sharper point, and turn their negative energy more powerfully against the existing conditions in the Church and the state. At first from France, and then from the direct influence of England, Germany received the ideas of the Enlightenment for which it had already received an independent preparation in a more theoretical manner. At this point it is interesting to reflect on the ideological terrain through which the debate on religion proceeds in the eighteenth century. The various arguments and counter arguments on reason and religion by the *philosophes* of the time are noteworthy.

The tendency of the Enlightenment philosophy was toward establishing the universal, "true" Christianity by means of philosophy. True Christianity is in this sense identified with the *religion of reason, or natural religion*, and is to be dissolved out from the different forms of positive, historical Christianity. At first, such a universal Christianity was still allowed the character of a revealed religion, but the complete agreement of this revelation with reason is maintained. John Locke has spoken at length on this. According to Locke, the use of reason (a divine gift) seemed not only to demonstrate God's existence but to validate the essential truths of Christianity as revealed through the Bible. In his '*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*' (1690), he claimed that 'reason is natural revelation, whereby the eternal Father of Light, and foundation of all knowledge, communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has lain within the reach of their natural faculties'. The adherers of such a viewpoint conceive of the relation between

natural and revealed religion in this sense: revelation is above reason, but in harmony with reason; it is the necessary supplement to natural knowledge. That is revealed which the reason cannot find out of itself but can understand as in harmony with itself after the revelation has taken place. *Socinians*<sup>10</sup> furthered this idea. They too recognized very vigorously the necessity of revelation. However they emphasized that nothing can be revealed that is not accessible to rational knowledge. Hence only what is rational in the religious documents is to be regarded as truth- the revealed truth. In other words, it is reason which decides what shall be held as revelation. The Socinians comprehended religion under the characteristic of law, and this constituted their peculiar position. What God reveals to mankind is not metaphysics but rather it is law. But if religion objectively is law giving, subjectively it is fulfilling the law- not an acceptance of theoretical doctrines, nor even merely a moral disposition, but subjection to the law revealed by God and a keeping of all its prescriptions.

If, however, the criterion of revelation is ultimately to lie solely in the rationality of the same, the completely consistent result of this theory is that historical revelation should be set aside as superfluous, and natural religion alone retained. This was done by the English *Deists*<sup>11</sup>. John Toland is the leader of deism in so far as he first undertook to strip Christianity, .i.e. the universal religion of reason, of all mysteries, and reduce it, as regards the knowledge which it contains, to the truths of the "natural light", .i.e. to a philosophical theory of the world. In his most famous book, '*Christianity not Mysterious*' (1696) Toland claims that mysteries and miracles of the Christian religion are an imposition and quite unreasonable. The following are extracts from the chapter '*The State of the Question*' of the same book:

TH-17361

*"Some of them say the mysteries of the Gospel are to be understood only in the sense of the Ancient Fathers. But that is so multifarious, and inconsistent with itself, as to make it*

---

<sup>10</sup> Socinians are the adherents of a 17<sup>th</sup> century theological movement professing belief in God and adherence to the Christian Scriptures but denying the divinity of Christ and consequently denying the Trinity.

<sup>11</sup> Deism signifies the belief in a single God and in a religious practice founded solely on natural reason rather than on supernatural revelation. Deism was most prominent in England, the only place where it approached the status of a movement. The practitioners of deism are known as deists.



*impossible for anybody to believe so many contradictions at once. They themselves did caution their readers from leaning upon their authority, without the evidence of reason: and thought as little of becoming a rule of faith to their posterity, as we do to ours. Moreover, as all the Fathers were not authors, so we cannot properly be said to have their genuine sense. The works of those that have written are wonderfully corrupted and adulterated, or not entirely extant: and if they were, their meaning is much more obscure, and subject to controversy, than that of the Scripture..... Some will have us always believe what the literary sense imports, with little or no consideration for reason, which they reject as not fit to be employed about the revealed part of religion. Others assert that we may use reason as the instrument, but not the rule of our belief. The first contend, some mysteries may be, or at least seem to be contrary to reason, and yet received by faith. The second that no mystery is contrary to reason but all are above it. Both of them from different principles agree, that several doctrines of the New Testament belong no farther to the enquiries of reason, than to prove them divinely revealed, and that they are properly mysteries still. On the contrary, we hold that reason is the only foundation of all certitude: and that nothing revealed, whether as to its manner or existence, is more exempted from its disquisitions, than the ordinary phenomena of nature. Wherefore, we likewise maintain, according to the title of this discourse, that there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to reason, nor above it; and no Christian doctrine can be properly called a mystery”<sup>12</sup>.*

But the content which the Enlightenment philosophy sought to give to this, its religion of Nature, had two sources, - theoretical and practical reason. As regards the first, Deism contains a metaphysics based upon natural philosophy. In the second aspect it involves a theory of the world from the point of view of moral philosophy. In this way the natural religion of the Enlightenment was involved in the movement of the theoretical and also in that of practical problems. In these its two elements stood in close connection, but found each a particular development, so that they could diverge and become mutually isolated.

---

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Paul Hyland, *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader*, Routledge Francis and Taylor Group: London, 2003. pp65-67

The complete union of the two elements is found in the most important thinker of this movement, *Shaftesbury*. The centre of his doctrine and of his own nature is formed by what he himself called *enthusiasm*,- enthusiasm for all that is good, true, and beautiful, the elevation of soul above itself to more universal values, the living out of the whole peculiar power of the individual by the devotion to something higher. In fact religion is nothing else but this- a life of increased and enhanced personality, a knowing one's self to be one with the great connected all of reality. The source of religion is, therefore, objectively as well as subjectively, the harmony and beauty and perfection of the universe; the unavoidable impression received from this perfection awakens enthusiasm. Shaftesbury further contends that there is nothing in itself evil- nothing which entirely misses its mark. All the imperfections of the particular vanish in the perfection of the universe; every discord is lost in the harmony of the world.

This *universal optimism*<sup>13</sup>, whose theodicy is in its conceptions completely Neo-Platonic in character, knows only one proof for the existence of God, the *physico-theological*. A new turn to such theodicy was provided by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In the conceptions of his metaphysics, Leibniz attempted to show that the actual presence of evil in the world does not make out a case against its having originated from an all-good and all-powerful creative activity. Physical evil is a necessary consequence of moral evil in the ethical world order; it is natural punishment of sin. Moral evil however has its ground in the finiteness and limitation of creatures, and this latter is metaphysical evil. Hence the entire problem of theodicy is reduced to a single question: 'why did God create or permit metaphysical evil?' The answer lies in the fact that finiteness belongs to the conception of a created being; limitation is the essential nature of all creatures. It is a logical necessity that a world can exist only out of finite beings which reciprocally limit each other and are determined by their creator himself. But finite beings are imperfect. A world that should consist of nothing but perfect beings is a contradiction in terms. Since it is an "eternal", .i.e., a conceptional or rational truth, that out of metaphysical evil follows first moral and then physical evil, that out of finiteness follows sin, and out of sin sorrow, it is then a logical necessity that a world without evil is unthinkable. However much, therefore the

---

<sup>13</sup> □ Optimism is the doctrine that this world is the best possible world.

goodness of God might desire to avoid evil, the divine wisdom makes a world without evil an impossibility. Metaphysical truths are independent of the divine will; the latter in its creative activity is bound to them.

On the other hand, the goodness, which belongs to the conception of God as truly as does his wisdom, is a guarantee that the evils are as few as possible. There is an infinite number of possible worlds, none of them entirely without evil, but some affected with much more numerous and heavy evils than others. If now from all these possible worlds, which God's wisdom spread out before him, he created this actual world, it can only have been the choice of the best that guided him in so doing; he has made real the one which contains the least and the fewest evils. The contingency of the world consists in the fact that it exists, not through a metaphysical necessity but through a choice exercised among many possibilities; and since this choice proceeds from the all-good will of God, it is unthinkable that the world is any other than the best. Theodicy cannot proceed to deny the evil in the world, for evil belongs to the very idea of the world; but it can prove that this world contains as little evil as in any way possible in accordance with metaphysical law. God's goodness would gladly have produced a world without evil, but his wisdom permitted him only the best among possible worlds. Hence arises the common expression, *optimism*.

The eighteenth century behaved as though it was the essential aim of Leibniz to prove that the world is the most perfect that can be thought. But the fact that he did this only under the presumption of the metaphysical necessity of evil was, in characteristic fashion, scarcely noted in the literature of the time, which itself was through and through optimistic in its thought. The world is such as it is only because God has willed it; by virtue of its omnipotence he might have chosen another; but in the choice of the possibilities before him the divine will is bound to the divine intellect as the "eternal truths". Above all reality hovers the fate prescribed by logic. The believers of natural religion contended that they could attain along the physico-theological path to the conception of the deity as creative intelligence. The conception of God as personality, which survived in this procedure as the last remnant from positive religion, offered a hold

for the moral side also of natural religion, and in turn found in that its support. But where only theoretical element was pursued, natural religion found itself involved in the course of development taken by naturalistic metaphysics, and found in this finally its downfall. Toland had already given a complete pantheistic turn to the admiration of Nature, which for him constituted the essential content of religious feeling. With the proclamation of the complete dominance of the mechanical explanation of Nature, the organic world was also recognized as in principle the product of the universal mechanism of Nature and thus the physicotheological proof lost its power over the mind. The Lisbon earthquake (1755) which shocked the entire Europe further distanced the thinkers from the physicotheological proof. In fact it was in this context that Voltaire launched a scathing attack on the *optimism* of Leibniz. In his '*Poem on the Lisbon Disaster*'<sup>14</sup> Voltaire's inconsolable disillusionment is evident. He has drawn an extremely poignant sketch of the earthquake's impact on humanity. In the opening lines of the poem he remarks with sarcasm the following:

*"Unhappy mortals! Dark and mourning earth!  
Affrighted gathering of human kind!  
Eternal lingering of useless pain!  
Come, ye philosophers, who cry, 'All's well',  
And contemplate this ruin of a world."*

In this poem he has ridiculed Leibniz notion of God, good and evil. Further he has also criticized Plato. He has found hope in the philosophy of Pierre Bayle. Like Bayle he suggests that all religions should show a spirit of tolerance within a society. He was a theist. In his *Philosophical Dictionary*<sup>15</sup> he has defined a theist in the following way:

*"The theist is a man firmly persuaded of the existence of a Supreme Being equally good and powerful, who has formed all extended, vegetating, sentient, and reflecting*

---

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Paul Hyland, *The Enlightenment: A sourcebook and Reader*, Routledge Francis and Taylor: London, 2003, pp. 77-82.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* pp.82-83.

*existences, who perpetuates their species, who punishes crimes without cruelty, and rewards virtuous actions with kindness.*

*The theist does not know how God punishes, how He rewards, how he pardons; for he is not presumptuous enough to flatter himself that he understands how God acts, but he knows that God does act, and that He is just.....*

*.... he does not embrace any of the sects, who all contradict themselves; his religion is the most ancient and the most extended; for the simple adoration of God has preceded all the systems in the world. He speaks a language that all nations understand, while they are unable to understand each other's."*

All the above arguments and counter arguments saw a new dimension with the emergence of a materialist viewpoint. Atheism and materialism drew upon these above conceptions its veil. All adaptation, all order of Nature, is only a phenomenon in the human mind. Nature itself knows only the necessity of atomic motion, and in it there are no worth determinations, that are dependent upon ends or norms of value. Nature's conformity to law is active with the same rigor in those things which otherwise appear aimless or unpurposeful, irregular or anomalous, as in the things which we judge in reference to their agreement with our designs or customs, and approve as purposeful. The wise man should make this indifference of Nature his own; he should see through the relativity of all conceptions of ends; there is no real norm or order. This principle was applied by Diderot to aesthetics. The correctness of Nature is accordingly the only thing that art should display, the only thing that it should grasp and give back; beauty is one of those valuations which have no objective validity. Materialism knows only an art void of ideals, only the indifferent copy of any reality whatever.

Baron d'Holbach was the most important materialist *philosophe* of the Enlightenment period. In most of his works including his most famous work *Le Systeme de la Nature* (*Systems of Nature*), Holbach has attacked religious beliefs and argued for the sole reality of the material world. He claimed that the notions of God (and all other religious ideas)

are unnecessary and contrary to common sense. The world consisted entirely of matter in motion: *'matter always existed; that it moves by virtue of its essence; that all the phenomena of Nature are ascribable to the diversified motion of the variety of matter she contains; and which like the phoenix is continually regenerating from its own ashes.'*<sup>16</sup> (*Systems of Nature*). In the preface to another famous work of his, Holbach has proclaimed that *'all religion is but a castle in the air'*. In this book he has made a dexterous effort to prove that it is man's naivety and childishness that makes him believe in God and religion. He further proclaims that science and reason can help man come out of this superfluous belief in religion and God which has been weaved by our forefathers.

*"Everything is good coming from the hands of the Author of things, everything degenerates in the hands of man"*<sup>17</sup>. This is the famous observation of Jean Jacques Rousseau in his book *Emile, Book I*. He denounces the doctrines of philosophes such as Holbach, as well as religious dogmas that are dependent on Revelation. According to him, the 'inner light' is all that is required to give humans direction in religion, and stresses that religion should be a spiritual rather than ritualistic experience. One should serve God in the simplicity of heart. Rousseau does not deny the existence of God. But he is against the blame game that God is often forced into. In his characteristic style in Book IV of *Emile* he has written that whatever evil befalls of man is a result of his own creation. God is always kind to which his subjects. He writes: *"the evil that man does falls back on him without changing anything in the system of the world, without hindering the human species from preserving itself even against its will. To complain that God does not hinder the commission of evil, is the same as complaining about His having given him an excellent nature, about His having put in men's actions the morality that ennobles them, and dignified them with virtue. Supreme enjoyment is inward content of mind; to merit this content we are placed upon earth and endued with liberty, tempted by passions, and restrained by reason and conscience."*<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Paul Hyland, *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader*, Routledge Francis and Taylor: London, 2003, pp. 87-90

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. pp.84-87.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp.83-87.



On the question on revelation he writes:

*“I was told that a revelation was necessary for pointing out the manner in which God thought fit to be served: and in support of this, I was informed of the extravagant modes of worship instituted by man, and those who told me so, did not advert that this very diversity of religions is owing to pretended revelations. As soon as people took it into their heads to have a revelation from the Deity, every man had a communication after his own way, and made the Deity say what he pleased. If one had paid attention only to what God says to the heart of man, there would never have been more than one religion on earth.”*<sup>19</sup>

While the foundations of Deism based on natural philosophy was thus crumbling from within, its epistemological basis also began to waver; for all attacks on the possibility of a metaphysics struck also at that of a natural religion, which indeed in its contents exhibited but a survival of religious metaphysics. In this respect the Baconian system was the most dangerous foe of the deistic doctrine. It allowed religion to stand only as revelation and combated the possibility of knowing its doctrines by the aid of reason, or even of merely bringing them in accord with reason. Pierre Bayle was the most energetic supporter of this standpoint. He worked systematically to show that all dogmatic doctrines were contrary to reason. He laid bare their contradictions with absolute keenness. He sought to prove that they were absurd for the natural reason. Religion, for Diderot, is possible only as a positive revelation in contradiction with philosophical knowledge. He defends with all keenness the twofold truth.

David Hume is another towering figure in this discourse on religious philosophy of the eighteenth century. He launched a powerful assault not only upon Christianity and the claim that its truth could be verified by the miracles recounted in Scriptures, but also on all forms of deism and natural religion. This was part of a wider examination of the concept of causation, in which he argued that knowledge about the relationship between cause and effect is derived entirely from observation and experience. He further

---

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Paul Hyland, *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader*, Routledge Francis and Taylor: London. 2003. pp.83-87

contended that when we infer any particular cause from an effect we must proportion the one to the other, and can never be allowed to ascribe to the cause any qualities, but what are exactly sufficient to produce that effect. Since, unlike humankind, the Deity is known only by his productions, it is not possible to infer anything about the authors of the existence or order of the universe other than what appears in the works of nature. Hume did not deny that there can be a God and that divinity may possibly be endowed with attributes, which we have never seen exerted but this was mere speculation. So from Hume's views it may be deduced that natural religion is a reasonable mode of view for the practical man but it should not profess to be scientific doctrine. While he found that religion cannot be based on demonstrative rational knowledge, he showed also that the question as to the origin of religion in the human mind must be completely separated from the speculative investigation. He shows how in the primitive apprehension of nature and in the feelings of fear and hope, of terror and of blessing, which are associated with it, and in the comparison of the course of Nature with the vicissitudes of human life, there lay the incitements to the formation of the ideas of higher beings, and to worship designed to appease or to flatter. The natural, primitive form of religion is, therefore, polytheism, which thinks and treats these higher powers in a completely anthropomorphic manner. But the manifold forms assumed by myth fuse in accordance with the laws of the association of ideas. The myths pass over into each other, and ultimately the whole body of religious ideas becomes condensed into the belief in a single divine being, to which the purposeful order of the universe is due- a faith, to be sure, which cannot preserve itself in a pure form, but is associated in various ways with its original presuppositions. The history of religion is the gradual transformation from polytheism to monotheism. Its result coincides with the teleological view of the world, not indeed capable of scientific proof but bound up with the natural feeling of belief.

The Enlightenment thinkers did believe that there has been a corruption in revealed religion. But they were entirely devoid of any historical comprehension to this effect. They considered the then condition of religion as replete with inventories of lies and deceit to serve vested interests. Such incapacity to do justice to the historical nature of positive religions agreed well with the universal lack in historical sense and

understanding which was peculiar to the whole philosophy of the Enlightenment. This had its ground in the fact that modern thought had made its growth, hand in hand with natural science, in investigating that which is either timelessly or always valid. Only in a few instances was this ban broken through.

The entire discussion on the philosophy of the Enlightenment showed the turmoil in the society of the time. There were different lines of thought on religion. Religion was subject to scrutiny. Some acknowledged the existence of God, some doubted it. Also visible was the opinions of a few *philosophes* on religious toleration and the concept of a single God and religion- the religion of humanity. Toleration can be considered the beginning of Enlightenment as Europe in the eighteenth century conceived it because it is the necessary social condition for people to use their own intellects to decide what they will believe. The Enlightenment's demand for toleration is thus the demand that people be given the opportunity to fulfill their deepest spiritual vocation: that of using their intellects to determine the faith they will live by. People miss this vocation whenever "faith" for them ceases to be a belief founded on their own evaluation of the evidence authority. The Enlightenment's judgment on such a spiritually crippling, unenlightened faith was pronounced more eloquently by John Locke. According to him faith is **nothing** but a firm assent of our mind which if it be regulated as is our Duty, can't be afforded to anything, but upon good Reason. Another visible element of the enlightenment period was rationalization. Every belief should be subject to enquiry through the power of reason. All inherited truths should also be dealt with an eye of skepticism. Hence the element of doubt was also introduced by the enlightenment. Nothing should be taken for granted. There should be a rationalistic or scientific approach to view things. Moreover empiricism was also emphasized. It should be remembered that the first moorings of modernity in terms of rationalization, scientificity, challenge to orthodoxy, and secularization was rooted in the enlightenment of the eighteenth century. The debate on secularization continues to this day. It has in fact acquired new dimensions. The following section focuses on the relationship between science, secularization, and the changing role of religion.

## *SCIENCE, SECULARIZATION, AND CHANGING ROLE OF RELIGION*

From the philosophy of the Enlightenment arose the modern notions of secularization. In the literal sense secularization is generally defined as the process of transfer from ecclesiastical to lay or civil use, possession, or control<sup>20</sup>. However as simple as the word might seem to be, sociologists hardly as much as agree to a universal meaning of the term. These different interpretations of secularization stem from the varied conceptions regarding religion and its future. Some sociologists maintain that religion is dead or decaying. Another group contends that religion still persists<sup>21</sup>. Sociologists who argue in favor of the persistence of religion stress that humans always need to endow their world with ultimate meaning, and that religion alone can provide this meaning of life. Thus, for example, for Mircea Eliade, spirituality is the very essence of human nature<sup>22</sup>. Echoing this position sociologist Andrew Greeley writes that “the basic religious needs and the basic religious functions have not changed very notably since the late Ice Age”<sup>23</sup>. He further elaborates five main persistent functions of religion<sup>24</sup>. These are as follows:

1. The provision of a meaning system allowing man to cope with the question of the Ultimate.
2. The provision of a feeling of social belonging.
3. The integration of the forces of sexuality into the rest of human life.
4. The provision of a mystical channel with the Powers that are real
5. The provision of leaders supporting the common man in his attempt to wrestle with the Ultimate.

Some others contend that religion is the only way for humans to obtain “compensators” for some of the rewards which they permanently seek, but are unable to obtain. Proposed

---

<sup>20</sup> Merriam Webster’s 11<sup>th</sup> Collegiate Dictionary.

<sup>21</sup> Oliver Tschannen’s ‘Sociological Controversies in Perspective’ in Review of Religious Research, vol.36, No.1, September 1994. pp. 70-86.

<sup>22</sup> ibid

<sup>23</sup> ibid

<sup>24</sup> ibid

by Rodney Stark and William S Bainbridge, this theory is based on a view of human nature exactly opposite to that of Greeley (man as the rational animal seeking to maximize utilities, as opposed to man as the symbolic animal wrestling with the Ultimate). Thus “humans seek what they perceive to be rewards and they avoid what they perceive to be costs”<sup>25</sup>. Thus religion, as the most general system of compensators based on supernatural assumptions can’t fade away- not as long as human beings seek unattainable rewards.

Another development in the form of religion in the contemporary world which asserts its permanence is the notion privatized spirituality. This notion emphasizes the prevalence of many private and individual practices in modern society outside the context of organized religion- private prayer, superstitions, listening to religious broadcasts on the radio, an interest in astrology and reading one’s horoscope in magazines, alternative holistic therapies and personal growth regimes, conceptions of the spirituality of nature and the sacredness of planetary ecosystem and so on. Such a definition of religion is definitely very broad and thereby excludes chances of the contemporary society being named as a secularized society. It is also very difficult to assess empirically the notion of secularization in this context. It needs to be interpreted in accordance to the connotation that one gives to religion. Thus the term secularization has been used in a number of ways. Shiner distinguishes six meanings or uses of the term. These are as follows:

First it refers to the decline of religion whereby previously accepted religious symbols, doctrines, and institutions lose their prestige and significance, culminating in a society without religion.

Second refers to greater conformity with ‘this world’ in which attention is turned away from the supernatural and towards the exigencies of this life and its problems. Religious concerns and groups become indistinguishable from social concerns and non religious groups.

---

<sup>25</sup> Oliver Tschannen’s Sociological Controversies in Perspective in Review of Religious Research, Vol.36, No.1, September 1994. pp. 70-86.

Third secularization may mean the disengagement of society from religion. Religion withdraws to its own sphere and becomes a matter for private life, acquires a wholly inward character and ceases to influence any aspect of social life outside of religion itself.

Fourth religion may undergo a transportation of religious beliefs and institutions into non religious forms. This involves the transformation of knowledge, behavior, and institutions that were once thought to be grounded in divine power into phenomena of purely human creation and responsibility- a kind of anthropologized religion.

Fifth the meaning relates to the desacralization of the world. The world loses its sacred character as man and nature becomes the object of rational-causal explanation and manipulation in which the supernatural plays no part.

Finally secularization may mean simply the movement from a 'sacred' to a 'secular' society in the sense of an abandonment of any commitment to traditional values and practices, the acceptance of change and the founding of all decisions and actions on a rational and utilitarian basis. This is the most widely referred connotation of secularization.

Thus it is evident that the diversity of the meaning of the term is associated with the wide range of interpretation of the term religion. From the wide variety of views on the concept and process of secularization, Tschannen has discerned three core elements<sup>26</sup>. These are differentiation, rationalization, and worldliness. Associated with these are a number of related processes, namely, autonomization, privatization, generalization, pluralization, and the collapse of the world view. Differentiation refers to the process by which religion and religious institutions become differentiated from other spheres. An obvious instance is the separation of the Church and the state. Rationalization refers to the process by which, once separated from religion, other social institutions operate upon principles rationally related to their specific social functions and independently of

---

<sup>26</sup> Oliver Tschannen's 'Sociological Controversies in Perspective' in *Review of Religious Research*, (Vol.36, No.1, September 1994) pp 70-86.

religious values and criteria. Economic life, for example, increasingly in the modern world came to be dominated by the logic of the market and by rational calculation. Finally, such processes impact back upon religion itself which becomes less concerned with transcendental matters and worldlier in its outlook. It seeks less to save souls and more to provide psychological comfort.

Differentiation leads to religion losing its social influence over many aspects of society. For example it no longer dominates the educational system. Autonomization refers to the process by which social institutions become autonomous and free of the influence of religion. The result is an increasing privatization of religion which becomes a matter of individual choice and conscience rather than of publicly upheld duty and obligation. On the other hand, religion may take on a more general and diffuse role (generalization) as, for example, in sacralizing the institutions of the state and government in what has been called civil religion. However, religious institutions lose the monopoly or near monopoly position they once held and religious pluralism comes to prevail. Finally religious affiliation and practice decline.

Rationalization is associated with an increasingly scientific outlook, a weakening plausibility of religious beliefs and progressive rejection of them. As a result a worldlier ethos prevails. All these core elements of the notion of secularization, however, do not imply the disappearance of religion. It only reflects the declining authority of religion. This echoes very closely to the definition proposed by Wilson that 'secularization refers to the process by which religious institutions, actions, and consciousness lose their social significance'<sup>27</sup>. In the context it would be interesting to discuss the views of Bryan Wilson on secularization of the society and the individual against the backdrop of the progress in science and the changing role of religion.

---

<sup>27</sup> Bryan R Wilson's *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment*, C.A.Watts and co: London, 1966. p 14.

*Bryan Wilson on religion in a secular society*

Wilson is of the contention that religion is in the most definite and obvious ways losing its importance. However simultaneously he maintains that the role of religion in the individual's life cannot be neglected even in a modern society. In fact in the concluding sentence of his very famous book "Religion in Secular Society"<sup>28</sup>, Wilson predicts that in response to the growing institutionalization, impersonality, and bureaucracy of modern society, religion will find new functions to perform. However that would not be the religion of ecumenism but the religion of the sects. Religious thinking, practices and institutions were the very centre of the life of western society in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. But this does not suggest that there were no non-believers in these centuries. It was just that religion was dominant in this period and dictated all aspects of social life. However the situation changed manifestly in the twentieth century. The process of change is still on. This change occurs at different pace in different societies. This change occurred due to the progress in the new knowledge .i.e. Science.

Wilson has very dexterously tried to show how the transition in the role and import of religion has taken place. To begin with he contends that the man of the past used to live in a community. Community can be defined as an on going local group and essentially religious. It was affective, customary, constituted of stable units with on going, and sustained relationships. It lived in continuity with the past and the past was a vital determinant of the present. So community has become a vestigial remnant of the past in contemporary Western life. The contemporary life is characterized by a societal system. Such a system is characterized as controlled, rationally articulated, increasingly organized, and consciously planned. It is dominated by industrial values and establishes technical controls. It is described in abstract concepts and categories, not in concrete terms and the concepts are those that transcend local experience. People begin to live in accordance with these abstractions rather than at the dictates of concrete experiences.

---

<sup>28</sup>

Bryan Wilson's Religion in Secular Society, C.A.Watts and co: London, 1966.



Thus it can be said that the modern social organization is the organization of a 'society'- "a self defined, autonomous, ongoing, internally structured, coherent system of segmented relationships that embrace more or less totally a large number of people who share at least the broad outlines of a cultural system of segmented relationships that embrace more or less totally a large number of people who share at least the broad outlines of a cultural system and who are controlled by an identifiably common political system"<sup>29</sup>. In such a set up the place of religion is certainly in the decline. There is no doubt a continuance of religious institutions, sub-cultures, and individuals who manifest religious dispositions. However the assumptions on which modern social organizations proceed are secular assumptions. The processes of production and consumption; the co-ordination of activities; the agencies of control; the methods of transmission of knowledge- all are organized on practical, empirical, and rational prescriptions. Thus societal organization demands the mobilization of intellectual faculties: it contrasts with the requirements of communal organization, which relies on the mobilization and manipulation of affective dispositions. In a societal system, actions of a mystical, marginal, or supernatural disposition is pushed to the marginal, "voluntary" areas of activity. Wilson further elaborates that such societal systems arose very slowly over the course of history. Religious ideologies and organizations played a part in their emergence. It is so because religion spoke the language that man already knew and so new ideas had to be expressed in terms of the old. This is evident from the events that were discussed in the period of the Enlightenment. Science or new knowledge was first expressed as an enlargement of religious understanding and was accorded religious significance. This can be substantiated by the religious dispositions of men like Kepler, Newton, and Faraday. Thus, radically secularizing developments were first enunciated within the framework of religious discourse.

Thus it is quite obvious that religious functions were greatly observed in community living. Before proceeding on to the elucidation of the changing role of religion and the way the change has taken place it is interesting to reflect on the functions of religion. In

---

<sup>29</sup> Bryan R Wilson's 'Aspects of Secularization in the West' in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, No.3, Vol.4, Dec 1976. pp 259-276.

the views of Wilson, religion performed both manifest and latent functions. Manifestly the most important function of religion is to provide *salvation*. This idea of salvation extended from immediate relief, solace, security, reassurance, or the removal of curses, to such all-inclusive ideas as the continuance of life after death, or the resurrection of the body. Salvation was something given by the Gods and the supernatural forces. The latent functions of religion were as follows<sup>30</sup>:

1. Religion was an agency of social control, a system of taboos and prescriptions, legitimated by reference to the supernatural order.
2. Religion subserved social cohesion, providing supernatural legitimation for the values men held in common, values they saw as characterizing their social life. Religion helped to “objectify” these values, giving them the appearance of some supra-social authority.
3. Religion legitimated group ends and activities, the policies that were followed, the wars that were to be fought.
4. Religion interpreted the cosmos, giving sense to the physical, and the social world, and meaning and purpose to the lives of men, even if that meaning was more on the order of affective reassurance than of intellectual discourse.
5. Religion facilitated the expression of emotion, prescribing the circumstances and styles in which men might, with approval, express joy, grapple with fear, indulge in a sense of grief, in ways and at times that did not disrupt the rhythm of group life. Since human emotion is potentially the greatest hazard to stable social life, religion was necessarily engaged in the management of the collective expression (and the restoration) of the emotions.

However in the modern society there have been tremendous changes in the functions- both manifest and latent- of religion. How is it so? As has already been stated modern man lives in a society which is highly rational and bureaucratic. Men assess the world in terms of empirical and rational motivations. They find themselves involved in

---

<sup>30</sup> Bryan R. Wilson's 'Aspects of Secularization in the West', in Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, No.3, Vol.4, Dec 1976. pp. 259-276.

rational organizations and rationally determined roles which allow small scope for religious predilections. Man is affected by a cause-effect thinking pattern. He is more pre-occupied with immediate, empirical ends and pragmatic tests. It may be that much of this rationality is derived from the participation in a society which is regulated by devices and machines which operate according to the criteria of efficiency. There is a dominance of economic costing over spiritual aspirations in modern society. So the function of providing salvation as performed by religion seems to be lost on modern society. In modern society with its calculated operations and abstract categories, its rational procedures, bureaucratic planning, and pragmatic tests, men are taught to save themselves. Their goals are instrumental, their techniques are scientific, and the type of reasoning which they must necessarily engage is empirical and procedural. Supernatural salvation or even supernatural help, by faith in higher powers becomes less congenial to the ideas and assumptions of everyday life. Since life has itself become more thoroughly regulated, since we expect to be able to solve our human and social problems by science and planning, since the hardships we suffer from are no longer "unexplained" and "unpredictable", so there is less thought of a compensatory life hereafter.

Wilson counters the latent functions of religion with modern weapons as well. According to him, societal systems have evolved alternative and more conscious mechanisms to fulfill these functions, in so far as they are still needed. To this extent he employs the concept '*societalization*'<sup>31</sup>. The process of societalization is the process by which the apparently "accidental" effects of particular social arrangements, which remained undiscovered until sociologists discovered them, are subject to rational thought and deliberate action. Thus instead of the latent functions of religion, modern society arranges its affair by rational and technical procedures. Thus,

1. Social control is achieved by legal procedures and by strictly technical devices.

---

<sup>31</sup> Bryan R Wilson's 'Aspects of Secularization in the West' in Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, No.3, Vol.4, (Dec, 1976) pp 259-276.

2. Social cohesion is prescribed in charters and declarations, constitutions and bills of rights. Beyond these the shared involvement in institutional life is underwritten by a vast substructure of legal arrangement, from unemployment insurance systems to credit ratings.
3. God no longer legitimates political action: elections and manifestoes in the name of “the people” now legitimate political policies and programme.
4. Explanations are now in strictly scientific terms. We turn increasingly to experts whose knowledge is based on the empirical and rational procedures of science to explain our world. The unexplained is no longer the “mystery”, it is only the “as yet unsolved problem”.
5. Modern society has evolved through a massive repression of the emotions, but what now occurs is a redistribution of the times and circumstances for emotional life- with mass recreational facilities to stimulate emotional life- with mass recreational facilities to stimulate emotional release in ‘controlled’ contexts so as to leave other areas of life (particularly work role performances) free from the extraneous influence of emotion.

Hence there are many displaced functions of religion all of which indicate the secularity of the model of operation of large scale societal systems. Religion thus serves to sanctify the community. But in the modern world, in the societally organized system, community ceases to be the principle of social organization. So in the societal system religion ceases to be the presiding agency in man’s affairs. It is no longer the court of last appeal for social organization. It no longer legitimates social arrangements, relationships, authority structures, and customs. It becomes one among several other “social institutions”. It is secularization that gains prominence. He does not use secularization in the ideological sense. In his words “secularization is used simply as a fact that religion- seen as a way of thinking, as the performance of particular practices, and as the institutionalization and organization of these patterns of thought and action has lost its influence in the U.S.A., England, and other western societies.”<sup>32</sup> Religion is not the most powerful determinant of the conduct of lives for

---

<sup>32</sup>

Bryan R Wilson, *Religion in secular society*, C.A.Watts, London, 1966.

the generality of men in western society, whether Church going or not. In the modern world religion is a remnant – a recollection of what was once thought to be “the natural order”, the order involved in community life. The change is not simply a matter of men ceasing to believe in the supernatural. It is much more a matter of the creation of a social context in which empirical rational thinking is demanded because the social order itself is no longer invested with sacred meanings and mysteries, but is regulated with technology. Thus secularization is the decline of community<sup>33</sup>. It is a concomitant of societalization<sup>34</sup>. He further clarifies that to discuss secularization is not to mount an attack on religious institutions. It is rather to acknowledge an actual social circumstance of the contemporary world. By secularization is meant the process by which religious thinking, practice, and institutions lose social significance<sup>35</sup>.

However all these discussions on modernity, science, technology, secularization, and of course the receding influences of religion does not negate its entire existence. He proceeds to depict the anomaly prevalent in the very process of secularization in the modern society<sup>36</sup>. According to him, societalization<sup>36</sup> imposes a process of rationalization and secularization making religion appear obsolete. The assumptions in modern society are that men can manage by their own technical and rational resilience. Yet, Wilson contends, men remain partly non rational beings. The very process of socialization demands the distribution of affective concerns. In the modern world, unlike in the traditional there is profound discontinuity between the situation of socialization and the impersonal world where the individual will live more and more of his later life. In the role articulated society love, trust, humanity is not the basis on which operations are conducted. Moral and humane faculties are replaced by technical criteria of efficiency. Yet without trust, mutuality, civic responses, and disinterested good will even highly rational systems cannot work. There is still an

---

<sup>33</sup> Bryan R Wilson's 'Aspects of Secularization in the West' in Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, No.3, Vol.4, (Dec, 1976) pp 259-276

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Bryan R Wilson, Religion in secular society, C.A.Watts, London, 1966

<sup>36</sup> Bryan R Wilson's 'Aspects of Secularization in the West' in Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, No.3, Vol.4, (Dec, 1976) pp 259-276.

ultimate dependence on human dispositions. Thus the paradox that societalization leads to secularization, but threatens the basic value orientations on which any kind of human society must depend. The human aspect of the social paradox is equally apparent. Men still seek community. Many of the communal ventures of our time, from sectarianism to hippy pads in the West are in their own way a search for the advantages and virtues of a world we have lost. There is a demand for meaningful and therefore local relationships- for the benefits of life in the stable community. That demand is sometimes represented by sociologists as a sociological quest. So it can be said that in the background of an extreme rationality the role of religion is still sought for crucial psychological functions including the provision of individual meaning and life purpose, explanations of suffering and moral values and procedures. Modern technical and bureaucratic societies are not good at generating subjective meanings, theodicies, or shared moral values and so, despite the decline of its public influence, religion still has a crucial role in the construction of subjective and moral worlds, albeit in a more privatized form<sup>37</sup>.

Having said that Wilson's conclusion in his own words can be thus presented:

*"The process of societalization has effectively eliminated the basis for integration between religion and social life. Religion can't solemnize and sanctify the computer, the electronic devices- they need no such sanctification or legitimation. Religion in secular society will remain peripheral, relatively weak, providing comfort for men in the interstices of a soulless social system of which men are half willing, half restless prisoners"*<sup>38</sup>.

So the above section discussed the changing role of religion in the context of scientific progress and of secularization. It was in reference to the views of Bryan Wilson. Any sociological study of religion is incomplete without referring to the thinkers of the classical sociological tradition. In the upcoming section an attempt has been made to represent the views of the three stalwarts- Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim,

---

<sup>37</sup> Bryan R Wilson, Religion in sociological perspective, Oxford, OUP, 1982, p 49.

<sup>38</sup> Bryan R Wilson's 'Aspects of Secularization in the West' in Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, No.3, Vol.4, (Dec, 1976) pp 259-276.

and Max Weber- on the question of religion and its role and position in the modern world.

*SOCIOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH RELIGION IN MODERN AGE:  
PERSPECTIVES FROM CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION*

Sociology emerged during a period of huge socio-political and ideological turmoil. The French Revolution had shattered the traditional authority of the Churches. Everywhere there were echoes of forming a new social foundation. It is during this time that there were tremendous discoveries in the field of science accompanied by technological inventions. Thus the entire European society was in a flux. The major streams of opinion that emerged during this period were in support of Enlightenment and opposed to it as well. It implies that some thinkers were of the view that a return should be made to the days of the Middle Ages. Another set of thinkers opined that a social foundation based on the philosophy of the Enlightenment should be formed. It was during this period of political, historical, and social turbulence that all the three major sociologists thrived. They were Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. These three thinkers represented three important traditions of looking at the changing scenario of the entire European world. According to Durkheim along with the rise of modern forces the division of labor becomes more intense. There was a growth of individuation. Community life was definitely to be affected in such a scenario. Given these observations, the man who considered society to be the object of worship in religion, it would be interesting to note his views on religion in modern society. According to Max Weber modernity accelerates the processes of rationalization and bureaucratization. In such circumstances the rise of objectivity is a foregone conclusion. Religion is also subject to objective enquiry. Weber had conceived of religion (protestant ethics) as one of the major factors contributing to the rise in a capitalist society. However in doing so it has been its own gravedigger. Karl Marx, on the other hand considered religion as an immense project of the privileged to dupe the masses. It is one of the major ideological and emotional mode of justifying the capitalist ventures and exploitations. Modern world with capitalistic orientations would lead to extreme commodification, a view echoed by

Max Weber as well. However when the class consciousness arises among the proletariats the bourgeoisie would be overthrown in a conflict with the former and it would lead to the establishment of an egalitarian socialist state with no religion to dupe masses.

### *Karl Marx on Religion*

Marx was extremely critical in his attitude towards religion. According to him, religion was neither an integral part of human society nor of life *per se*. He further continued that religion was a compensating and comforting illusion which would eventually be dispensed with as human beings lost their need for illusion. For him, religion was essentially a product of the class society. It was seen as both a product of alienation and an expression of class interests. He considered religion at one and the same time a tool for the manipulation and oppression of the subordinate class in society, an expression of protest against oppression and a form of resignation and consolation in the face of oppression. In his view, in class society human beings are alienated and have a mystified view of reality. Human products are not seen as such but as being the creation of external forces. They take an independent reality that is seen as determining rather than being determined by human action. Marx noted that the observation that Christians believe that God created man in his own image is a falsity. According to him the fact is that man created God in his own image. Man's own powers and capacities are projected onto God who appears as an all-powerful and perfect being. Religion is, therefore, a reversal of the true situation because it is a product of alienation. A vivid understanding of Marx's viewpoint on religion and its future in the modern world would be evident from the following extract:

*"..... . Man, who looked for a superman in the fantastic reality of heaven and found nothing there but the reflection of himself, will no longer be disposed to find but the semblance of himself, the non-human [Unmesch] where he seeks and must seek his true reality.*



*The basis of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has either not yet found himself or has lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, the society. This state, this society, produces religion, a reversed world-consciousness, because they are a reversed world. Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritualistic point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn completion, its universal ground for consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence because the human essence has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore mediately the fight against the other world, of which religion is the spiritual aroma.*

*Religious distress is the same at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.*

*The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion.*

*..... . The criticism of religion disillusions man to make him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason, so that he will revolve round himself and therefore round his true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves round man as long as he does not revolve round himself.*

*The task of history, therefore, once the world beyond the truth has disappeared, is to establish the truth of this world. The immediate task of philosophy, which is at the service of history, once the saintly form of human self-alienation has been unmasked, is to unmask self-alienation in its unholy forms. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the*

*criticism of the earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of right and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.*<sup>39</sup>”

Thus for Marx religion is a reversed world consciousness because it is a product of a reversed world. It is essentially ideological. It is opium in the sense that it provides temporary relief to the alienated man with the promise of a better living in the next life if he accepts the situation including the injustices of the present life. Thus it comes at a cost. It provides no real solution and in fact tends to inhibit any real solution by making suffering and repression bearable. Religion thus plays its part in helping to perpetuate the very conditions that produce it. It promotes resignation rather than search for means of changing the world.

Since religion is the product of social conditions, its death bed lies only in remedying these social conditions. In a communist society where men will control their own society rather than being controlled by it, alienation will be overcome and mystified views of reality will no longer prevail. This calls for an environment in which religion has no place. So basically Marx had predicted that religion has no future. His rhetoric consisted in the view that religion is not an inherent tendency of human nature but the product of specific social circumstances.

#### *Emile Durkheim on Religion*

In contrast to Marx, Durkheim considered religion to be a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity. He is also against the view that religion is largely false and illusory. In his words “*it is a fundamental postulate of sociology that a human institution cannot rest upon error and falsehood. If it did, it could not endure. If it had not been grounded in the nature of things, in those very things it would have met resistance that it could not have overcome. Therefore, when I approach the study of primitive religions, it is with the certainty that they are grounded in and express the real. .... . Fundamentally,*

---

<sup>39</sup> This extract is taken from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion*, Moscow Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955, pp41-42.

*then, there are no religions that are false. All are true after their own fashion: All fulfill given conditions of human existence, though in different ways.*"<sup>40</sup> He further contends that in looking at the most primitive form of religion .i.e. the totemic systems of certain Australian aboriginal tribes, particularly the Arunta, he is looking for that which is constant and unvarying in religion, its essential features. Durkheim assumes that the most primitive societies known to us will provide the simplest cases of religion in which the relationships between the facts will be more apparent. As Durkheim said "*If I address myself to primitive religions, then, it is not with any ulterior motive of disparaging religion in general: These religions are to be respected no less than the others. They fulfill the same needs, play the same role, and proceed from the same causes; therefore, they can serve just as well to elucidate the nature of religious life and, it follows, to solve the problem I wish to treat.*"<sup>41</sup> According to him the first systems of representations that man made of the world and himself was of religious origin. Every religion is a cosmology and a speculation of the divine. He further contends that science and philosophy were born of religion. Religion has not merely enriched the formation of the human intellect. It has in fact helped in the formation of that intellect. Men owe to religion both the content and the form in which religion is elaborated. On the concept of religion he reflects that "*religion is an eminently social thing. Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or re-create certain mental states of those groups. But if those categories are of religious origin, then they must participate in what is common to all religion: They, too, must be social things, products of collective thought.*"<sup>42</sup>

Durkheim divided religious phenomena into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. Beliefs are the states of opinion and consist of representations. On the other hand, rites are modes of actions. "*All known religious beliefs display a common feature: they presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two*

---

<sup>40</sup> Emile Durkheim's "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life", The Free Press: New York, 1995.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

*classes- two opposite genera- that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words profane and sacred translate fairly well. The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane- such is the distinctive trait of religious thought.*"<sup>43</sup> The heterogeneity between the sacred and the profane is absolute. Sacred things are things that are protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are those things to which the prohibitions are applied and that must keep at a distance from what is sacred. Religious beliefs are those representations that express the nature of sacred things and the relations they have with other sacred things or with profane things. Finally, rites are rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things.

Further Durkheim contends that religion is nothing but society venerated. Society is a reality *sui generis*. The predominance of society is based upon moral authority. We are induced to obey the dictates of society by a moral authority exercised by society rather than because we reason that it is in our interest or wise to obey. Thus, for Durkheim, the dictates form the basis of morality. Actions are moral because society demands them of us. Because this moral sensibility is experienced as an external pressure, human beings came to conceive of the society which exercises this pressure as an external force or power which also took on a spiritual and sacred nature since it was quite unlike any ordinary external object or force. In this way reality was perceived to be of two radically different natures or, in other words, divided between the sacred and the profane. He defines religion as *'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them'*<sup>44</sup>. Religion is a collective thing. It is a collective force of the society over the individual. The practice of religion .i.e. the set of regularly repeated actions in the form of rites and rituals is necessary. It is so because they help in the well working of our moral life as our food is for the maintenance of our physical life, for it is through them that the group affirms and maintains itself. He says that *"anyone who has truly practiced a religion knows very well*

---

<sup>43</sup> Emile Durkheim's 'The Elementary Forms of Religious Life', The Free Press: New York, 1995.  
<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

*that it is the cult that stimulates the feelings of joy, inner peace, serenity, and enthusiasm that, for the faithful, stand as experimental proof of their beliefs. The cult is not merely a system of signs by which the faith is outwardly expressed; it is the sum total of means by which that faith is created and re-created periodically. Whether the cult consists of physical operations or mental ones, it is always the cult that is efficacious*"<sup>45</sup>. So the cult functions to awaken within the worshippers a certain state of soul, composed of moral force and confidence. But the cult does not compose the entire of religion. Religion is not merely a system of practices, but also a system of ideas whose object is to explain the world. There is no doubt a connection between rites and beliefs. But they are quite different as well. *"The one is turned towards action, which it demands and regulates; the other is turned towards thought, which it enriches and organizes"*<sup>46</sup>

With the emergence of scientific knowledge religion would definitely get affected. But it would not be wiped out as some thinkers and sociologists contend. According to Durkheim, *"there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself"*<sup>47</sup>. He affirmatively asserts that every society would always feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality. If one set of religious beliefs are proved to be redundant then another new set of beliefs would arise. This would be sync with the progress in science and reason of the time. This belief is essential for fostering collective consciousness and social solidarity. As he says *"there are no gospels which are immortal, but neither is there any reason for believing that humanity is incapable of inventing new ones"*<sup>48</sup>. However he acknowledged the fact that there is in the present situation an intense contrast between faith and reason which was never seen before. But how would religion survive science? How is it possible to maintain a balance between the two? Reflecting on the place and role of religion in a modern world defined by immense scientificity, Durkheim has the following viewpoint:

---

<sup>45</sup> Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, The Free Press: New York, 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

*“The realities to which religious speculation is applied are the same as those which later serve as the subject of reflection for philosophers: they are nature, man, society. .... Religion sets itself to translate these realities into an intelligible language which does not differ in nature from that employed by science; the attempt is made by both to connect things with each other, to establish internal relations between them, to classify them, and to systematize them. The essential ideas of scientific logic are of religious origin. It is true that in order to utilize them, science gives them a new elaboration; it purges them of all accidental elements; in a general way, it brings a spirit of criticism into all its doings, which religion ignores; it surrounds itself with precautions to escape precipitation and bias, and to hold aside the passions, prejudices and all subjective influences. But these perfectionings of method are not enough to differentiate it from religion. In this regard, both pursue the same end; scientific thought is only a more perfect form of religious thought. Thus it seems natural that the second should progressively retire before the first, as this becomes better fitted to perform the task. .... It is said that science denies religion in principle. But religion exists; it is a system of given facts; in a word, it is a reality. How could science deny this reality? Also in so far as religion is action, and in so far as it is a means of making men live, science could not take its place, for even if this expresses life it does not create it; it may well seem to explain the faith but by that very fact it presupposes it. Thus there is no conflict between science and religion except upon one limited point. Of the two functions that religion originally fulfilled there is one and only one, which tends to escape it more and more: that is its speculative function. That which science refuses to grant to religion is not its right to exist, but its right to dogmatize upon the nature of things and the special competence which it claims for itself for knowing man and the world. As a matter fact, it does not know itself. It does not even know what it is made of, nor to what need it answers. It is itself a subject for science, so far is it from being able to make the law for science! And from another point of view, since there is no proper subject for religious speculation outside that reality to which scientific reflection is applied, it is evident that this former cannot play the same role in the future that it has played in the past.*

*However it seems destined to transform itself rather than to disappear.*

*There is something eternal in religion, it is the cult and the faith. Men cannot celebrate ceremonies for which they see no reason, nor can they accept a faith which they in no way understand. To spread itself or to maintain itself, it must be justified, that is to say, a theory must be made of it. A theory of this sort must undoubtedly be founded upon the different sciences, from the moment when these exist; first of all, upon the social sciences, for religious faith has its origin in society; then upon psychology, for society is a synthesis of human consciousness; and finally upon the sciences of nature, for man and society are a part of the universe and can be abstracted from it only artificially. But howsoever important these facts taken from constituted science may be, they are not enough; for faith is before all else an impetus to action, while science, no matter how far it may be pushed, always remains at a distance from this. Science is fragmentary and incomplete; it advances but slowly and is never finished; but life cannot wait. The theories which are destined to make men live and act are therefore obliged to pass science and complete it prematurely. They are possible only when the practical exigencies and the vital necessities which we feel without distinctly conceiving them push thought in advance, beyond that which science permits us to affirm. Thus religions, even the most rational and laicized, cannot and never will be able to dispense with a particular form of speculation which, though having the same subjects as science itself, cannot be really scientific: the obscure intuitions of sensation and sentiment too often take the place of logical reasons. On one side, this speculation resembles that which we meet within the religions of the past; but on another, it is different. While claiming and exercising the right of going beyond science, it must commence by knowing this and by inspiring itself with it. Ever since the authority of science was established, it must be reckoned with; one can go farther than it under the pressure of necessity, but he must take his direction from it. He can affirm nothing that it denies, deny nothing that it affirms, and establish nothing that is not directly or indirectly founded upon principles taken from it. From now on, the faith no longer exercises the same hegemony as formerly*

*over the system of ideas that we may continue to call religion. A rival power rises up before it which, being born of it, ever after submits it to its criticism and control.”<sup>49</sup>*

Unlike Marx who professed the death of religion with the imminent arrival of a communist society, Durkheim saw a future of religion. Religion is a functional necessity. With the increasing influence of scientific progress on the individuals and the society as a whole, the possibility of the declining authority of religion is an unavoidable fact. But this in no way implies the death of religion. Religion reinvents itself to cater to the wants of the modern man. Life is full of uncertainties and unpredictabilities. It is faith that propels to move along in this very uncertain life. Religion thrives where faith lingers. Science holds the strings to religiosity in the modern world. But religion at times provides an *ad hoc* support to science where it is yet to develop.

#### *Max Weber on Religion*

Max Weber never provided a concrete definition of the term religion. Yet his contribution to the study of religion is the most talked about and debated work in the sociology of religion. He was not concerned with the definition of religion per se. For Weber the sociology of religion was fundamentally the study of the relationships between religious ideas and the particular social groups that are the ‘carriers’ of those ideas and of the consequences of history and society of such religious orientations and their impact upon styles of life, attitudes and behavior. Elaborating on this, Weber says that religion is fundamentally a response to the difficulties and injustices of life which attempts to make sense of them and thereby enables people to cope with and feel more confident when faced by them. Religious conceptions arise as a result of the fact that life is fundamentally precarious and uncertain. Uncertainty implies that human beings desire certain things but their desires are not always fulfilled. There is always a discrepancy between what we think ought to be and what actually is. It is the tension generated by this discrepancy which is the source of this religious outlook. Religion thus makes the apparently arbitrary world seem meaningful and ordered. The fortunate deserve their good fortune if the wider

---

<sup>49</sup> Emile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, The Free Press: London, 1995.



religious view is taken into account while the unfortunate deserve their faith or are only temporarily unfortunate in this material world and will enjoy their rewards in the hereafter. In this way religion provides what Weber calls a 'theodicy' of good or ill fortune. Consequently religious attitudes tend to be associated with particular groups in society. Thus Weber believes that there is a relationship between particular religious ideas and particular social groups.

Weber has also noted that it is only by locating charisma beyond the material world that the way for ethical rationalization to dominate the religious attitudes begins. Man has to rely increasingly on his own skills and techniques to survive and prosper in this world and life. Gods become more and more bound up with ethical considerations. They begin to make demands on men that they should live in accordance with certain moral and ethical principles. Weber in fact tends to equate religion with the appearance of ethical rationalism and he tends to see religious developments in terms of development in ethical rationalization. He associates ethical rationalization with the appearance of priesthood. The concern of priests is with intellectual matters and with the elaboration of doctrines which generally involves the development of ethical thoughts. Weber further links the emergence of a priesthood and the development of ethical rationalization with increasing complexity. In complex social situations greater reliance must be placed on law and formal rules and procedures. In such circumstances there is a need to formulate ethical principles, to propagate them, to iron out contradictions and ambiguities and to deal with new situations and contingencies. This requires specialists in the ethical code and hence a priesthood which tends to develop a professional and vested interest in carrying the whole process still further. If in the development of human society we can discern a certain pattern of religious development, then, according to Weber, not all groups in society develop religious sentiments to the same degree or the same intensity. Now reflecting on the ethical religiosity, Weber contends that it is the middle and lower classes that are the real carriers of ethical religions and especially the lower middle class of the urban areas.

According to Weber the aim of religion is to make sense of the world and it entails making sense of the particular position and typical life-fate of given social groups. He further notes that the needs which give rise to such variety of religious ideas are ideal interests and not material interests. His conception of the relationship between material and ideal interests and between both of these and religious ideas, and his characterization of the role of material and ideal interests in social change, is a complex one. It is more clearly stated in his 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions':

*"Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest. 'From what' and for 'what' one wish to be redeemed, and let us not forget, 'could be' redeemed, depended upon one's image of the world."* <sup>50</sup>. It is thus a fairly complex picture which he presents regarding the relationship between ideas, interests- material and ideal and the world view. Ideas for Weber are never simply ideological statements or reflections of the interests of a specific stratum or group. Yet ideas embody certain basic assumptions which have been determined to a considerable extent by the particular circumstances and situations of that stratum or group and the social and psychological forces which have formed its particular outlook and conceptions of its own interests. These basic assumptions or presuppositions are at the root of religious conceptions and Weber considers them to be in the last analysis fundamentally non-rational. The way in which religious systems develop on the basis of such presuppositions is looked at in terms of rationality by Weber.

The concept of rationality is a fundamental to Weber's sociology. According to him, "rationalism involves 'an increasing theoretical mastery of reality by means of increasingly precise and abstract concepts' but points out that it can also mean 'the methodical attainment of a definitely Gadequate means' or simply 'systematic

---

<sup>50</sup> Max Weber's and Co, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, Routledge Francis and Taylor Group: London, 1998. p.280.

arrangement'<sup>51</sup>. In the sphere of religion rationality meant the elimination of magical aspects and the removal of contradictions and ambiguities in the solutions to the problem of salvation. There are a various directions which this process can take. This is contingent on the position in the society of the stratum which is the carrier of the religious ideas. On the other hand, religious ideas may have inherent tendencies to develop in certain ways. As a result they may have a significant independent influence upon the conduct of life of the stratum which is their carrier and indeed upon a whole society and civilization. Weber was particularly concerned with the practical implications of the systems of religious ideas; that is to say their impact on economic activity. It is in his book 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' that this concern of Weber has found its manifestations. It must be made definite at the outset that Weber never intended to provide a description of the role of ideas in history. He even did not deny the influence of economic development on the fate of religious ideas. His chief concern was to show how while religious ideas themselves simply cannot be deduced from economic circumstances... a mutual adaptation of the two took place. It is very clear from the following passage that Weber did not intend to provide an idealist explanation of modern capitalism:

*".... we have no intention whatever of maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation, or even that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation. .... . On the contrary, we only wish to ascertain whether and to what extent religious forces have taken part in the qualitative formation and quantitative expansion of that spirit over the world. Furthermore, what concrete aspects of our capitalistic culture can be traced to them. In view of the tremendous confusion of interdependent influences between the material basis, the forms of social and political organization, and the ideas current in the time of Reformation, we can only proceed by investigating whether and at what points certain correlations between forms of religious beliefs and practical ethics can be worked out. At the same time we shall as far as possible clarify*

---

<sup>51</sup> Max Weber and co, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, Routledge Francis and Taylor: London, 1998. p.293.

*the manner and the general direction in which, by virtue of those relationships, the religious movements have influenced the development of such material culture. Only when this has been determined with reasonable accuracy can the attempt be made to estimate to what extent the historical development of modern culture can be attributed to those religious forces and to what extent to others.*"<sup>52</sup> Hence the protestant ethic can be considered to be an important contributory factor in the development of modern capitalism. Ascetic Protestantism created an ethos compatible with modern rational capitalism and did not stand in conflict with the capitalist business methods and practices. The capitalist could engage in his work with an easy conscience and indeed with that much greater vigor and enthusiasm in the knowledge that what he did was not only morally suspect but was, in fact, the carrying out of God's purposes for him in this life. The spirit of capitalism, which had its roots in ascetic Protestantism, stimulated and promoted a distinctively European type of economic development. The motivation and orientation to life that constituted this spirit of capitalism were derived from Calvinist teaching and are characteristic of the outlook of Calvinist and Calvinistic Protestants. Weber in an attempt to make clear the concept of the '*spirit of capitalism*', quotes extensively from the works of Benjamin Franklin. The *spirit* can be best depicted as follows:

*"Time is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but six pence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon that the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides.*

*Credit is money. If a man lets his money lie in man hands after it is due, he gives me the interest, or so much as I can make of it during that time. This amounts to a considerable sum where a man has good and large credit, and makes good use of it.*

---

<sup>52</sup> Max Weber, Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Charles Scriber and Sons: New York, 1958. p.91.

*Money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. Five shillings turned is six, turned again is seven and three pence, and so on, till it becomes a hundred pounds. The more there is of it, the more it produces every turning, so that the profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding-sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation. He that murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds.*

*The good paymaster is lord of another man's purse. He that is known to pay punctually and exactly to the time he promises, may at any time, and on any occasion, raise all the money his friends can spare. This is sometimes of great use. After industry and frugality, nothing contributes more to the raising of a young man in the world than punctuality and justice in all his dealings; therefore never keep borrowed money an hour beyond the time you have promised, lest a disappointment shut up a friend's purse forever.*

*The most trifling actions that affect a man's credit are to be regarded. ....*

*It shows, besides, that you are mindful of what you owe; it makes you appear a careful as well as an honest man, and that still increases your credit.*

*..... Keep an exact account for some time both of your expenses and your income. If you take the pains at first to mention particulars, it will have this good effect: you will discover how wonderfully small, trifling expenses mount up to large sums, and will discern what might have been, and may for the future be saved, without occasioning any great inconvenience”<sup>53</sup>.*

All the above mentioned rules or clause form the spirit of modern capitalism. All the above mentioned rules should be followed as a matter of duty. The infraction of such rules is to be considered as forgetfulness of duty. It is not mere business astuteness. It is an ethos. All these moral attitudes are colored with utilitarianism. As is evident, all the above mentioned virtues- honesty, frugality, industry, punctuality, etc assures more

---

<sup>53</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the spirit of Capitalism*, Charles Scriber and Sons: New York, 1958.

credit. So the spirit of modern capitalism was dominated by an urge to acquiesce more and more and yet avoid all spontaneous enjoyment of life. *So economic acquisition is no more subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs*<sup>54</sup>.

However this conception did not appear under capitalistic conditions. Rather the spirit of capitalism was presented before the capitalistic order. Weber has shown the power of religious forces that motivated the creation of such a spirit. However he has very precisely mentioned that the religious factor is one of the most important but not the only factor that created such a spirit. He takes Calvinism as the point of departure in his exploration of the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.

One of the fundamental elements of the spirit of modern capitalism, and not only of that but also of all modern culture: rational conduct on the basis of the idea of the calling was born from the spirit of Christian asceticism<sup>55</sup>. Moreover the Calvinist doctrine of predestination combined with the idea of the calling gave it a radical impact. According to this doctrine a certain part of humanity, the elect, will be saved and the rest eternally damned. No one can earn salvation because it would amount to an attempt to obligate God who cannot be obligated. Who is to be saved and who is not is entirely a matter of God's will and is predetermined since God is omniscient and must therefore know already whom he will save. This helplessness and uncertainty of fate was practically intolerable for the common man. Consequently God was seen to help only those people who helped themselves. Thus the only way to attain salvation lies in working diligently and regulating one's life's conduct in an ascetic and rational way. So the phenomena of this worldly asceticism gained prominence. This definitely, although very unintentionally, led to the development of an enterprising capitalist spirit. Thus, *asceticism when carried out of monastic cells to everyday life began to dominate worldly morality, and did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order*<sup>56</sup>. As a consequence of ascetic Protestantism the religious life was no longer

---

<sup>54</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Charles Scriber and Sons: New York, 1958.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

something to be lived apart from everyday life but within it. Ascetic Protestantism was not opposed to the accumulation of wealth as such; it was opposed to its enjoyment of it. The work ethic, the systematic pursuit of profit and the emphasis on abstemiousness naturally led to surpluses which could only be reinvested; in short, to the accumulation of capital. Capital accumulation and deferred consumption was the key to the enormous economic dynamism of modern capitalism and to the breakthrough to continuous growth as a normal feature in modern societies.

Weber very incisively shows that capitalism has remained and is growing stronger but the religious ethics have left into oblivion or so it seems. The following quote summarizes his view on the changing influence of religion in the highly calculative and rationalistic environment:

*“This order .i.e. the economic order (italics mine) is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determines the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. .... . In Baxter’s view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the ‘saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment’. But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage<sup>57</sup>”*. He continues:

*“Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. Today the spirit of religious asceticism- whether finally, who knows?- has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer”<sup>58</sup>*. Weber is not very sure of the future of religion and humanity as such. Reflecting on the intensity of materialistic and consumerist orientation that has subsumed the entire humanity he is ill at ease. He writes:

---

<sup>57</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Charles Scriber and Sons: London, 1958.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*

*“No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: ‘Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved’<sup>59</sup>.”*

Weber precisely puts across the viewpoint that such an increasing materialist orientation has in turn led to an accelerating trend towards a materialist interpretation of history and culture. As he says ‘the modern man is in general, even with the best will, unable to give religious ideas significance for culture and national character which they deserve<sup>60</sup>’.

So this was in a nutshell the viewpoints of the three major thinkers on the topic of religion and its location and role in modern age. Having learnt of that, it would be interesting to note the crisis encountered by faith in the entire matrix of modernity and how the modern man amalgamates faith and science in his contemporary existence.

#### *CRISIS IN FAITH AND CONTEMPORARY EXISTENCE*

The entire course of the chapter has shown the corrosive influence of modernity on religion. It is without doubt that religion is losing many of its traditional functions. But at the same time it is also rediscovering itself. However the fact remains that religion in its traditional form has lost its sheen especially in the public domain. In the private sphere its presence is not always in the traditional form, though the ‘presence’ as such cannot be ruled out. All the thinkers discussed above with the exception of Karl Marx have been cautious in their treatment of the subject of the future of religiosity. Marx was however distinct in his contention that this could be a possibility only in a socialist world. The contemporary existence is however defined by a capitalist essence. The market is the

---

<sup>59</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Charles Scribner and Sons: London, 1958.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*



mainstay of modern existence and materialism and consumerism it's closest ally. In this scenario, as has been discussed by all the above thinkers and especially emphasized by Max Weber a sense of meaninglessness has shrouded modern existence. The problem is aggravated by the fact that religion- which attributed meaning to both our routinized as well as our crisis situations- is losing its importance by being subject to the rigorous examination of man's reasoning capacity. In this predicament, where would modern man shelter his anxieties? What are the alternatives to a faith in the transcendent which would provide peace and security? In dealing with these questions, at this juncture, the viewpoints of two major thinkers in the realm of Sociology of Religion- Peter Berger and Clifford Geertz- are to be examined. Both of them deal with the theory of a meaningful existence being provided by religious faith. The changing façade of religion in relation to this function is also to be examined in view of their writings.

#### *Clifford Geertz on Religion and Meaning*

In his article 'Religion as a Cultural System', Geertz has very precisely explained his concept of religion. The entire endeavor has been made in a unique fashion in the sense of explaining each clauses of the definition that he has carved out for religion. This has been substantiated by instances from his huge ethnographic work. He has also given a detailed account of the religious perspective to life and differentiated with other perspectives. His basic argument is that religion helps in providing meaning to all our worries and anxieties, to all the aberrations in our routinized life, and thus defines our existence in this highly unpredictable world.

He approaches the subject of religion from a cultural dimension of analysis. It implies looking at religion as a part of cultural system. By culture he means "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form"<sup>61</sup>. As apart of culture religion deals in sacred symbols and what sacred symbols do. He contends "*sacred symbols function to synthesize people's*

---

<sup>61</sup> Clifford Geertz, Religion as a Cultural System, in Interpretation of Culture, Basic Books, New York, 1973. pp.87-125.

*ethos and their world view. In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well arranged to accommodate such a way of life. This confrontation and mutual confirmation has two fundamental effects. On the one hand, it objectivizes moral and aesthetic preferences by depicting them as the imposed conditions of life implicit in a world with a particular structure, as mere common sense given the unalterable shape of reality. On the other, it supports these received beliefs about the world's body by invoking deeply felt moral and aesthetic sentiments as experimental evidence for their truth. Religion symbols formulate a particular style of life and a specific metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other". Thus he has shown that religion performs both intellectual and emotional functions in making sense of the world to the individual. From such considerations he arrives at a definition of religion. According to him, religion is: 1. a system of symbols which acts to 2. establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men 3. formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and 4. clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that 5. the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.*

Geertz considers that the first element of religion is that it is a set of symbols. A symbol can stand for something, represent or express something or it can act as a sort of blueprint or instruction for what to do. For instance, dark clouds are symbolic precursors of an on coming rain; a red flag is a conventional sign of danger. These systems or complexes of symbols, referred to as cultural patterns, thus express reality. This mode of expressing reality has two dimensions to it: they can act as a *model for* reality or as a *model of* reality. *The models of- linguistic, graphic, mechanical, natural, etc, processes which function not to provide sources of information in terms of which other processes can be patterned, but to represent those patterned processes as such, to express their structure in an alternative medium- are much rarer and may perhaps be confined, among living animals, to man. The perception of the structural congruence between one set of processes, activities, relations, entities, and so on, and another set for which it acts as a*

*program, so that the program can be taken as a representation, or conception- a symbol- of the programmed, is the essence of human thought. The intertransposibility of models and models for which symbolic formulation makes possible is the distinctive characteristic of our mentality*<sup>62</sup>.

This intertransposibility is very much evident in the religious symbols. The religious symbols express the world and at the same time shape it. They shape the world by inducing dispositions to behave in certain ways by inducing moods and motivations. 'A motivation is a persisting tendency, a chronic inclination to perform certain sorts of acts and experience certain sorts of feeling in certain sorts of situations, the "sorts" being commonly very heterogeneous and rather ill defined classes in all the three cases'<sup>63</sup>. 'Motives on the other hand are neither acts nor feelings, but liabilities to perform particular classes of act or have particular classes of feeling. The major difference between moods and motivations lies in that moods are scalar whereas motivations are vectorial qualities. Motivations have a directional cast, they describe a certain overall course, gravitate toward certain, usually temporary, consummations. But moods vary only in intensity: they go nowhere. They spring from certain circumstances but they are responsive to no ends. Motives persist for an extended period of time. But moods recur from time to time; disappearing as soon as they appear. Motivations are made meaningful with reference to the ends towards which they are conceived to conduce. On the other hand moods are made meaningful with reference to the conditions from which they are conceived to spring. Religion enables in establishing such dispositions. Religious symbols are set aside from other secular symbols evoking the same kind of response in the sense that the former relates to the sacred and the transcendent and it affirms something. Geertz exemplifies that one can be "religious" about golf not merely in its pursuit as a passion but in the fact that the person must see it as symbolic of some transcendent truth.

---

<sup>62</sup> Clifford Geertz, Religion as a Cultural System, in Interpretation of Culture, Basic Books: NY, 1973. pp.87-125.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

According to Geertz religion formulates concepts of a general order of existence. Such concepts are needed to view the world as a meaningful and ordered entity. A world of chaos governed by chance threatens to disorient people. Religion rescues them from such chaotic situations by infusing coherent meanings to them. These chaotic situations include bafflement, suffering, and a sense of intractable ethical paradox or the sense of evil. Bafflement is the experience which comes about when unusual or dramatic events occur, with which none of the normal means of explanation are competent to deal. Religion provides ultimate answers as it explains the otherwise inexplicable. Geertz sees religious beliefs as attempts to bring anomalous events and experiences within the sphere of the, at least potentially, explicable. *The quest for lucidity and the rush of metaphysical anxiety that occurs when empirical phenomena threaten to remain intransigently opaque is found on much humbler intellectual levels.* He says that in such cases humans form hypotheses to understand their situation. Abandonment of one such hypothesis implies the formulation of a new one but it is never without an explanation. The religious response to bafflement is primarily an intellectual one. In its intellectual aspects religion affirms the ultimate explicability of experience. Its affective aspect can be found in the way it answers to the next chaotic situation which an individual has the possibility of encountering in a life time. It is suffering.

Suffering also threatens the realm of meaning. He tends to disagree with the 'theodicy of optimism' of Malinowski in dealing with the question of religion's role in explaining suffering. According to Geertz, 'in its career religion has probably disturbed men as much as it has cheered them; into a head-on, unblinking confrontation of the fact that they are born to trouble as often as it has enabled them to avoid such a confrontation by projecting them into sort of infantile fairy-tale worlds ....'. So in Geertz's view the problem or the task of religion is not related to question of the avoidance of suffering but rather to issue of accepting the suffering and making the suffering sufferable. According to him most of the religions of the world affirm the proposition that life entails suffering and some even glorify it. Thus in its affective aspects religion affirms the ultimate suffering of existence. It does this by providing symbolic means for expressing emotion. It attempts to cope with suffering by placing it in a meaningful context, by providing

modes of action through which it can be expressed and thus understood. To be able to understand it is to be able to accept it and endure it.

The third type of meaning threatening experience is that of evil. According to Geertz, 'the problem of evil is concerned with threats to our ability to make sound moral judgments. What is involved in the problem of evil is not the adequacy of our symbolic resources to govern our affective life, but the adequacy of those resources to provide a workable set of ethical criteria, normative guides to govern our action'. Thus religion attempts to make moral sense of experience, of inequality and of injustice. It attempts to show that these things are only apparently the case and that if one takes a wider view, they do fit into a meaningful pattern. A very common way in which this is done is, of course, to claim that injustices in this life are compensated for in the next. This is very much prevalent in Hinduism.

Hence Geertz has very descriptively elaborated on the function of religion complete in its intellectual, affective, and moralistic endeavors. This is a very novel way of presenting religion. Most of the above mentioned thinkers especially Wilson have emphasized only on the emotional support that religion provides. Thus religion is a matter of belief in the set of symbols which attributes meaning to the 'crisis' situation of an individual. The question arises as to what this 'belief' implies in the religious context? Second why do people accept such beliefs at all? These questions are both posed and answered by Geertz himself. According to him 'religious belief involves not a Baconian induction from everyday experience- for then we should all be agnostics- but rather a prior acceptance of authority which transforms that experience. The existence of bafflement, pain, and moral paradox is one of the things that drives men towards belief in gods, devils, spirits, totemic principles, or the spiritual efficacy of cannibalism but it is not the basis upon which those beliefs rest, but rather most important field of application'. Thus the real basis of any belief lies in authority or tradition. Religion is only one perspective on the world among others. There are a variety of competing perspectives as well. These are the commonsense perspective, the scientific perspective, and an aesthetic perspective and so on.

Geertz differentiates between these various perspectives. According to him the distinctive factor that separates the religious factor from the commonsense perspective is that the former 'moves beyond the realities of everyday life to wider ones which correct and complete them, and its defining concern is not action upon those wider realities but acceptance of them, faith in them. It differs from the scientific perspective in that it questions the realities of everyday life not out of an institutionalized skepticism which dissolves the world's givenness into a swirl of probabilistic hypotheses, but in terms of what it takes to be wider, non hypothetical truths. .... It differs from art in that in stead of effecting a disengagement from the whole question of factuality, deliberately manufacturing an air of semblance and illusion, it deepens the concern with fact and seeks to create an aura of utter actuality. It is in this sense of the "really real" upon which the religious perspective rests and which the symbolic activities of religion as a cultural system are devoted to producing.' So the distinguishing factor of the religious perspective is faith. The mechanism which generates this faith and conviction is ritual. Ritual is both the formulation of a general religious conception and the authoritative experience which justifies and even compels its acceptance.

He has made a very interesting observation in the last part of a definition of religion. According to him human beings do not stay in the world formulated by religious symbols all through out their life. In fact for most part of their mundane existence they lead life with a commonsense perspective. They live and act accordingly in this everyday world of common sense objects and practical acts- the paramount reality of human experience. It is only when there is a need to shape the social order or the individual anxieties that the religious perspective arises. There isn't one religious perspective but rather a variety of religious perspectives depending upon the ethos and world view of that particular culture. However as Geertz has reflected these religious perspectives are each unique ways of approaching the world- ones which seems uniquely realistic to those who espouse them and eminently practical and sensible. It is this imperviousness of religion to doubt that religious perspectives seem to acquire that gives them their power to affect society so profoundly. The fact that believers within each religious perspective regard their own

perspective as obviously and self evidently the most sensible and realistic one gives such perspectives great potency.

Clifford Geertz has very dexterously put across the element of cultural relativism in his essay on religion. Thus assessing opinions on religions and their changing roles cannot be measured in the same yardstick. What is of further interest is the way he has shown how a variety of views can be accommodated in one single existence. There is an element of the commonsensical, the aesthetical, the scientific, and the religious in each one of us. All these contribute to the meaningfulness of our existence. But the importance of religion lies in the fact that it salvages the 'constructed' meaning of the world we live in or provides a new meaning to our existence when ever we encounter a crisis situation. Religion rescues us from crisis situations by providing reassuring images of the transcendent. But what if belief in religious faith is in crisis? All the above discussions on the future of religion have shown a receding influence of religion on humanity as a whole. This issue has been dealt with by Peter Berger.

#### *PETER BERGER ON FAITH IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES*

Peter Berger is one of the most vocal proponents of Sociology of Religion. He, like Geertz, believed that religion provides a meaning to our existence and helps us deal with situations in which we doubt our world of meanings. According to him, 'religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established'<sup>64</sup>. He further notes that religion makes the audacious attempt to consider the world as humanly significant. Religious conceptions of the world are underpinned and maintained as credible by a specific set of social processes which constitute what Berger calls 'plausibility structure'. These are the social processes by which religious views are promoted, disseminated, defended, or assumed. If this plausibility structure is weakened, religious convictions can easily lose their hold on the mind. However before embarking on a discussion on the present situation of religion it is interesting to note the features and functions of religion elaborated by Berger. According to him, religion does not simply legitimate and make

---

<sup>64</sup> Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, Faber and Faber: London, 1969. p.34.

sense of the social order. It makes sense of experiences which might otherwise be disruptive and disordering. It legitimates marginal situations and experiences- those which are at the limits of everyday ordinary experience. These include death, catastrophes, war, social upheaval, suffering, evil, etc. A religious explanation of such things helps prevent anomie. This is what Geertz has also talked about. It is providing meaning to chaotic and anomic situations that religion performs its most salient function of maintaining social order and individual sanity. Berger like Geertz emphasizes on the importance of rituals importance of rituals in upholding the traditional influence of religion.

But where does religion locate itself in the contemporary society? The viewpoints of the various thinkers irrespective of their approaches are rhetorical in the sense that for all of them religion is no more the sky. It is a setting sun in the brink of the horizon. However in saying so they are most effectively referring to the traditional conception of religion. So the question is how does religious faith survive in this modern world? What is its way of survival? Third what is precisely the crisis in religion? This last question is of much importance for the further course of the study.

Peter Berger writes that religion in contemporary society suffers from a 'crisis of credibility'. One of the decisive factors leading to this situation is secularization. According to him secularization is the process by which sectors of the society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. Causing this secularization is the process of rationalization that is the pre requisite of any industrial society of the modern type. However Berger is cautious in his analysis of the relation between modernity and secularization. In his viewpoint the assumption that modernity is directly proportional to secularization and inversely proportional to religion is a very naïve assumption. Moreover every threat to religion is often countered by an upsurge in religious movements in various parts of the worlds. He contends that the only place where secularization has taken place to a great effect is Europe. This does not imply that secularization has not taken place in other parts of society. But it has affected only a certain section of the intelligentsia as in the USA or other developing countries like India.



This however does not imply that USA is less modern than Britain. A historical assessment is necessary to understand the process of secularization. It would otherwise be misleading.

Secularization has no doubt resulted in a wide spread collapse of the plausibility of traditional religious definition of reality. In developing this argument Berger differentiates between secularization at two levels: at the social structural level and at the level of consciousness. It is at the socio structural level that secularization first emergence with its initial manifestations displayed in the economic sphere. It was more profound in those economic areas which were formed by the capitalistic and industrial processes. 'Consequently different strata of modern society have been affected by secularization differentially in terms of their closeness to or distance from these processes. In other words, modern industrial society has produced a centrally "located" sector that is something like a "liberated territory" with respect to religion. Secularization has moved outward from this sector into other areas of society. An interesting consequence of this has been a tendency for religion to be polarized between the most public and the most private sectors of the industrial order.' he further notes that there has been a 'cultural lag' between the secularization of the economy on the one hand and that of the state and the family on the other.

Characteristic to Berger's argument are the following elements:

There has definitely been a change in the authority and role of religion in the modern society. This change has been brought about by the forces of modernization. However the secularizing effect of this modernity is not all comprehensive i.e. it has not affected society and humanity in equal measure. There has been secularization of consciousness at the socio structural level with its profundity manifest in the economic or the market sphere. But secularization at the level of consciousness tells a different story. There has definitely been a polarization between the public and the private domain when studied from the viewpoint of the impact of religion. An understanding of this situation can be obtained from the following observations of Berger:

*“The overall effect of polarization is very curious. Religion manifests itself as public rhetoric and private virtue. In so far religion is common it lacks ‘reality’ and in so far as it is ‘real’ it lacks commonality. The situation represents a severe rupture of the traditional task of religion, which was precisely the establishment of an integrated set of definitions of reality that could serve as a common universe of meaning for the members of a society. The world building potency of religion is thus restricted to the construction of sub-worlds, of fragmented universes of meaning, the plausibility structure of which may in some cases be no longer than the nuclear family. Since the modern family is notoriously fragile as an institution this means that religion resting on this kind of plausibility structure is of necessity a tenuous construction. This tenuousness can be mitigated by seeking more broadly based plausibility structures.*

*The ‘polarization’ of religion brought about by secularization and the concomitant loss of commonality and/or ‘reality’ can also be described by saying that secularization ipso facto leads to a pluralistic situation. The term ‘pluralism’ has been applied to those cases in which different religious groups are tolerated by the state and engage in free competition with each other. .... . Secularization brings about a demonopolization of religious traditions and thus, ipso facto, leads to a pluralistic situation. .... . Thus there is a crisis in credibility brought on by pluralism as a social structural phenomenon. The pluralistic situation, in demonopolizing religion, makes it ever more difficult to maintain or to construct anew viable plausibility structures for religion. The plausibility structures lose massivity because they can no longer enlist the society as whole to serve for the purpose of social confirmation. It becomes increasingly difficult for the ‘inhabitants’ of any particular religious world to remain entre nous in contemporary society. Disconfirming others can no longer be safely kept away from one’s own. Furthermore, the plausibility structures lose the appearance of durability as a result of the aforementioned dynamics of consumer culture. As religious contents become susceptible to fashion it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain them as unchangeable verities. These processes must be understood as grounded in the specific infrastructure established by modern industrial society.*

*The pluralistic situation multiplies the number of plausibility structure competing with each other. Ipso facto it relativizes their religious contents. The religious contents are 'de-objectivated'. They become subjectivated in a double sense: their reality becomes a private affair of individuals, i.e., loses the quality of self evident inter-subjective plausibility- thus one cannot really talk about religion any more. And their reality, in so far as it is still maintained by individual, is apprehended as being rooted within the consciousness of the individual rather than in any faculties of the external world- religion no longer refers to the cosmos or to history, but to individual Existenz or psychology. .... In the contemporary society, the individual discovers religion within his own subjective consciousness, somewhere deep down within himself. In fact the emergence of the unconscious itself may be analyzed in terms of specific structural developments of modern industrial society.*

*In this way the demonopolization of religion is a social structural as well as a social psychological process. Religion no longer legitimates the world. What certainty there is must be dredged up from within the subjective consciousness of the individual, since it can no longer be derived from the external, socially shared and taken for granted world."<sup>65</sup>*

Thus he concludes that religion is losing its sheen in the public domain. In the private sphere its presence can not be overlooked. But there are a number of competing values and beliefs vying for modern man's attention. Thus religion is not the only but one among many aspects that provide meaning and stability in man's life.

The entire course of the chapter showed a tussle in the intelligentsia to free the common man's consciousness from the grip of religion. This was nonetheless carried out in different ways. For some it was a struggle against the superstitions ingrained in religious beliefs and for others it was religion as such. Continual struggle over the last couple of centuries has not thawed the debate on religion. Rather the entire debate on the importance and the functions and the reality of religion has been taken to a different

---

<sup>65</sup> Peter Berger, *The social reality of Religion*, Faber and Faber, London, 1969.

plane in modern society. Religion survives in contradictions and in the anxieties and ailments of a modern existence. It is undoubted that the sole authoritative influence of religion has received a set back. But this in no way diminishes the role of religion and its need in our existence. This element has been proved by modern man's recourse to various spiritual centers to seek meaning and peace in his/her existence. The sacred element is missing. But the emotional and moralistic fervor is still in tact.

This chapter essentially reflected on the process of modernity as it took shape in the western world. The negotiation of this modernity with religio-spiritual faith was also taken note of. However modernity as envisaged in the west is not the only form of modernity. As has already been argued by Clifford Geertz a society should always be interpreted in its specific cultural context. Thus the trajectory of modernity in India and the way in which the question of religio-spiritual faith was dealt with should be understood in the context of our cultural specificity. In India the first steps of modernity arose with the colonialism. The western world, in this case England, was basking in its civilisational glory heralded by the project of the Enlightenment. The Indian intelligentsia was no doubt influenced by the rationalistic, scientific, and objective world view of the West. However the west undermined the cultural heritage of our civilization. This was not to be accepted by the intelligentsia. There was an urge to speak the new language but in one's own cultural idiom. Hence despite an acceptance of western rationalism, there was an increasing dependence on the Vedas and Upanishads. The goal was to envisage rationality in one's own religiosity. Such response was an attempt to establish the cultural supremacy of India as it was challenged by the west. The modern thought and ideas of the west was no doubt appreciated and accepted but this was not at the cost of the Hindu cultural traditions. A kind of synthesis between the east and the west was sought by these intellectuals. The possibility of a modern world with a spiritual or religious orientation was the possibility demonstrated by our intellectuals. However this religiosity is without its dogmatic and ritualistic pretensions. This kind of modernity is quite different from the secular modernity of the west. This is the kind of modernity where religion and tradition play important roles was the Indian intelligentsia represented by the likes of Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, etc. Moving a little ahead in time it can be

observed that such a kind of modernity was practiced by Mahatma Gandhi. He critiqued the discontents of our cultural tradition- untouchability, superstitions, moral degradation, subjugation of women etc. But at the same time he exposed the irreligiosity, barbarism, and violence of the western civilization. He espoused the power of morality to fight the lure of modern tradition while simultaneously accepting its progressive qualities. Hence it is the Indian response to the entire influence of colonialism along with its modernizing project and the thrust of our religio-spiritual faith in this entire dynamics is the subject of discussion in the next chapter. It establishes the space for the existence of multiple modernities.

## CHAPTER II

### INDIA IN TRANSITION: SITUATING THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

It is a tabloid of hectic political activities that generally defines our perception of colonial India. No doubt anti-colonialism was the dominant strand of consciousness in those days of yore. However its initial expression was found in the realm of ideology and culture. In fact Amilcar Cabral wrote ‘.....it is generally within the cultural factor that we find the germ of challenge which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement’<sup>1</sup>. A closer look at the historiography of colonial India would very well establish this statement.

The British had a fair hold over India towards the early nineteenth century. This brought in a contact between ‘a pre-modern and a modernizing cultural system’. Hindu India has had a history of foreign encounters, the most prominent being the Mughal invasion. However, ‘the encounter between the cultural traditions of Hinduism and Islam was essentially of two *traditional* world-views’<sup>2</sup>. So, the British encounter brought along with it new dimensions of social and cultural perspectives. This necessarily evoked reactions and counter-reactions from the Indian society.

The cultural tradition of the west (the British in this case) was fundamentally different from the cultural patterns of Hindus and Muslims. The enlightenment project of the west defined their ideological and cultural framework with the concept of rationality. On the other hand, India in the early nineteenth century was a much beleaguered country marked by a rigid caste system in the ranks and files of its society. There were superstitions galore in the socio-religious beliefs of the people of the country. So it is evident that the

---

<sup>1</sup> The importance of culture in national liberation movements has found forceful expression in Amilcar Cabral. Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle*, Monthly Review Press: London and New York, 1980, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, Rawat Publication: Jaipur and New Delhi, 2005, p.85.

basic tenets of western values conflicted with the cardinal principles of Indian tradition. The former advocated the values of equality, equity, and universalism instead of status and hierarchy of the latter. Social stratification was based on achievement and not ascription. These and many other factors were definitely threatening to the Hindu cultural ethos. Gradually, the western impact caused acculturative and innovative changes in the cultural pattern of India<sup>3</sup>. It did produce cultural synthesis *per se*. However, elements of cultural identity of both the Hindus and the Muslims were threatened as well. The project of reviving and rejuvenating the cultural identity was embarked upon. This noble and ambitious attempt started with religious revivalism of the Hindu past.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to show the British influence on India, especially its socio-cultural and religious impact. In this context a special mention would be made of the Bengal Renaissance. Its impact on the cultural rejuvenation of the country would also be studied with some effect. The British influence no doubt brought about immense change in the attitude of section of the people. The modern ideas absorbed through the British contact questioned the Hindu cultural ethos. There was an encounter in the form of science and religion, faith and reason. The entire cultural identity of Hindu India and also of the Indian society was challenged by the Western ideas. Thus aroused a reaction to counter these influences. These influences arose in many ways. This aspect has also been dealt in the chapter. Given the focus of the entire dissertation the Ramakrishna Mission has been singled out for the cause of the study. It has been used as a case in point to show the religious revivalism of the India due to the colonial impact. This is a way of dealing with the modern forces. Its history and sociology has been detailed.

It is worth mentioning here that the attempt at religious revivalism and reformation in India did not happen for the first time with the onset of colonial impact. There was a vigorous attempt made in the Bhakti movement to wade away the ills circumscribing the

---

<sup>3</sup> Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, Rawat Publication, Jaipur and New Delhi, 2005. p86.

Hindu religion. However, its appeal lied in the emotional rather than the rational way of viewing.

### *THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT*

Indian society has experienced socio-religious movements much before the advent of British rule in India. The Bhakti movement of medieval India is a case in point. It was a spiritual mutiny against the superstitions and brahminical excesses ingrained in Hinduism. The main message of Bhakti is expressed in a Hindi couplet which says- "God does not ask to which caste one belongs, whosoever worships Him is loved by Him"<sup>4</sup>. The Bhakti saints renounced idolatry, priesthood. They also preached fervently against caste exclusiveness and subjugation of women. Various causes led to the rise of the Bhakti movement in India. One of them was the establishment of Islamic state in India and the rapid propagation of Islam because of its democratic nature and also because it was shorn of any wasteful rituals. As a result a number of low caste Hindus were attracted towards the religion which promised them respect and equality in the society. It is in this scenario that a need was felt to reinterpret the sacred scriptures of the Hindus. Thus the Bhakti Cult can be interpreted as a reform movement which aimed to purify the Hindu religion in order to meet the challenges of Islam. Like the Sufi saints among the Muslims, the Bhakti saints also preached the unity of Godhood, love of mankind, religious toleration and importance of good deeds.

Ramanuja, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Meera Bai, Ramananda were among the most prominent Bhakti saints. The Bhakti movement did create a stir by advocating religious tolerance and equality among all human beings irrespective of caste and class. It also helped in the development and enrichment of vernacular languages as the Bhakti saints spoke in the language of the majority of masses. However, the impact of the movement was not long lasting. Scholars have different explanations to it. Neera Desai<sup>5</sup> suggests

---

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in D.N.Kundra, History and Civics, Part 1, Goyal Brothers Prakashan, New Delhi, 1992, p.19.

<sup>5</sup> Neera Desai, Woman in Modern India, Part 2, Blackwell Publishing Ltd: London, '1957. pp.41-42.



three factors: first, the Bhakti movement fostered equality only in the religious sphere, not in secular life; second, the movement did not offer any alternative program of social and economic reorganization of Indian society. Its appeal was more emotional than rational; third the movement produced individual and not collective resistance to the status quo. W.B.Patwardhan<sup>6</sup> says it was the tolerance to opposition by Bhakti saints that prevented the movement from being a success. He wrote “the fact is that the saints of the Bhakti school were of a pacific turn of mind and did not love controversy or contest. . . . . the saints of the Bhakti school have always been eager to reconcile the conflicting systems. . . . . their principle was the principle of reconciliation.”<sup>7</sup>

So it is well evident that the socio-religious reforms are not novel phenomena in India. Various egalitarian and modern ideas had cropped up even before the advent of British imperialism. Nonetheless the changes brought about in the Hindu religion and the discoveries made regarding its past, its re-interpretation included, are due to the British impact. A lasting social change in India had to be brought about by influences other than the traditional religion, because traditional religious spirit was predominantly mystic in its inspiration and in its continuing manifestations as has been evident. D.P.Mukerji argued that such influences were secular ones which were brought into India by the British. Mukerji’s observations sounded Marxian when he said “By the British rule the very basis of the Indian economy has been changed. The British gave to India something which was never offered by Hindu religious leaders, an observable, functioning, and successful alternative to her native systems”<sup>8</sup>. But he was only partly right in implying that the impact of the British was merely economic and social. There were also the profound religious and intellectual alternatives which were presented to India by the West. The entire dynamics of the Western influence on the Hindu cultural identity and the reaction to this has been dealt with in the next section.

---

<sup>6</sup> W.B.Patwardhan, Fergusson College Magazine (Poona), Feb 1919, quoted in Charles Heimsath, Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1964. p34.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> D.P.Mukerji, Modern Indian Culture, Hind Kitab: Bombay, 1948. p.23-24.

*ENCOUNTER WITH THE WEST AND THE NEW INTELLIGENTSIA AND NEW  
THINKING*

Professor Yogendra Singh<sup>9</sup> says that westernization in Indian context was of two types: primary westernization and secondary westernization. The former referred to the western influence on Little traditions. The latter referred to western influence on the Great traditions. Primary westernization is of two types: one type was highly superficial and was limited to the lifestyles of people-their eating habits, food patterns etc. Such a type of westernization did not affect the values or cognitive categories of people. Hence it could be said that this pattern of westernization was mere imitation of some of the cultural traits of the west and no major kind of assimilation was involved.

Unlike the first type, the second type of primary westernization involves the emergence of a sub-cultural pattern represented by those intellectuals who adopted western cognitive patterns as well besides their styles of life. These intellectuals can be roughly categorized into the nationalists with western education and a sound ground in Hindu tradition. This breed can be best represented by Raja Rammohan Roy. The second category was the denationalized and hyper-westernized youth who found flaws in everything indigenous. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and all the alumni of the then Hindu college represented this category. The present study focuses on the former.

Besides the primary westernization changes were observed in the Great traditions as well. These changes had a pan Indian character and were referred to as secondary westernization. The cultural structures included in this are education, law, science and technology etc .The present study endeavors to concentrate on science and technology only. Hence the dialogue between religion and science, the tussle between both, the

---

<sup>9</sup> Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi and Jaipur, 2005, pp. 85-117.

supposed superiority of western science, the emergence of a nationalist science, its acceptance in oriental and occident literature, rediscovery of Hindu India's scientific and religious glory are some of the major developments that originated in colonial India. Thus it can be said that the nineteenth century India was a society of profound self questioning and change. To this effect the importance of English education and western egalitarian and 'modern' values cannot be overemphasized. However it should be remembered in the same breath as Edward Shils said that 'modernity had entered into Indian character and society but it had done so through assimilation and not replacement'<sup>10</sup>. The entire contention reflected in the above paragraphs can be substantiated by a historiography of the intellectuals of the nineteenth century and their contribution to the social reform movement of the time.

As noted above the pattern of Western impact was varied. However the fact remains that it definitely produced a novel pattern of thinking. An encounter with an alien culture complete with rational and superior technological and scientific abilities is bound to shudder the spine of a country languishing under the burden of ignorance and a faith usurped by the dictates of a Brahminical consciousness. The Western impact went a long way in this path. However the development of such a critical attitude was not limited only to those influenced by Western ideas. This factor has often been overlooked. In emphasizing this point, K.N.Panikkar notes that 'the approach that Western knowledge and philosophical notions were fundamental to the development of a critical attitude and cognition of reality *is not entirely correct* in the context of colonial India'<sup>11</sup>. (Italics mine). In terms of the formative educational influences, two broad categories can be identified among the nineteenth century Indian intellectuals: one nurtured on traditional knowledge and the other on a combination of the Western and the traditional. While Radhakanta Deb, Dayanand Saraswati, and Narayana Guru belonged to the first category, Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Bal Gangadhar Tilak belonged to the second category. It is to be emphasized that, in spite of the differences in the formative

---

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd I. Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: The Democratic Incarnation of Caste in India* quoted in Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, 2005, p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *The Intellectual History of Colonial India* in (eds) Romila Thapar and S. Bhattacharya, *Situating Indian History*, OUP, New Delhi, p. 414.

educational influences on the members of these two groups, their perception of reality and vision of social transformation seem remarkably similar. Neither did western influences automatically lead to 'progressive' social and political consciousness nor did traditional influences invariably create conservative attitudes. It is essential to probe more into this factor in the historiography of the intellectuals.

Another set of historians such as Charles Heimsath believe that the various religious reforms in colonial India were inspired by English education. The western educated were exposed to the philosophies of reason and rationality. As Chandavarkar noted 'English education was accomplishing silently what no law could have accomplished- unsettling people's minds, raising controversies....and thus forwarding the cause of social progress.'<sup>12</sup> John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer were some of the thinkers who had deep influence on the reformers' minds. Spencer's theory of evolution had a great influence on the educated Indians. He argued that every society passes from simple to complex. This evolution, according to him, is a universally applicable natural phenomenon. However microscopic, India's advance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was under way, according to Spencerian analysis, and the evolution towards a more individualistic, freer society was progressing despite all set backs.

Whatever the background of these intellectuals, their uprising for the cause of socio-religious reform can be conjectured as a reaction due to the Western influence. This reaction can be bracketed as traditional and modern: 'the former sought to purge Hinduism of its degenerate forms by a rededication to God in the Bhakti spirit. On the other hand, the modern reform sought to purify beliefs as well as practices by establishing virtually a new religion, the Vedic faith based on a reasoned interpretation of the Vedas. The traditional reform ignored the challenges to the Hindu faith embodied in Christianity, Islam and western knowledge; the other met all those challenges and set up a systematic creed that could accommodate scientific knowledge and thus appealed to English educated men and women. To the former belongs the Swami Narayana sect of

---

<sup>12</sup> Chandavarkar, *Speeches and Writings*, quoted in Charles Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1964.

Gujarat. The latter is represented by the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, etc.

The nineteenth century Indian intellectuals had a clear vision of the country's socio-religious conditions. "The interdependence and the interconnection of religion and social life, religious beliefs and social evils, distortions and misrepresentations of religious scriptures and knowledge, the social implications of some prevalent forms of worship and the adverse influences of social institutions such as caste, were a part of this perception. Reformation in this sphere, which was the main task undertaken by intellectuals in the nineteenth century, was induced not solely by these objective conditions but by their perceived linkages with the destiny of society. The early expression of the cultural-ideological struggle in colonial India was within this ambit. This idea, namely that socio-religious reformation was not an end in itself".<sup>13</sup> Almost simultaneously with this the Indian society witnessed the emergence of a consciousness about the cultural implications of colonialism. Destruction and denigration of the colonized culture generally forms a part of the methods of domination and control. Thus the initial expression of the struggle against alien domination manifests itself in the realm of culture. This is what happened in India as well. The intellectual quest to realize the potential inherent in traditional culture was a part of this struggle. These two tendencies, the first marked by a struggle against the backward elements of traditional culture and ideology to modernize society and the second by reliance on the strength of the traditional culture and ideology to shape the future, have been characterized as reformist and revivalist respectively. One reformist movement in the form of the Brahma Samaj and one revivalist movement in the form of Arya Samaj have been hitherto discussed.

### *The Brahma Samaj*

Leading this movement was Raja Rammohan Roy. He wanted the best of both the east and the west for the Indian people. He advocated the preservation of the spiritual and the cultural heritage of India. However, at the same time, he supported the absorption and assimilation of modernism imported from the West. He believed in monotheism. A

---

<sup>13</sup> K.N.Panikkar, *The Intellectual history of Colonial India*, OUP, New Delhi, 1986, p. 427.

rationalist, he aimed to relate religion to all aspects of life- individual, social, and national. He revolted against the system of sati, child marriage and caste system. He was a critic of the infallible Brahminical belief in the scriptures. He, however, believed in the Vedas and the Upanishads which taught about the Unity of God. He founded the Brahma Samaj on 20 August, 1828. Religion was used as a practical recourse to solve human problems rather than a dogmatic doctrine. August Comte and Durkheim wouldn't have agreed less. His announced purpose was to restore Hindu faith to its original purity. India's political advancement rested on a prior social advancement and this in turn depended upon religious beliefs and practices. This is what Roy believed in.

After Roy's death in 1833, leadership of the Samaj fell upon Debendranath Tagore. He gave a new spiritual leadership to the movement. The religious growth of Debendranath, whose creative leadership assured the Samaj of a prominent place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengali intellectual life, testified to the vitality of Hindu thought even at a time when it was besieged, so to speak, by western rationalism and the attraction of scientific knowledge. For Debendranath's thought developed through the rationalistic, deistic phase typical of a follower of Rammohan Roy to a final realization that the essence of the religious spirit is devotion, bhakti, the forms of which would determine its thoroughly Indian character. The outcome of his search for religious truth was in essence the religion of bhakti, or as he expressed it, "the pure unsophisticated heart was the seat of Brahmaism." Thus, it can be said that the Samaj under Debendranath wanted a middle course between popular religion and total reform. However a section of the Samaj was against it. This was led by A.K.Dutt who urged a more rational approach to religious ideas and a greater attempt at social reform.

A new phase began in the Brahma Samaj with the emergence of Keshub Chandra Sen. He advocated radical measures. This did not go down well with the old Brahmans. A split was thus inevitable. The new section thus formed was named as the Brahma Samaj of India. The older one was called the Adi Brahma Samaj. Debendranath's religious aims concerned only the Hindu community. But Sen's vision encompassed the world and he sought a universal faith. But, unlike Roy, this faith was to be based on devotion, a

common realization of one God and a common sense of sin. Roy, on the other hand, had placed utmost importance on reason. Once Sen said “I do not undervalue social reformation,” but he declared, “make religion the centre of all your reform movements—make religion the basis on which reorganized, reformed, and regenerated India will stand in future.” Although Sen’s major motive was religious reform yet one social issue close to his heart was marriage reform. His effort did bring out legal reforms concerning marriage by the British administration. However, his act of marrying off his 13 year old daughter to the 16 year old then Maharaja of Kutch Behar turned the tables on him. The marriage was a lavish affair of almost unmitigated orthodoxy. Second, both the bride and the groom were below the minimum age of marriage advocated by him. This proved to be a costly affair for K.C.Sen and the Brahma Samaj.

### *The Arya Samaj*

‘Go back to the Vedas’- this was Swami Dayanand Saraswati’s clarion call. His ideology rested on an integrated view of past, present, and future linked in a continuum on the one hand and his conception of God and true religion on the other. He believed in a formless, yet immanent and omnipotent God. God revealed ‘true religion’ to the sages of the Aryas through the Vedas in the divine language of Sanskrit. However this greatness has been lost mid-way because of the greed and opportunism of the priests. Vedas are the true source of Hinduism. The Hindu religion, as depicted by the Brahmin priests, is but a corruption of the true ethos of Hinduism. He sought a total elimination of the Brahminical rituals and worship. He believed in the unity of all Hindus. He advocated a religion where the Vedas are the most important with the accompanying ritual being ‘homa’ accompanied by Sanskrit shlokas. Swami Dayanand’s emphasis on the ritual of homa deserves attention. He preached that homa or the offering of aromatic, medicinal and wholesome sacrificial materials into the fire to the accompaniment of ‘mantras’ (sacred formulas), is the proper mode of worship on all important occasions. He further stated that offering ‘ghee’ into the fire has practical utility for life on earth. He looked upon homa as the most important institution of the Vedic Aryans and sought to reinstate it as the chief ritual of the Arya Samaj. It is worth mentioning in this context that Arya

Samaj was found by him in 1875. He followed a mid-way between the rationalists and the traditionalists.

Such movements were a reaction against the perceived violation of the religious beliefs and practices due to the administrative measures undertaken by the colonial state or by the evangelizing efforts of Christian missionaries. Thus it can be said that the defense of indigenous culture and institutions and an introspective study of their strength and past glory were a consequence of colonial cultural intrusion. It was forced by historical circumstances which necessitated a redefinition of identity. It led to a search for identity in indigenous tradition as is amply evident in the above discussions. But this reclining back to the indigenous faith was not without qualifications. It was to some extent influenced by the principle of reason and objectivity. This reminds of the period of Enlightenment in Europe. However this tendency to rely on the vitality of traditional culture and to reinterpret it to meet the requirements of contemporary society was a part of the religious quest. However it hindered with the growth of a secular ethos. This legacy continued culminating in a partition of the country. Ironically the communal undercurrents seem irrepressible even in contemporary India manifested in their intermittent occurrences.

All these were orthogenetic changes in Hindu religion. A.R.Desai considers these religious reform movements as an expression of national awakening due to contradictions between the old value systems and new socio-economic realities. The aim of these movements was to revive the old religion in the context of nationalism and democracy as the cardinal principles for the emergence of modern India. It can be said that “these religio-reform movements were national in content but religious in form.”

If this social base-the social structure of society- trembles then the universe of meaning also shakes. Religion becomes the prey in such a case. This is no doubt the case in all societies. When western rationality made inroads into India our entire social base was shaken up. What to say of the caste system and other overriding ills plaguing the Hindu society, in fact the total concept of Hinduism was questioned and its religiosity considered irrational. The changing social structure necessitated changes in some of the



religious doctrines. It also catalyzed a 'self reflexivity' within the Hindu society. Our religious reformers discovered the lost glory of the Hindu religion and revolted against the Brahminical rituals and the encompassing superstitions. It thereby provided a meaningful interpretation of the altering lifeworlds of the Indian people.

#### *FAITH AND REASON: SEARCH FOR A NEW IDENTITY*

Most sociologists, irrespective of their theoretical orientation, have predicted a helpless future for religion with the accelerating importance of science and reason. They have also constructed a picture of faith getting relegated to the background as reason takes centre-stage. However, none of the theories could explain satisfactorily the Indian situation after its encounter with the west. India's response to the alien power was unique. The rational ideas definitely inspired the west educated Hindu to attempt at the erosion of the ills ingrained in his society. But it did not in any way threaten the legitimacy of religion, as Berger would say. In fact the section of westernized Indians who ridiculed Hindu cultural and spiritual ethos viz. the Derozians failed miserably. It is so because Hinduism is not a mere religion. It is rather a way of life for its practitioners. The western thought, in fact, inspired the Indians to return to their roots and bring to the fore the purity of the Hindu traditions by emphasizing their spirituality. So it was not exactly a case of evolution from faith to reason. But rather it was a history of reason inspiring faith and faith giving an impetus to reason. Thus it can be said that any discourse on the religious transition in India has to be considered in a different paradigm. Having said this it becomes expedient to refer to at least two of the greatest scientific minds in colonial India- P.C.Ray and J.C.Bose.

It goes without saying that post-enlightenment, scientific endeavors and technological advancement had become an inherent part of Europe (in this case England). It is only under the British influence that India started questioning the superstitions and irrationality steeped in its cultural landscape. However the English project had two assumptions which did not go down well with the Indians: first, India is more spiritual and less scientific; second modern science is superior to all other forms of alternative

sciences. So, scientific interests in India grew as a counter-response to this assumption. Indian scientists were eager to prove the scientific nature of Indian people. They drew comparisons with ancient Europe and established that ancient India was as much scientific as ancient Europe. Scientific discoveries in ancient India belonged to or even preceded the European discoveries. Hence they talk of a parallel scientific culture in India running along with the west. The cause of India's scientific decline as envisaged by these scientists would be dealt later. Here, it is essential to say that the sudden interest shown in science and the reference to past glory of India's scientific tradition was in response to colonial west attempts to establish their scientific supremacy. By considering European scientific knowledge as the point of departure India's scientists have nonetheless, at least implicitly accepted the supremacy of the then current rationality and science of the west. Thus India's scientific project was more of a nationalistic endeavor. Whatever be the reason it is interesting to locate the way these two scientists have dealt with the material history of India without at any time discounting its spiritual greatness.

P.C.Ray, in his book, 'A History of Hindu Chemistry', sought to address a very crucial area- 'science, and the material-spiritual divide that its social discourses implied between the West and the East.' Ray was convinced that a nation needed its own rational traditions, particularly in science. So his search started to establish the scientific glory of the Hindu past. Such a nationalistic search for a scientific culture implied a predominant scheme of a spiritual east and a materialist west inherent in Oriental scholarship. Ray criticized the dominant European attitudes towards the Orient, which defined its essential character in opposition to the Occident. For Ray the east had a scientific and a materialist past as well. He turned the tables on the west when he argued about the west' spiritual past. Through this reversal of the characters of the Occident and the Orient, Ray made his fundamental proposition of a civilisational synthesis and the universality of science. Ray talked of the various stages in the evolution of Hindu chemistry. He had a fascination for alchemy and studies on mercury. He also dealt in detail about the Greek influence in the project of a scientific Europe. According to him, the European celebration of Greece was through a tendency to locate political identity and wisdom in its past. In the process, civilization was defined in this historiography by their antiquity: the European

civilization was perceived as Greek and the Indian civilization was located in ancient Hindu India. He, however, confesses that these two parallel streams of knowledge could not remain so because of some structural and ideological changes in the Hindu society. West went to experience a period of enlightenment and its post-enlightenment scientific explorations are amazing. On the other hand, the Indian scientific spirit was buried under the burden of the caste system. He wrote 'directly the caste system prevented, in course of time, the spread of knowledge beyond a small privileged, hereditary class and indirectly led to the neglect of the physical sciences.' So it can be said that Ray has, in Dhruv Raina's words, 'inaugurated a social science of history in identifying the cause of scientific decline in the consolidation of the caste system and social rigidities of the medieval times. However, in the later phases of his life Ray acknowledged the superiority of the then prevailing scientific knowledge of the west. He also accepted the spirituality of the Hindu mind and was confused between hope and desperation regarding subsequent scientific endeavors in India. To him actual science emerged only after the Scientific Revolution in Europe. He wrote 'modern chemistry, by which I mean Scientific Chemistry, is only of yesterday's origin. It may be said to date from the time of Lavoisier, who, as you all know, was one of the earlier victims of the fanatical outburst which followed in the wake of the French Revolution.' He, unlike his contemporary J.C.Bose, could not perceive any moral crisis in such a materialist, western science. It is worth mentioning here that even Max Weber could perceive the ensuing moral crisis and disillusionment arising out of an excess of rationalistic thoughts and mechanistic actions.

J.C.Bose was one of the greatest physicist and plant physiologist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century India. His invention of electric torch and discovery of rays similar to infra red light cannot be undermined. However his most pioneering work was done in the field of plant physiology. In spite of being a scientist of repute, Ray could sense a moral crisis in the western science, with its temporal, secular, mechanistic characteristics. He believed that Indians could add a new dimension to contemporary science. He sought to introduce an eastern spirituality within a materialist western science, with a definite conscious assertion of 'Indian spirituality.' Bose was influenced by Rabindranath Tagore in his spiritual quest. It is understood that Tagore hoped that through scientific researches India

would return to her ancient glory- to the steadfast work, to duty and devotion to her trance of earnest meditation. J.C.Bose also had similar ambitions in mind. In an address to the Royal Institution Friday Discourse in May 1901, Bose projected a larger thematic significance for his work. From then onwards his researches were also to be a manifestation of classical India. He concluded in the paper: "it was when I came upon the mute witness of these self-made records, and perceived in them one phase of a pervading unity, that bears within it all things- the mote that quivers in ripples of light, the teaming life upon the earth, and the radiant sun that shines above us- it was then that I understood for the first time a little of that message proclaimed by my ancestors on the banks of Ganges 30 centuries ago- they who see but one in all the changing manifestations of the universe, unto them belongs the Eternal truth- to none else, unto none else." This is the fullest articulation of nationalist Vedic monism in his works. The boundary between the outer and the inner is transcended. The external omnipotent energy has entered the body, manifesting itself as inner strength, as the 'self', and even resisting the external world. 'What is mine amongst all this?' Bose asked. He subsequently found the answer in the notion of eternal energy: 'the struggle between the inner and the outer has manifested life in its various forms. At the root of both is that great power, which stimulates the living, the non-living, the molecules, and the entire universe. Life is an expression of that power.' His words conformed to those of Swami Vivekananda, 'all forces of Nature, therefore, must be created by the Universal Mind. And we, as little bits of minds, are taking out that Prana from nature, working it out again in our nature, moving our bodies and manufacturing our thought.'

There have been many critics of this nationalist science. Ashis Nandy, in fact, has shown that the very articulation of Indian nationalism implied a 'colonization of the mind'. It internalized various Christian and Victorian values of religion, masculinity and gender, which in turn became the mainstay of such nationalistic assertions. This observation most definitely holds water and can be subjected to further discussions. However the way nationalist science tried to accommodate science and spirituality cannot be undermined. The quest for a new identity of the Hindu faith which the social reformers were attempting to build found a support in the beliefs and proclivities of these scientists. Such

a tendency to strike a balance between reason and faith which to a large extent defined the struggle of the social reformers and later on in the politics of the nationalists has been a unique in the history of the world.

### *The Bengal Renaissance*

Any discussion of the reform movements of the nineteenth century is incomplete without a reference to the happenings of Bengal of the time. Often these socio-cultural changes advocated in then Bengal have been described under the term “Bengal Renaissance”. Many historians do not accept such a terminology to describe the period. However that is a different debate and for the cause of the present study this term has been used. Nineteenth century Bengal was a unique blend of religious and social reformers, scholars, literary giants, journalists, patriotic orators, and scientists, all merging to form the image of a renaissance, and marked the transition from the ‘medieval’ to the ‘modern’. According to Susobhan Sarkar<sup>14</sup> the role played by Bengal in the modern awakening of India was comparable to the position occupied by Italy in the European renaissance. Elaborating further on this Niranjana Dhar<sup>15</sup> observes that the Western scientific and secular education worked wonders for the nineteenth century Bengal. However he did not attribute the awakening in Bengal entirely to the influence of the British. The Western influence was a mere catalyst. The difference in the way of Bengal’s reaction to this influence vis-à-vis other parts of the country lied in historical factors.

According to Dhar, Buddhism had played a key role in the socio-intellectual life of India. It continued to make its impact felt in Bengal even after it had faded away from other parts of the country. As a result the Bengalis had always preserved the habit of rational thinking. Thus the impact from without (the British influence) combined with the rationalistic urge from within which worked wonders. Moreover the Nyaya Navya movement continued to nurse the Bengali mind in the post Buddhist period. The process of reasoning involved in Nyaya Navya was conceived in relation to the objective reality.

---

<sup>14</sup> Susobhan Sarkar, *Notes on Bengal Renaissance*, PPP, New Delhi, 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Niranjana Dhar, *Vedanta and Bengal Renaissance*, in (ed), Ralph Dumain, *The Autodidactic Project*, Minerva Associates, Calcutta, 1971.

It is to be noted that very much like the Italian Renaissance the Bengal Renaissance was not a mass movement. It was restricted to the upper section of the society. English education, British Orientalism, coupled with the strategic location of Calcutta as a port city saw the inroads of British the most into this city. The secular and rational values did create an upsurge in Bengal. It is very well reflected in the pioneering effort of Raja Rammohan Roy and his Brahma Samaj. Another stalwart of the period was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. He was a crusader of the time. Often referred to as the “father of Bengali prose style”, Vidyasagar fought for the cause of marriage reforms. His chief concentration was on the abolition of polygamy and the allowing of widow remarriage. He wrote a book entitled “Marriage of Hindu Widows” in which he sought to prove shastric sanctions for the remarriage of widows and stated his unwillingness to rest the case on reason alone.

Another known face of the time was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. He was thoroughly smitten by the Western rationality. He started the Hindu college. He along with his students from the Hindu college was thoroughly against all kind of religiosities. They discarded faith and based their struggle solely on the ground of reason. Other major figures of the Renaissance were Michael Madhusudan Dutt who under the influence of English education converted to Christianity. He was a poet and playwright whose major works include Tilottamma, Ratnavali, etc. Others included A.K.Datta, D.N.Tagore, P.C.Majoomdar, and Rabindranath Tagore. Hence the Bengal renaissance witnessed numerous stimulations in the field if ideas and to some extent its practical ramifications. An interesting point to be noted about this historical period is that in a search for an identity there was an attempt to accommodate faith and reason without in most cases abandoning one for the other. This is reminiscent of the Enlightenment in Europe. But in Europe reason tried to prevail over faith. In the Indian context, reason and faith were demonstrated to be the two sides of the same coin. There culmination in a single subject is quite a possibility.

Bengal Renaissance is incomplete without an appraisal of the place of Swami Vivekananda in the entire set up. In the backdrop of the various social and economic

changes brought about by the British rule, and having learned of the religious and scientific development that took place in India, it is evident that Indian society was undergoing transition. Modern ideas and institutions were no doubt impressing upon the Indian consciousness. The section of society which had an opportunity to study Western ideas and viewpoints were no doubt influenced by the egalitarian ideas of the Enlightenment, the scientific and rationalistic world view. However at the same time many of them could see the inherent contradiction between the idea of Western egalitarianism and their colonialism over India. The challenges to Hinduism brought about by Christian missionaries were also another overwhelming factor which gave an impetus to a struggle to maintain the Hindu identity. However this struggle was in no way an attempt to return to our tradition as such. Rather it was a cautious move to reason out tradition by doing away with its dogmas. There was an element of modernity and tradition put together. Swami Vivekananda was a veritable representation of such a phenomenon. It is against this backdrop that the sayings of the great philosopher and spiritualist Swami Vivekananda should be examined. In fact no discussion on Indian spirituality is complete without a detailed description of the works of Swami Vivekananda. The subsequent portions of the chapter would deal with Swamiji's teachings on Advaita philosophy and Practical Vedanta, and last but not the least on the sociology of the Ramakrishna Mission.

*SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: A MODERN SAINT*  
*AND*  
*HIS PRACTICAL VEDANTA*

On Vivekananda, Romain Rolland writes, "*it was impossible to imagine him in the second place. Wherever he went he was the first.... . Everybody recognized in him at sight the leader, the anointed of God, the man marked with the stamp of the power to command. A traveller who crossed his path in the Himalayas without knowing who he was stopped in amazement and cried, "Shiva..."*"<sup>16</sup> This was Swamiji who made the

---

<sup>16</sup> Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, Advaita Ashrama: Calcutta, 1988. pp. 5-6.

emphatic and earnest appeal to Hindu civilization and the Indian people 'Awake arise and stop not till your goal is reached'. What was the goal? For this cyclonic monk and visionary socialist, the aim was the propagation of the Vedantist philosophy. There are different dimensions to this dynamic personality. But the present study focuses on the following aspects: his conception of spirituality, reason and religion, western influence on Swamiji. To understand vividly the ideas accorded to Swamiji, it is pertinent to quote Christopher Isherwood. *"Vivekananda was profoundly moved by the realization of India's poverty and the state of her oppression under the British colonial rule. And he proposed a revolution. The spirit of this revolution enormously influenced Gandhi and influences Indian political thought till this day. Vivekananda in this sense is a great figure in Indian history, one of the very greatest historical figures that India has ever produced. But it must always be noted that Vivekananda's revolution, Vivekananda's nationalism, were not like the kind of revolution, the kind of nationalism, which we associate with other great leaders, admirable and noble as they may be. Vivekananda was far greater than that. In fact, when one sees the full range of his mind, one is astounded. Vivekananda looked toward the West, not simply as a mass of tyrants exploiting various parts of Asia, and other undeveloped areas, but as future partners, people who had very, very much to offer. At the same time, without any false humility, he faced the West and said, 'we have fully as much and more to offer you. We offer you this great tradition of spirituality, which can produce, even now, today, a supremely great figure such as Ramakrishna. You can offer us medical services, trains that run on time, hygiene, irrigation, electric current. These are very important, we want them, and we admire some of your qualities immensely"*<sup>17</sup>. This brings forth the great nationalist that Vivekananda was. A look at the globalized arena of our survival, very fittingly supports the spiritual import of India and its relevance in the west. Otherwise why would Indian philosophy and spirituality dealing with mental calisthenics be such a rage in America and the west? So Swamiji while acknowledging the scientific nature of the west remarkably presents the case of the indispensability of Indian spirituality.

---

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Swami Lokeshwarananda, *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna- Vivekananda*, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture: Calcutta, 1983. pp. 52-53.



Before moving into details it would be interesting to note a brief on Swamiji's early life. Swami Vivekananda was born as Narendranath Dutta on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1863. He was the only son and third child of Vishwanath Dutta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi. Fondly addressed as Naren by family members he was quite bright in his studies. He passed his Bachelor of Arts from the Scottish Church College in 1884. Naren's college days were marked by tremendous intellectual ferment and spiritual upheaval. Those were the days of the first stirrings of political awakening in India, and physical culture was considered to be a hallmark of patriotism. On the admonitions of Surendranath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose he joined a gymnasium as well. Being an avid follower of the happenings of the time, Naren took interest in the Brahmo Samaj of the time. The activities of the Brahmo Samaj were dynamic and new in sharp contrast to the moribund state of the Hindu society. Its leader Keshab Chandra Sen was the idol of young Bengal. The movement as already discussed was progressive in its views. In Naren it aroused a tumult of thought and feeling. He frequented the Samaj and considered it to be a potential solution to all of life's problems be it individual or national. He had the same ideas as that espoused by the Brahmo Samaj with regard to the discontents of our Hindu culture. For a time the intellectual atmosphere of the Brahmo Samaj satisfied him. He felt uplifted during the prayers and the devotional songs. He was uncompromising in his practice of the Brahmo ideals. With the rest of the Brahmo Samaj, Narendranath also believed in a formless God with attributes. However unlike the others he was convinced that if God really existed He would surely appear in answer to the sincere prayers of the devotees. He felt that there must be a way of realizing him, else life would be futile. Then realization dawned on him that if God was to be realized then he was no nearer the goal than before he had joined the Samaj. This spiritual quest made Naren very restless. The question: 'have you seen God?' haunted him. He went to Maharshi Debendranath Tagore with the hope of finding an answer to his question. But all attempts went in vain. None could establish properly the existence and tangibility of God. Finally Naren found an answer after his contact with Sri Ramakrishna. This contact opened a new chapter in Naren's quest for a spiritual life.

Initially Naren was apprehensive of the potentials of Sri Ramakrishna and thought of him to be a mad saint. But gradually his apprehensions were dispelled. He entered into debates and discussions with Sri Ramakrishna. The discussions ranged into a variety of from science and western influence to tradition, religion, and the Hindu culture. Many a times Naren, who was later to become Swami Vivekananda, and disseminate Ramakrishna's teachings far and wide through out the world argued with Ramakrishna on issues where he sought to differ. For instance, being a follower of the Brahma Samaj Swamiji believed in the formlessness of God. But Sri Ramakrishna worshipped idols. Swamiji could not understand and agree to this action of Ramakrishna. Hence he argued against it. He also had a streak of fanaticism in him. On noticing this Ramakrishna admonished him: *"my boy, try to see the Truth from all angles and in every perspective"*<sup>18</sup>. This tendency to bigotry disappeared when Naren realized the oneness of all spiritual endeavor and religious belief. As has already been told Swami Vivekananda did not accept any contention which was against his reasoning capacity. He displayed a high level of intellectualism in his interactions with Sri Ramakrishna. He debated with him and many a times contradicted him. On the other hand, Sri Ramakrishna entertained all his doubts and allowed Naren to put to test all the theories of the former. At the same time Sri Ramakrishna also put to test all his disciples including Naren.

The Radha-Krishna episode of the Hindu tradition was a bone contention between Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The latter doubted its historicity and in the second place he considered the relationship between Radha and Krishna as immoral and objectionable. Unable to convince to him Sri Ramakrishna said one day, *"even if it is agreed that Radha was not a historical personality and the episode is imagined by some lover of God, why not fix your mind on the intense yearning of Radha and the Gopis for the Supreme? Why dwell on the expression? This may appear human to you, but the yearning and vision you must take as divine"*<sup>19</sup>. The master was however glad at heart that Naren was a rebel as without intellectual questioning and struggle no one can arrive at illumination. Again Naren also considered it blasphemous to equate the philosophy of

---

<sup>18</sup> The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Western and Eastern Disciples, Vol.1. Advaita Ashrama. 5 Dehi Entally Road: Calcutta, 1989. p.94.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 95

the Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy of the soul's oneness with God. Sri Ramakrishna tried to reason out the philosophy with Naren as he thought it to be the best way to deal with him. One day when Naren was ridiculing the Advaita philosophy, Sri Ramakrishna came out nude and touched Naren and then plunged into Samadhi. The effect of the touch as described by Naren himself is as follows:

*"The magic touch of the Master that day immediately brought a wonderful change over my mind. I was astounded to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God! I saw it quite clearly, but kept silent to see whether the impression would last; but it did not abate in the course of the day. .... Everything I saw appeared to be Brahman. I sat down to take my meal, but found that everything- the food, the plate, the person who served, and even myself- was nothing but that. .... . When I became normal again, I realized that I must have had a glimpse of the Advaita state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the Advaita philosophy."*<sup>20</sup>

Thus in this way little by little Naren was led from doubt to certitude, from darkness to light, from anguish of mind to the peace of vision, from the seething vortex of the world to the grand expanse of universal Oneness. He was taken, by the power of Ramakrishna from bondage to spiritual freedom, from a pale of a little learning into that omniscience which is the consciousness of Brahman. Gradually Naren found his answers in spiritual fulfillment under the auspices of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus Narendranath became the great Swami Vivekananda who propounded the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta and its practicality.

. It is interesting to analyze Swamiji's zealous enthusiasm in interpreting the Vedanta philosophy from a scientific perspective. But it is the same breath that he points out at the latent metaphysics in every thought including science.

---

<sup>20</sup> The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples, Vol.1, Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Calcutta, 1989. pp. 96-97.

On the outset, it must be mentioned that Swamiji was a noble crusader of humanity. He was most definitely not immune to the superstitions and the irrationality that has plagued Hindu religion for centuries. If this continues Hinduism cannot sustain itself in the face of proselytizing missions of the Christian missionaries. Moreover, it faced a greater challenge from the modernist and the scientific forces of the west as well. Hence Swamiji sought a radical transformation in the Hindu belief system. The ugly façade of priesthood, their advocacy of numerous rituals and sacrifices, their projection as the mediator between man and God- a God who supposedly watches everyone from a certain place called heaven- all these seemed like some unscientific folklore to the western science. On the other hand, Swamiji not only wanted Hinduism to get rid of these of these Brahminical influences he also reinterpreted Hinduism by propelling to the forefront a part of it to be the philosophy central to the religion. This was the Vedanta philosophy. Swamiji was also well aware of the fact that establishing the credibility of his philosophy in a rapidly changing lifeworld affected by scientific discourse would not be easy. So his first task was to juxtapose science and spirituality. This was the first task keeping in view the changing socio-cultural conditions in India. Before reflecting on this aspect it is pertinent to express that the word 'philosophy' is not the way Kant or Hegel would interpret it. It is neither a book nor a symposium of writing. It is culmination of a series of books written at different points in history.

In his paper on Hinduism read at the World Parliament of Religion, he read "*the Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same. Then, if there was a time when nothing existed, where was all this manifested energy? Some say it was in a potential form in God. In that case God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, this would make Him mutable. Everything mutable is a compound, and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction. So God would die, which is absurd. Therefore there never was a time when there was no creation.*"<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> The complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol 1, Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Kolkatta, 2006. p.7.

Swamiji was very well informed about the threat that science holds towards religion. It is therefore evident in all his speeches that he was trying to give a rational connotation to religion and the concepts associated with it. He talked of the 'theory of evolution' which biologists have talked of in the realm of living beings, geographers in the field of ecology and social scientists in the field of society. However, unlike the projection of sociologists of the changing role of religion and its pre-eminence as rationality progresses, Swamiji tends to differ. Weber has talked of religion losing its importance in a highly materialistic world. Wilson also echoed similar views. However, Swamiji's perception and interpretation of religion is fundamentally different from these western thinkers. He believes in the science of religion and envisages a greater and more emphatic role for religion in modern society. It should also be mentioned that the Vedanta philosophy that he preaches about is fundamentally the 'religion of humanity'. He does not believe in the assumption of an imaginary God who needs to be worshipped. He believes that the greatest god is within the 'self'. '*Tat tvam asi*' is basic to his teaching. It implies 'that art thou'. Science believes that explanations of things are inherent in their nature. He has also tried to explain religion in this perspective. Besides he has also tried to prove his theory of religion by applying deductive logic which is a part of science only. His attempt at giving a scientific base to his religious preaching would be quoted at length. However before that it is interesting to note the way in which Durkheim's perception of religion differed from Swamiji. According to the former it is society which is worshipped as God. It is this feature which helps in fostering collective consciousness and maintaining stability in society. However Swamiji opines that it is the self that is the highest manifestation of the divine. But we are generally devoid of this knowledge because of the cloud of materialism and other worldly pursuits that has surrounded us. Thus we feel the necessity of constructing a Personal God. This definitely is vulnerable to the societal changes and progress in reason. So it is important to note the fundamental difference in the nature of conceptualizing God and religion by Swamiji and other western social thinkers including Durkheim. Following is the way Swamiji has conceptualized the relation between reason and religion. In his own words:

*“knowledge of the sciences covers, as it were, only part of our lives, but the knowledge which religion brings to us is eternal, as infinite as the truth it preaches, claiming this superiority, religions have many times looked down, unfortunately, on all secular knowledge, and not only so, but many times have refused to be justified by the aid of secular knowledge. In consequence, all the world over there have been fights between secular knowledge and religious knowledge, the one claiming infallible authority as its guide, refusing to listen to anything that secular knowledge has to say on the point, the other, with its shining instrument of reason, wanting to cut to pieces everything religion could bring forward. This fight has been and is still waged in every country. Religions have been again and again defeated, and almost exterminated. The worship of the goddess of Reason during the French revolution was not the first manifestation of that phenomenon in the history of humanity, it was a re-enactment of what had happened in ancient times, but in modern times it has assumed greater proportions. The physical sciences are better equipped now than formerly, and religions have become less and less equipped. The foundations have become less and less equipped. The foundations have been all undermined, and the modern man, whatever he may say in public, knows in the privacy of his heart that he can no more “believe” ..... This fight cannot last much longer without breaking to pieces all the buildings of religion”.* <sup>22</sup>This very aptly sums of the present crisis of religion. Facilitating it earlier decline is also the contributions of the communal and fascist forces. It is essential to reflect on the practicality if this Vedantism. This is possible as Swamiji also reflects on the plausibility of a way out of the dilemma that religion encountered then. This can be applied even now. He has discovered the ‘science in faith’. He continues:

*“Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason, through which every other science justifies itself? Are the same methods of investigation, which we apply to sciences and knowledge outside, to be applied to the science of Religion? In my opinion this must be so, and I am also of opinion that the sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigation, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition;*

---

<sup>22</sup> The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol 1, Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Kolkatta, 2006. pp. 366-367.

*and the sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen. All that is dross will be taken off, no doubt, but the essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this investigation. Not only will it be made scientific-as scientific, at least, as any of the conclusions of Physics or Chemistry- but will have greater strength, because Physics or Chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has.”<sup>23</sup>*

Swamiji further states that if religion satisfies the two principles- principle of generalization and principle of evolution- then it can most definitely qualify as rational. He elucidates that these principles find echo in Vedanta. *“The Brahman of the Vedanta fulfils that condition, because Brahman is the last generalization to which we can come. It has no attributes but is Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss- Absolute. Existence is the very ultimate generalization which the human mind can come to. Knowledge does not mean the knowledge we have, but the essence of that, that which is expressing itself in the course of evolution in human beings or in other animals as knowledge. The essence of that knowledge is meant, the ultimate fact beyond, if I may be allowed to say so, even consciousness. That is what is meant by knowledge and what we see in the universe as the essential unity of things. To my mind, if modern science is proving anything again and again, it is this, that we are one- spiritually, mentally, physically<sup>24</sup>.”*

Science has several basic principles- the theory of causation, of deduction and induction, of evolution, the indestructibility of matter. Through his various lectures and writings Swamiji has proved all these principles apply to Advaita Vedanta as well. However he has also demonstrated that these principles only apply to the belief in an Impersonal God. Personal God is but a manifestation of human beings’ ignorance regarding the Ultimate Truth. However in the same vein he shows that science has in its belief system a set of assumptions which are beyond the explanation of rationality and reason. He says *“the scientist is brought to the necessity of recognizing metaphysics, when he supposes that atoms having neither breadth nor length yet become, when combined, the cause of*

---

<sup>23</sup> The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkatta, 2006. p. 367.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 372-373.

*extension, length and breadth. When one atom acts upon another, some medium is necessary. What is that medium? It will be a third atom. If so, then the question still remains unanswered, for how do these two act upon the third? A manifest reduction ad absurdum. This contradiction in terms is also found in the hypothesis necessary to all physical sciences that a point is that which has neither parts nor magnitude, and a line has length without breadth. These cannot be either seen or conceived. Why? Because they do not come within the range of the senses. They are metaphysical conceptions. So we see, it is finally the mind which gives the form to all perceptions. Thus even the materialist is driven to metaphysics in the last extremity.<sup>25</sup>*

So these are a few of the various ways in which he demonstrates the science and hence practicality of Vedanta. Generally it is said that the exigencies of modernity are too overwhelming to find time for devotion to the spiritual Ultimate. However in the very introduction to Practical Vedanta Swamiji shows that even the busiest of persons can be a Vedantist, a believer. It is not necessary to lead a secluded life to experience power and utility of the Vedanta. It would be interesting to detail a bit on Practical Vedanta in this context.

### *Practical Vedanta*

According to Swami Vivekananda the purpose of Vedanta is not its practice only by the ascetics. It can be practiced by the busiest person on earth as well such as a monarch. He says: *"In various Upanishads we find that this Vedanta philosophy is not the outcome of meditation in the forest only, but that the very best parts of it were thought out and expressed by brains which were busiest in the everyday affairs of life. We cannot conceive any man busier than an absolute monarch, a man who is ruling over millions of people, and yet, some of these rulers were deep thinkers."*<sup>26</sup> He further states that *"the real activity, which is the goal of Vedanta, is combined with eternal calmness, the*

---

<sup>25</sup> The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol 1 Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Kolkatta, 2006. p. 386.

<sup>26</sup> The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol 2, Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Kolkatta, 2006. p. 292.



*calmness which cannot be ruffled, the balance of mind which is never disturbed, whatever happens. .... . the Vedanta preaches the ideal; and the ideal, as we know, is always far ahead of the real, of the practical as we may call it. There are two tendencies in human nature: one to harmonize the ideal with the life, and the other to elevate the life to the ideal. It is a great thing to understand this, for the former tendency is the temptation of our lives. I think that I can only do a certain class of work. .... . Vedanta though it is intensely practical is always so in the sense of the ideal.”*<sup>27</sup> the Vedanta preaches the glory of the soul. Nothing is good or bad, nothing is a sin. The Vedanta recognizes only errors. Further the Vedanta is a doctrine of oneness. It implies faith in all because the one is all. The Vedanta says that god exists in each one of us. It is only by serving the needy and by living in harmony within each other that one can find God. It is one of the most important teachings of the Vedanta. It teaches us that our ‘bodies’ and our ‘selves’ are not to distinct entities. It is one and the same. This realization would produce a sea of change in humanity. Basically central to this philosophy of Vedanta is humanity and service with a stimulating spiritualizing undertone. As Swami Vivekananda concluded: “.... *Every man will be a worshipper and the reality in every man will be the object of worship*”<sup>28</sup>

There are two observations made regarding the teachings of Swamiji. First, the Vedanta that he preached, the religion that he tried to propagate was, in his opinion Hinduism. However most of his philosophies seem constructed and less likely to belong to Hinduism. Second, the entire preaching seems to be a project responding to the colonial rule. It is an attempt to emphasize the lost glory of the nation (emphasizing his nationalist sentiment); it is also a project to re-establish the quickly receding importance of religion in the face of increasing attacks from rationalists. He knew religion is important to sustain any life. But, given the then situation, religion could be accepted only by giving a rational base to it. So his espousal of the Practical Vedanta (this mirrors his image of a saint). Third he does not at any point undermine the science of the west. Rather he acknowledges its importance and in the same breath does not forget to warn of the

---

<sup>27</sup> The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol 2, Advaita Ashrama: Kolkatta, 2006. p. 292-294.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 358.

disastrous consequences of excessive materialism. In fact Swamiji writes *“as scientific discoveries undermined confidence in all the old forms of Western dogmatic religions both Hinduism and Buddhism had met the challenge and were offering the restless Western atheist or agnostic a spiritual home.”*<sup>29</sup> To sum, he recognizes the importance of reason in explaining religion and the importance of religion in the trajectory of scientific progress. So he can be said to represent a picture of a modern saint.

As has already been mentioned Swamiji believed in the religion of humanity. For him it is not renunciation that leads to ultimate realization. One can be a part of this world and yet practice Practical Vedanta. Being a propounder of the Unity of all men, he believes in the saying “service to mankind is service to God”. So besides the pursuit of spiritual travails, ‘seva’ is one of the aims of the Ramakrishna Mission.

#### *ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION*

Ramakrishna mission is a part of a wider project termed as the Ramakrishna movement. This movement consists of four streams- the Ramakrishna math and mission together form the main stream. The other two streams include Sri Sarada math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission. The first two were established by Swamiji. Emphasizing on the Ramakrishna mission it can be said that it was established in May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1897. Before elaborating further on the mission it would be interesting to know about the causes that led to its formation. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, India was a victim of recurring famines. This period saw the undermining of Indian indigenous industries as a result of British tariffs imposed on imports of Indian cotton and also due to the penetration of imported goods across India on the newly created railway network. These, and other changes in the pattern of trade, pricing and taxation policies, were to place food supplies beyond the reach of the poorest in the society during times of scarcity. Therefore these famines can be classed under ‘modern famines’. Swamiji was startled at such suffering of humanity. He was also puzzled at the insensitivity and lack of help shown by the British administration. He also believed that India’s apparent helplessness in the grip

<sup>29</sup>

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol 1, Advaita Ashrama: Kolkatta, 2006.

of famine was a sign of a people whose spirituality has become deadened by *tamas*. Swamiji was impressed by the organizations and associations formed in America and the west to deal with certain problems of a specific nature or to arrive at a particular shared goal. Enriched by this western method and viewing India's plight, Swamiji embarked upon the idea of establishing a Ramakrishna mission. This mission is a joint venture of the household devotees and the monks. Having dealt with a brief history of the Ramakrishna mission a discussion on the nature of the mission ensues.

Categorizing the Ramakrishna mission is one of the major tasks confronted by social thinkers. It has been variously considered as a 'reformed' Hinduism, neo Hinduism, Christianized Hinduism or an expression of westernization, modernization, nationalism or innovation. Given its inspiration from the west which Swamiji did not hesitate to acknowledge, the mission has also been labeled as a denomination or a sect. Thinkers who do not agree to this description consider it to be a *sampradaya*. However, a look at the sociological definitions does not qualify the mission to be categorized as any of the above mentioned types. A sect is a relatively small religious group. It often rejects many of the norms and values of the wider society and replaces them with beliefs and practices which sometime appear strange to non believer. As a result, sects are, in Peter Berger's words, 'in tension with the larger society and closed against it'. The denomination, on the other hand, accepts the norms and values of society. It does not identify with the state and approves of the separation of the church and the state. So it is evident from the very definitions that a denomination has heavy Christian undertones and hence the mission cannot be described as a denomination. It also does not fulfill the necessary clauses for being categorized as a sect.

A *sampradaya* is normally taken to refer to the transmission of teaching between successive teachers and so to the devotees who adhere to the authority of this living tradition over successive generations. A *sampradaya* may take its name from the deity worshipped, the name of the first teacher, a characteristic or distinctive belief, practice or feature. The Ramakrishna math and mission has not continued a 'transmission' of teaching down through a line of teachers around whom devotees gather but has set in

place a monastic bureaucracy surrounded by an increasingly institutionalized form of religion. For this reason, it would be misleading to continue to define the Ramakrishna mission as some form of sampradaya. It can simply be put that the Ramakrishna mission is a innovative response devised by Swamiji to deal with the social, economic, political, and cultural changes in India. It is no doubt heavily influenced by the western notion of an association but its Christian description should end there. It is a vitalistic, modern Hindu association. It can be considered to be the organizational aspect of the Ramakrishna movement. Its functions include the dissemination of Practical Vedanta and involving in help to the destitute. In fact the latter is considered as a vital step in realizing the former. The mission helped in institutionalizing the sayings of Ramakrishna and Swamiji. This effectively helped in the propagation of their beliefs and actions. 'First of all comes the gift of food; next the gift of learning, and the highest of all is the gift of knowledge'. This is how Swamiji emphasizes on the goals of the mission. The agenda of the Ramakrishna Mission is elaborated below. This elaboration of the agenda in terms of its aim and present relevance has been derived from the various booklets written by the Swamijis of the Mission to that effect-

#### *Agenda of the Ramakrishna Mission*

The sorry state of affairs of modern man and humanity as such has been amply shown in the previous section. It has also been observed that the urgent need of the hour is greater spiritual help. It is all the more needed in a country like India where religion and spirituality has been and still plays a major role. Having already learnt that the Ramakrishna mission's prominent and most important goal lies in the spiritual upliftment of human beings, it becomes necessary to reflect on its role in this altered civilisational milieu. For this purpose two aspects have been considered- one, the way it helps individuals deal with their modern problems and second, the way it impacts the humanity as a whole. In this part, the perception and viewpoints of the insiders' .i.e. the swamijis have been taken into account. It is through the various 'booklets' that their opinions have been deciphered.

Swami Bhuteshananda<sup>30</sup> very succinctly spells out the ideal of the Ramakrishna mission. He quotes Swami Vivekananda for this purpose- 'for the salvation of the Self and the good of the world'. This, he believes is the foundation and the guiding motto of the Ramakrishna Order. Basically he stresses on the life and teachings of the founding fathers of the Order especially Ramakrishna Paramhansa's and Swamiji's to elaborate on the role of the mission and the way it is helpful to modern man and society. To begin with he gives a strong blow to our very hypocritical revelation in the assumed greatness of Indian spirituality. He feels that it is a fact of the past. Now India is as much in the tentacles of hydra headed materialism as the west. He feels that the condition of human life, both in the east and the west, is more or less the same though there may be qualitative and quantitative differences in the nature of their joys and sorrows. The belief that Indians are believers has become a sort of dogma. There is no more serious attempt to apply this principle to apply this faith to life itself. This also explains the state of our great degradation. In this land of saints and sages the younger generation has almost lost faith in the sacred heritage of our country. In fact even if a youngster shows any kind of spiritual leanings, elders dissuade such orientations by saying such things as 'if you are thinking of prayer and devotion to God, well this is not the time for such things. They may be attended to in the future. Enjoy your life now'.

Swami Bhuteshananda feels that we have battered our souls for the sake of little mundane joys and have finally come to suffering. He feels that we are too pre-occupied with our body and its requirements. We strive for the gratification of our mere physical wants and needs. He says that one might find meaninglessness and emptiness in the midst of plenty. He says "wealth may be there, health may be there, and there may not be much obstructions to enjoyments. Even then, sometimes we feel a sort of unhappiness without our realizing what the cause of this is. People sometimes say of themselves- 'ill at ease'. Sometimes we question ourselves: 'I have everything that I think worth having; but still, why is it that I feel unhappy?'" In the same breathe it is important to remember another malady as well- poverty. In India there are many people living below poverty line. They lack the minimum requirements of life- they suffer from inadequate food,

---

<sup>30</sup> Swami Bhuteshananda, *Thoughts on Spiritual Life*, Advaita Ashrama: Calcutta, 1997. pp. 9-175.

clothing, shelter, literacy, and finance. Notwithstanding affluence and deprivation, an all pervading unhappiness is the greatest malady afflicting humanity.

It is in this context that he calls in to reckoning the role of the Ramakrishna Order. He recalls the preaching of Swami Vivekananda in this context. Swamiji once said, 'religion cannot be preached to a person who is starving'. He further said 'first bread and then religion'. It is not possible to understand spiritual truths on an empty stomach. So, a man's physical needs have to be met first. Then comes mental and intellectual needs. Then only spiritual things can be learned. Bhuteshananda says "serve with material things where a man needs physical help; if one needs intellectual growth, provide him with education and knowledge. If he is need of spiritual help, give him spiritual ideas. Emphasis should be laid on the path through which people will be benefited in every way, both materially and spiritually." This is what the mission strives for in the present. Today the Ramakrishna Mission is serving mankind in every walk of life. Medical service, financial assistance, relief and rehabilitation of the distressed, education, cultural uplift etc are a few of the diverse activities of the mission to serve man. However, Bhuteshananda is quick in emphasizing that it is not merely a social service institution. The chief emphasis is to help people manifest their innate divinity- to serve the Siva in *jiva*. Unless one is established in the infinite spiritual strength within, one's problems will not be solved. It is only by the evolution of the whole being, the spiritualization of the whole personality that ultimate solution to our problems can be found. It must be shown how people can get rid of their miseries and become evolved into beings full of light and happiness. It is along these lines that the Ramakrishna Mission works.

The Mission never insists its believers to take the path of renunciation. The founding fathers of the Mission believed that it is possible to strive for God realization in spite of being a householder. This fact has great significance in the present society. The Mission believes in "duty as God". To elucidate, Bhuteshananda gives an instance: Pratap Hazra, a believer in Ramakrishna was scolded by the guru. Hazra had abandoned his mother, wife and children leaving them to fend for themselves. Ramakrishna ordered him to go back and take care of his family. This does not imply that he was against one's being

absorbed in God consciousness. His point was that normally one should not be indifferent to one's responsibilities. Thus it is clear that the Mission is not a place to take refuge from one's duties, it is not a place for the escapists. It is not necessary to renunciate the world. Mental detachment is enough for the householder. He advised: 'do all your duties but keep your mind on God. Live with all- with wife and children, father and mother- and serve them'. Ramakrishna points out that what is needed to accomplish the goal of God realization is immense faith. He put tremendous emphasis on faith. However, it should not be equated with blind belief. In fact Ramakrishna does not believe in blind faith. He also emphasized the non essential nature of rituals in God realization. It is, he believes, only a preliminary step to higher realization. Tremendous faith is necessary for the strict adherence to a particular path to the end. We must have unflinching faith in the goal. At the same time he advocated equal respect for the paths that others follow. This is what the mission follows- respect for all religious philosophies in as much as they contribute to God realization. If we can follow this teaching we can look upon the followers of different paths as fellow-travellers to the same goal as ours. This message is of utmost importance particularly in these days of communal hatred and conflict. In the same vein it may be mentioned that Swami Vivekananda believed in the essential unity of man. He said that one must look upon all as God Himself. Till the time we are ignorant of the atman, the innate divinity in all of us, we make divisions between man and man, between races and races, and between nationality and nationality. Owing to these sorts of differences, we quarrel with each other and make this world a place uninhabitable for sane people. It is by the practice of true Vedanta that this problem can be ameliorated. One can see in this teaching that the Mission is striving to make this world a better place to live in.

As has already been discussed man is unhappy in spite of all materialistic possessions. It is apt to reflect on this point here. Swami Bhuteshananda explains this unhappiness in the following way: 'there is in essence, in the very core of our being, the Self or Atman which remains unattained in spite of all these finite earthly comforts. That is what Swamiji has called 'blessed discontent'. It is a discontent, dissatisfaction in the midst of the most perfect environment for worldly pleasures that we can think of. This discontent

is there because, there is something lacking and that missing 'something' cannot be had through all the earthly sources of satisfaction. The attainment of that something, the Atman or infinite Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, is the real goal of life. This is what real spirituality is'. It is for the commoners to understand this fact, taught by the mission, to choose the life they want to lead.

Swami Bhuteshananda emphasizes the immensity of the ideas that the Mission is attempting to implement. He believes that what is needed is a practical involvement in these ideas and the enthusiastic struggle to realize them in our lives. So it can be said that the Mission strives to help man touching all the dimensions. Be it the physical deprivations and poverty, the way out of the material labyrinth, the parochial attitude leading to violence and strife among nations, within nations, or an attempt at spiritual redressal in one's life, the Mission strives for the betterment of the humanity as a whole.

Swami Gahanananda<sup>31</sup> has also emphasized on the importance of the Ramakrishna Mission in the present times. He believed that the Ramakrishna movement is for all individuals. He enumerates some salient features of the mission which would establish its present relevance:

1. the Mission does not believe in miracle mongering. It is because the founding fathers of the mission considered such powers as a great obstacle to spiritual progress. Religious hypocrisy and spiritual pretensions must be done away with. It thus condemns the exploitation of the uneducated by the babas or black magicians. On the other hand it is also against the business of so called God men exploiting the emotional restlessness of the modern materialist drunken in the consumerist culture.
2. as already evident from the various quotations of the founding fathers cited in several previous sections, the mission propounded a modern outlook. Relics of past social customs like caste distinctions have no place in our individual or collective life. Thus the mission strives for an Indian society bereft of caste distinctions.

---

<sup>31</sup> Swami Gahanananda, Ramakrishna Movement for All, Sri Ramakrishna Math: Madras. Pp. 3-19.



3. none of the founding fathers of the mission liked setting limits to God. God has infinite powers and can assume various forms. A true adherent of the mission looks upon all religions as valid means of realizing the Ultimate Truth and regards the cultic practices and the spiritual techniques as suited to different temperaments. Hence the mission preaches against fanaticism.
4. love for humanity is basic to the mission.

Swami Harshananda<sup>32</sup> also articulates along the same lines as Swami Bhuteshananda. He remarks that if lack of basic amenities of life worries certain segments of the world society, a surfeit of them is threatening life on earth in other sections. Both these, though it may appear strange are the creations of modern civilizations. The problems of our society can be interpreted at: the individual level (like alcoholism, drug addiction, sex perversions and orgies); the social or national level (like exploitation, crimes, and violence, group animosities and conflicts based on pride and prejudices); and the international level (like wars and violations of human rights). Harshananda believed that almost all the problems that modern man faces, whatever be their ramifications can be traced to two basic infirmities of the human mind: lust and greed. It is necessary for modern man to regulate his lust and greed within the permitted perimeters of Dharma as sanctioned by the scriptures and gradually overcome them through disciplines prescribed for them. In keeping with these problems, Harshananda reflects on the importance of the mission as a vehicle to propagate and help in the practical realization of Swamiji's and Ramakrishna's ideas. Both the teachers talked of 'harmony'- harmony of all aspects of life, within the framework of the ultimate spiritual welfare of man. They also advocated self control of the body, mind and speech. These two messages are, according to Harshananda admirably tailored to fit the modern society which is in the throes of greed, lust and consequent conflicts often leading to conflagrations. It is interesting to note, as written by Harshananda, the views of Ramakrishna on the human body. This in turn

---

<sup>32</sup> Swami Harshananda, Relevance of Ramakrishna to Modern Life, Ramakrishna Math: Bangalore, 2000. pp. 3-24.

applies to the working of the mission as well. Unlike the post Vedic scholars who invariably relegated and even derided the role of the body, Ramakrishna advised to take care of the body since the Lord himself resides in it. The body is a great aid in obtaining spiritual experiences. Hence it sends a great wisdom to the humanity as a whole. It is important to take care of the body, but excessive pre-occupation with it, hampering its natural modifications and commodifying it does not harbor good for the modern man. It is extremely pathetic to note how educated modern men get duped by various advertisements which promise a fairer look, a younger look etc. Swami Budhananda says it can happen in this world of extreme consumerism. The construction of the body is commercialized. People who consider the well being of the body alone to be the be-all and end-all of life the declining years is dreadful. They fail to understand that it is not in the scheme of nature to remain young for ever. Hence they resort to artificial ways to retain their youthfulness. It is an accepted fact that youth has a beauty of its own- the beauty of creative power, of both biological and spiritual potential; whereas the beauty of advancing old age is the beauty of serenity attained through experience: it is the beauty of the growth in mind and the spirit which is far superior to the beauty of the flesh. Spiritual joys far outweigh the loss of physical pleasures. Modern man fails to comprehend this fact and hence the growing problem of depression and deprivation.

Swami Budhananda<sup>33</sup> has also written about the true religion. He too considers the Ramakrishna Mission a great vehicle to help people put to practice the teachings of the founding fathers. He feels that the modern man has a very superfluous notion of fun and progress. It is all evaluated at the sensual and material level. Modern man thinks he would lose out on the fun of life if he/she indulges in religious activities beyond the instrumental. But Budhananda writes the fun which eventually makes us suffer is not real fun. For people having such a notion of fun life is only skin deep. It is people who do not have a right idea of true religion think in such a way. Coming to the idea of progress he laments that progress has been equated with material progress only. This again, he believes is a lopsided view of what true progress is. Progress should include the

---

<sup>33</sup> Swami Budhananda, True Religion Always Helps, Ramakrishna Mission: New Delhi, 1994. pp. 1-52.

realization of the full potential of the mind, body, and soul. There has been much materialistic progress in recent times yet man is not happy. He pines for some peace of mind which has become a hard bargain in this world. This itself proves that there is something more than meets the eyes. Spiritual progress is necessary for the all round development of man. It is not possible without faith and practice of true religion. According to Budhananda true religion implies the truth of every religion. He feels that in contemporary world religion faces two dangers within its fold. One issues from 'narrowness' and the other from 'shallowness'. The first case takes religion to be primarily concerned with putting the world straight. The second case assumes one's own religion alone is true. These views breed contempt and hence violence in the name of religion. So a utilitarian and limited interpretation of religion is not true religion. True religion has two broad implications:

- A. Objectively, true religion means those spiritual principles through the living of which one attains perfection, illumination, God vision, or liberation. These spiritual principles are truthfulness, purity, self control, non violence, forbearance, detachment, equanimity, straight forwardness, dutifulness, other regard, compassion, love of God, and longing for spiritual enlightenment.
- B. Subjectively, true religion means not some-time, but an all-time, religion in a person's life.

Having seen what true religion is all about it becomes necessary to realize how practical such a religion is. This religion is our eternal friend. We live in wanton lifelong violation of the principles of religion. But religion always comes to our rescue. What would otherwise explain the booming craze for spirituality among the modern people?

All the above discussions are the ideas of the various swamijis residing in various Ashramas of the Mission. It definitely reflects their personal viewpoint but at the same time it also talks galore of the role of the Ramakrishna Mission in the contemporary times in serving man, society, and humanity. It is in fact true that modern man, essentially with

a very myopic vision of God, religion, and spiritual practices is increasingly resorting to spirituality to deal with his day to day problems. However the nature of this help would be transitory if one does not develop a true faith in spiritual orientations and just tries to 'use' it to serve some purpose. So in this context it is pertinent to ask 'can one be scientific and yet spiritual?' An answer is provided to this question in a book by the same name written by Swami Budhananda. A prior discussion on this topic has already been suggested in the previous chapter. He says that there is no actual conflict between science and religion. One can be truly scientific and truly spiritual at the same time. He exemplifies the life and ideas of Albert Einstein to prove this truth. In his book 'Out of My Later Years', Einstein makes illuminating remarks on science and religion. He says that the scientific method can teach us nothing beyond how facts are related to, and conditioned by each other. He claims that such objective knowledge is the highest man is capable of. Further he says that this knowledge of what is does not open the door directly to what should be. Objective knowledge does not give intimations of the end and inspiration for moving toward it. He asserts that it must come from another source and the source is religion. He emphasizes that the fact of our existence and activities acquire meaning only by setting up such a goal and corresponding values. Thus there should be a creative dialogue, understanding and mutuality between science and religion. As Bertrand Russell pointed out '...science can tell him how certain ends might be reached. What it cannot tell him that he should pursue one end rather than the other'. If modern man understands this simple fact the world would definitely be a better place to live in and human life would be worth a living and not just mere living. This is the endeavor of the Ramakrishna Mission in contemporary times.

In trying to locate the Ramakrishna mission in the context of the transition in the social structure and cultural base as well as the enlightenment brought about by reason, the impact of the Ramakrishna mission should be understood: the individuals whom it has lifted socially and materially through its *sadhana* of service, the policy makers whom it has influenced, and the individuals whose spirituality, when currently motivated in acts of service, it believes will act as a leaven to transform the whole of Indian society and ultimately humanity itself. The movement, till date, continues to emphasize that service

to humanity, although necessary and desirable, is only a 'by- product' of the quest for God realization. Consequently, Swamiji's message is a spiritual one and should not be evaluated in philanthropic terms as it is only half the picture revealed.

### CHAPTER III

#### FAITH IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES: A DIALOGUE WITH SELECT DEVOTEES

In the last two chapters one learnt of the theoretical ambivalence that characterized the transitional period in the West and the East respectively. In the entire journey exploring the location of religio-spiritual faith in the context of modernity the path gradually led to Ramakrishna Mission. Having learnt of the genesis and the agenda of the Ramakrishna Mission in today's world, it would be interesting to note the way the Mission works to accomplish its declared objectives. For this purpose a field work was conducted on a very small scale. In fact it can be said that it was a kind of field sensitization to understand in a vivid way the complexities of modern life and even more complex relationship between man's orientation to matter and faith. The role played by various religio-spiritual centers in assuaging this struggle is also of great importance. To empirically understand the effect of such centers the Ramakrishna Mission is chosen as a case in point. Now the question which crops is with regard to the choice of the site of study. In this case the question arises as to why was the Ramakrishna Mission chosen? Basically the historicity of the Mission, the period of its genesis gives an entirely different thrust to the Mission. Its establishment happened in a period of severe crisis- of Hindu religiosity and identity. Now again the modern world is increasingly encountering the same problems- relating to our identity, relating to the meaninglessness of life, and also concerning the changing role of religion. So for a proper perspective of the problems under study the Ramakrishna Mission proved to be the best possible case. Second there is a personal dimension to choosing the Mission. Since a very tender age the researcher has had a child like fascination for Swami Vivekananda. There has always been an urge to understand this man through his teachings of the Practical Vedanta. Thus the Ramakrishna Mission seemed to be the best place for the implementation of these teachings. Hence the Ramakrishna Mission was chosen.

The Ramakrishna Mission in Puri was chosen as the site of study. The importance of space cannot be overlooked in any sociological study. The location of a field site has to be thoroughly accounted for as the sociological interpretation of findings can change with the physical space in which the field study has taken place. The present study of the Ramakrishna Mission was made in its Puri branch. Puri is one of the four 'dham' which every Hindu considers a privilege to visit. Its fame lies in its religiosity considering the location of Srimandira in this town. There has been much study on the ill effects of modernity and erosion of cultural values. However Puri impresses one with its seeming lack of commodification and commercialization. So this place was chosen with a view to assess the kind of role the Ramakrishna Mission plays in a religious place the collective conscience of whose people supposedly is spirituality and its progress among the humanity. However, a peep into the facts shows that the seeming lack of malls and other pompous display of commercialization is not the spiritual consciousness of the people but their poverty. In fact the problem is more intense at Puri. Under the garb of spirituality and religion unabashed exploitation of the pilgrims takes place by the pandas. Similarly capitalizing on the Jagannath cult ignominious songs are churned out in the name of the Lord. These songs are a rage as it very conveniently appeals to the senses. This is called making money in the name of God. The negotiation of faith and money, extreme traditionalism in the realm of non- material and material culture, the importance of the Jagannath cult, Puri presents a picture of great intensity and interest to a sociologist. The location of faith in a religious place in a modern world definitely forms an interesting and intriguing study. Moreover the fact that the researcher is from Puri facilitated the choice of the site. It is so because the findings can be better analyzed keeping in view its culture specificity. Hence Puri was chosen as the site of study. In the following sections the everyday activities of the Mission and an intense engagement with the household devotees of the mission has been analyzed.

#### *EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES OF THE MISSION*

It can be stated that there are two branches of the Ramakrishna Order in Puri town. One is the Ramakrishna Math which is the residential place of the monks. The other is the

Ramakrishna Mission. In the Mission boundary one can find a children's home, a students' library and a prayer hall. The main office of the Mission is also situated here. This is in keeping with the fact, as Swami Bhuteshananda has stated, that the math emphasizes on the spiritual aspect and the mission on the public activities without being dissociated from the spiritual strivings for perfection in life. However, it is worth mentioning over here that there is no strict dichotomy between the two institutions of the Order- not in the least in its functions. The children's home houses orphans and the poor and provides them with education. The students' library has around 283000 books and numerous periodicals and magazines. This library is of great help for school and college students keeping in view the inferior educational infrastructure in Puri. The mission has many householders as its members. One such householder, Dibakar Tripathy, is the member secretary of the mission. However before a discussion with these devotees it is interesting to have a look at how a typical day in the mission begins and ends.

To start with, the temple or the prayer hall has a photo Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa in the centre with Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother Sarada Devi placed on either side. One can also note that the light green walls of the hall are adorned with the huge photo frames of all the twelve notable disciples of Sri Ramakrishna including Swami Vivekananda. The other photos are that of Swami Brahmananda, the first elected president of the mission, Swami Saradananda, the first secretary of the mission, Swami Shivananda, Swami Abhedananda, Swami Ramakrishnananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Sachchidananda, Swami Yogananda etc. The temple or the prayer hall of the Mission opens at 5a.m. early in the morning. Then morning prayers are offered by the students of the Mission's children's home. The temple remains till 12 o' clock. Devotees visit the temple during this period. Again, the temple re opens at 4p.m. Evening prayers are held at 5.30p.m. It is during this time that the devotees of the mission congregate. They offer evening prayers and then many of them meet in the sitting room of the mission's office discussing with great passion the ideas of the swamijis, the ideal of the mission, various activities to be undertaken by the mission for the welfare of the people of Puri. The evening songs are better known as Arati songs of the Ramakrishna Order. These songs comprise of four hymns of praise of and supplication to Sri Ramakrishna



and Sarada Devi. They are sung every evening by the devotees all over the world. The four hymns are: *khandana-bhava-bandhana*, *Om hrim rtam tvamacalo*, *sarvamangala-mangalye*, and *prakrtim paramam*. Of these, the first two are the compositions of Swami Vivekananda himself on Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. The third is a part of the hymn known as the *Narayaniya stuti*. The last one is composed by Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, on Sarada Devi. Except the first hymn which is in Bengali, the rest are in Sanskrit. Eventually the temple closes at 9p.m. the president of the Mission Swami Biswakanandaji Maharaj holds special religious discussions, especially pertaining to the teachings of Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa. These discussions are held 5 days in a week. These are Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. As far as the food habits are concerned the residing members of the mission have *sattvik* food only. The members have their breakfast at 6a.m, followed by lunch at 12 o'clock, tiffin at 4p.m., and dinner at 9p.m.

There are certain occasions which are celebrated with great pomp in this Mission. For the purpose, various talks are held, the nature of talks depending on the nature of the occasion. In certain instances small workshops and seminars are also conducted. Long rallies celebrating the occasion are conducted by the devotees in Puri. Further arrangements are made to feed the deprived and the poverty stricken in pockets viz the lepers' colony, the fishermen's colony in penthakatha et al. some of the important occasions of celebrations are the Sankar Jayanti, Buddha Jayanti, Durga Mahashtami, Christmas celebrations, Sarada Devi's birthday, National Youth Day .i.e. Swami Vivekananda's birthday, and Ramanabami. Every Ekadasi, which falls twice in a month, is also celebrated. It is pertinent to mention that during the present field trip to the mission, the researcher was witness to the ways devised to celebrate the National Youth Day on January 12, 2008. It was a two day long celebrations wherein various eminent academicians and administrators of Orissa were invited to speak. There were also sports, debate, quiz, music and several other competitions conducted by the mission. The students of every school across Puri participated in the competitions prior to this day. The winners were to be felicitated on the occasion.

An unstructured interview of 17 devotees was taken. There was an interview schedule to guide these interviews. These interviews were conducted by the researcher at the end of every prayer session in the evening. It was more over a kind of conversation and discussion with these devotees. The views and opinions of the devotees were collected through thorough interaction and discussions with them ranging over a month. All the devotees interviewed were educated people, married and in an average age group of 40-75. There was no conscious attempt to choose such an age group. The fact is there were no youngsters seen among the devotees.

### *Understanding the Relevance of the Mission through the prism of its Devotees*

Dibakar Tripathy, former headmaster of the prestigious Biswambar school, Puri seems like a busy man. A 64 years old man, he is the working secretary of the Mission and hence has immense responsibilities. His association with the Mission goes back to his teaching days. He used to frequent the Mission whenever posted in Puri. For him, the Mission is a living accomplice. It is in the temple or the prayer hall that he found peace. All his problems starting from domestic affairs to professional lows seemed to have an answer in the peaceful precincts of the prayer hall. When enquired if a visit to the Jagannath temple never occurred in such instances, he said he is a believer and frequents the Jagannath temple. However, he expressed disgust at the sorry state of affairs of the temple. Besides the administrative mismanagement and the high handedness of the Pandas, what affected and pained him the most was the way in which '*patita pabana*' was being sold to the visitors. He despised the way in which everything is getting instrumental. Even the fact that being a Panda has become more of a lucrative career decision! In all this what has suffered is truth and faith. He believes that it is the mission, the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, which inspires and reinforces his faith in the goodness of the world. He does not consider Sri Ramakrishna as a God incarnate and denies any further discussions on this topic. However, he shows immense faith in Ramakrishna, the teacher, who ought to be worshipped.

Reflecting on the concept of faith, he says that faith is a personalized affair for him. It is a driving force which originates from the inner recesses of the heart. Faith, for him, is definitely a spiritual experience. This spiritual experience is reflected in any kind of joy when one succeeds with right earnest after a hard day's labor. He finds immense faith as the motivating force in the discoveries of Columbus, inventions of Thomas Alva Edison, and achievements of Abraham Lincoln. Faith is immense belief in the potential of the self. He however feels that faith has become just another dogmatic concept with no real value in today's world. Faith suffers in this labyrinth of mad materialistic pursuit. He questions: 'what faith can one have in the world where teachers are abused and beaten up by students and students suffer harassment and favoritism in the hands of the teacher?' In this context, he is reminded of the beautiful comprehension of teacher-student relationship by Sri Ramakrishna. He, however, believes that whatever be the nature of one's existence, the nature of the world one encounters, it is essential to have immense faith in one's own self. Given the demanding nature of the world of the faith it is an individual's faith accompanied by right thought and action that would see him through.

On an after thought he says that he is a contented man worldly wise. His children are well established and he has enough to fend for himself and his wife. Having been associated with the Mission for over 30 years and also having got immense support from the Mission in all his life endeavors, it his high time he dedicated himself to the cause of the Mission. hence, he was all the more happy to take on the cudgels of secretary of the Mission. He feels that his philanthropic, intellectual, and spiritual fulfillment gets a concrete form only through his association with the Mission.

Rabindra Ghosh and his wife are regulars in the prayer hall. A 62 years old gentleman, Mr.Ghosh is a retired demonstrator in the department of physics in S.C.S college, Puri. His wife is a home maker. Mrs. Ghosh' association with the Mission is since her childhood days. It was her parents who initiated her into the Mission. She has been a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna since her childhood days. She has immense faith on Paramhansa. She feels that Paramhansa's teachings are multi-dimensional. It has a word for every human being on earth irrespective of the occupation in which he/she is involved

in. she narrated several folklore to prove the relevance of Ramakrishna and Swamiji's preaching. According to her the violent behavior of the modern children, their disrespect for authority and tradition needs to be corrected. The western way is not of much help to us. Our children should be conditioned to develop interest and faith in Indian spirituality and Swamiji's teachings.

It is of much interest to discuss the ideas of Mr. Ghosh. He gave instances from science to demonstrate the scientific nature of spirituality and the inherent truth in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. A man of science, he however, had immense faith in the truth of religion and spirituality. He talked of great scientists being staunch believers in God with child like interest. He talked of Einstein's religiosity which has been discussed elsewhere in this chapter. He narrated instances in which he had discussions with Physics readers who believed in miracles. In fact he said that these readers believed in miracles and considered them to have a scientific basis. He believes that this flesh and bone human being is nothing but 'name' and 'form'. These two are transitory and would one day evaporate into nothingness or '*shunya*'. However, all our individual worries and anxieties, all our societal troubles, all our greed and selfishness, all our consumerist orientations arise out of this 'name' and 'form'. He believes we reside in a world of relative or half truths. The reality of my lifeworld is different from yours. We are too engrossed in self admiration to have any empathy for what is not true or real for us. Further, he says that salvation is achievable only beyond time, space, and causation because it is in the stillness that 'the real' lies.

Having given an insight into the nature of phenomenal world, he reflects on the meaning and nature of faith in our present existence. By faith he means an immense belief which can stand the test of time and circumstances. Such a faith may be religious or non-religious. However, if it is for the good of society then it is most definitely spiritual. When interpreted from the religious angles Mr. Ghosh points out that Ramakrishna used his body as a laboratory. In this laboratory, he practiced several other kinds of religions besides Hinduism. Every time he was able to reach the ultimate truth. So Mr. Ghosh believes that different religions/faiths are just different ways to reach the same goal.

There is one existence and just one goal. Whatever lies in between are relative truths which are the source of all kinds of problems. He feels that there can be no competition in true faith. This tendency of projecting 'my faith as better than yours' is nothing but mere politics. He warns against such perceptions of faith as they carry the germs of fundamentalism and communalism whose tentacles are engulfing the entire world. Such an attitude is extremely dangerous for the existence of true religion and true faith.

A septuagenarian N.G.Sarkar is a retired CA who has completed his course in London. He had a high paying job but left it half way and got settled in Puri. He chose Puri because it is the *Jagannath dham*. Second it is not as cosmopolitan as other parts of India has become. He is also a great follower of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. In fact he turned to the Mission and to this spiritual place as he was frustrated with the abundance surrounding him. In a jovial tone, he said that 'the bank balance was a real headache'. He talked of the Upanishads which teaches and informs that dispassion and dissociation is reached only after passing through phases.

Talking of faith he said that it is an integral part of all human beings. No man is without faith. Our entire survival is conducted through the kind of faith that we harbor and believe in. Every achievement, every rejuvenation, every trial to keep going even after failure- that is faith and it is a spiritual experience. Such a faith should be vested on God to understand the scientificity of 'belief' of a true believer. God is invisible. So it becomes difficult to cultivate such a belief on the part of man in his mundane existence. Thus it is God men like Sri Ramakrishna who are required to celebrate that Ultimate Truth. Commoners like us who are enslaved by our sense perceptions and especially in this modern age where rank materialism rules man can just strive to understand and reach the place where Sri Ramakrishna reached. It is because being elevated to such a position requires Ultimate faith. But what is this Ultimate faith? Mr. Sarkar himself answers the question he has posed. By ultimate faith is meant the *faith without residues*. It is a kind of faith which is intrinsic and not instrumental. This is the kind of spirituality which is practiced only by the blessed of the land. This was practiced by Christ long time back to salvage the wisdom and humanity to human beings. Sri Ramakrishna is also a

blessed soul and in today's scenario, his teachings if implemented would definitely contribute to lasting peace in the world and elevate human beings beyond mere mundane pre-occupation.

Such a faith is the highest symbol of spirituality. Spirituality is an eternal experience. It can be understood only when one understands the fact that physical body decays. It can spring up only when one questions 'what remains beyond?' He emphasizes that 'what' is the question and should be the question. But when asked why it is necessary to question something beyond the reach of the human senses, he answered thus: 'this 'why' to the 'what' is a vigorous exercise in futility. The predicament in which modern man finds himself is because of this obstinacy. We tend to consider ourselves as modern and hence foster faith in empiricism. The empirical truth is that we suffer because of what is. So is it not high time to question our mode of existence in the quest of a higher truth, a better existence?' having questioned that, he continues saying that spirituality implies sacredness and meaningfulness. The way spirituality is being packaged and marketed for the consumption of the much troubled modern man is a blatant exploitation of human emotions. Besides, such an exercise of 'commercializing' spirituality is a travesty of spirituality itself. On a reflective mood he remembers a saying from one of the scriptures: 'lilavaitya kaibatyam', God makes a man mad before destroying him. He believes that the preaching of Ramakrishna needs practical implementation for the sake of world peace. When questioned on the controversies surrounding the life of Sri Ramakrishna he just answered that all criticisms are gracefully welcomed by the members of the Mission without accepting the veracity of their criticisms.

Gobinda Sinha is a retired employee of the Puri municipal corporation. He is a great devotee of Mahaprabhu Jagannath and a follower of Paramhansa. He is a 62 years old man. Love, belief, and understanding are what faith is for him. He further says that he has this faith only on the invisible power. That invisible power is not something tangible. But it is the holy silence of an unoccupied mind which inspires us to be good people. He says that the concept of faith sounds superfluous when contextualized in the phenomenal world. The only places where this faith gains ground is when one gets overwhelmed at

the sight of 'chaka aakhi', when one sings with abandon the evening Arati and when talks to one's self impartially. He further says in Oriya "jhia tu ki 'faith' katha pacharuchu. Tu ta research karuchu. Padhu thibu, dekuthibu 'spirituality' aau 'peace' naa re sabu kana kana hauchi. Mu naa nebini kintu emiti dekhile ta dhanda chalichi. Samaste samastanku thaki baare byasta. Kiye besi kiye kam. Economics aau politics chalichi ishwaranka naa re. Gote thara bhala bhaba re buli aa Srimandira re kinba kaunasi so called dharmika ba 'spiritual' anusthana re. aape aape dina aalua bhali sabu jani paribu. Kali juga ra pagalaami. Tu ta dili re rahuchu, besi patha bi padhichu. Sabu janu thibu. Ki sabu dhanda chalichi Bhagabanaka naa re. bhagabanakun bi chadileni?" (there is a huge, lucrative business going on in the name of spirituality. Each one of us is busy duping every one else. Opportunities to dupe for power, money, and fame might vary but attempt is made by members of each class and religion. There is economics and politics going on in the name of religion and God. Have a keen look of the Srimandira ambience or for that matter of any so called religio-spiritual institution. Every thing will be as clear as broad day light. This is the madness of *kali yug*. They didn't even live God!). For years he has been following the teachings of Paramhansa. Initially he did not believe in the practicality of his teachings or of the speeches of Swami Vivekananda. However, he never stopped reading as it was a source of joy for him and he felt a vicarious thrill in reading it. But all this while he was very much a normal person who respected and read these great souls but never believed in its relevance in the present world. However his wisdom gradually taught him to reflect on the truth, practicality and relevance of Ramakrishna's and Vivekananda's teachings. He exemplified in Oriya "mo pua upare mu bahut raage. Bhari balunga thila. Ebe ta jemiti semiti MBA kari chakiri khande karichi. Pila bele taara mana khali khela re. balunga pila maanakara saangare misi khali kheliba aau mauj kariba. Aau jemiti kichchi kama nahin. Mu dina raati taaku dekhile mane gere gere huae. Jaha tike kirti arjana karichanti babu baas khela re. abasya nail gara lagini kebebi kintu padha padhi re bilkul mana nahin. Jemiti semiti second division re pass heijauthila. Jete gaali dele bi ae kanare purei se kana re bahar. Dine aasi kahila baba aama district champion hela inter district volleyball championship re. mu captain thili. Mu taaku tahi taapara karibaku lagili. Mo pua kichchi samay pare kandi baku lagila. Eita mote bhari badhila, ede bada toka te mo sakase kanduchi. Mu

*taaku santwana deba pai jae ta kahila, 'baba mu jaha hele bi MBA karibi, tumaku katha deuchi. Kintu tame mo jibana ra khushi o dhyana ku emiti kuhani. Mote aaji bhari badhila. Mu tuma katha bujhuchi, kintu aaji tume mo saangare ta bhala ki katha heipari thanta'. Mu bujhili pila ta kharap nuhein. Mora bi dosa rahichi. Sabu manias ra bhabira drusti, nijaku gadhibara dhanga alaga. Gote bayasa pare pila maanaku bujheibara chesta kara jaipare. Kintu semanaka uupare kichchi ladiba uchit nuhe. Semane semankara budhi, bibek o aatma ra daka anusare kama karibe. Karana aame Samaste bhinna. Aamara asha o abhilasa Madhya bhinna. Jadi aame ae katha ku thik re bujhiba aau jibanare ehara rupantara kariba ta hele ta aame bahut shanti aau khushi re banchipariba. Eeata chota ghatana tie. Mo matare ae bhali bhabana jadi jibanara sabu khetra dekhajae tahale ta bahut samasya ra samadhan hejjiba". "That is exactly what both these great men were trying to say in their own way". (my son was very much into sports. He was not very meritorious. I used to nag him day and night. His very sight was enough for me to start my sarcasms and preaching. I never took any interest in his endeavors and achievements in sports. Once he came up to me and said that Puri has emerged champion in inter district level volleyball championship and ha is the captain of the team. I did not give any credit to him on his achievement as it was not an achievement for me at all. I, as usual, started being sarcastic and acerbic in my remarks. He listened to whatever I said and then burst into tears. It was embarrassing for me to make a college going young guy cry. He said he understood my desperation and would definitely try to get a seat in affair MBA college. However he requested me not to be so caustic towards the meditation and happiness of his life- volleyball. He was really hurt. Then and there I understood that all of us are different. I cannot and should not expect my son to be the mirror all my dreams. I should learn to respect this difference. No doubt, as a parent I should guide my child in the right direction. But after a certain age I cannot force him to do things, it depends on his rationality and call of his conscience. If only all of us can understand this simple truth and implement it in reality then we can live in peace and happiness. This is just a small incidence. I feel if such a thought arises in every one's mind then a whole lot of problems of our existence and of the world will be solved).*



Kalashree Patnaik is a 42 years old woman. She is a lecturer in political science department in S.M.S College, Puri. She has completed her M.A. in Political science. She is unmarried and has no intent of getting married. In fact she has plans to take '*diksha*' in the near future. When asked what had kept her away from taking the diksha in all these years, she quipped it was family responsibilities. In her early thirties she realized that she was not suitable to the life of a householder. Her calling lies somewhere else. However she has an ailing father to support and a younger brother to finance his education. She said her brother is an MBA student. Once he gets a job, she would retire from her duties as a daughter with due blessings from her parents. She said that her interest always lied in the service of the needy and the deprived. She had joined a local NGO to fulfill a childhood dream. It was an NGO working for the abandoned women, widows and children. However, she left the job within four and a half month of service. According to her, she could not bear the filth, the corruption, the hypocrisy among her colleagues. She was quite young at that time and this aspect of life came as a shock for her. According to her, man's pre-occupation with the self has crossed all limits. Basic humanity is also hard to find. She exclaimed if in an extremely religious place like Puri such instances can be found aplenty, what would be the situation in places inebriated by the power of materialism and consumerism. So she resorted to lectureship. However that instance blew away her faith in the goodness of the world. However she emerged as a stronger individual with immense faith in her own self and her potential.

She was an old member of the Mission. She also used to frequent the Mission's library during her college days. So she eventually planned to join the Mission after her duty as a daughter is accomplished. This, she said, was in keeping with the tradition propounded by Sri Ramakrishna starting with Pratap Hazra. She, as a member of the Mission has been associated with many social service activities and wants to continue with it. Taking '*diksha*' would only make her closer to a purer existence. When asked as to how she would perceive modern life and modern ways of living, she had just one answer: 'I spoke of my experience and you can well nigh decipher my perception. I cannot talk on behalf of others. But yes, it is very essential that the Ramakrishna Mission spread its wings through out the world. It is necessary to convince the modern man about the practicality

and the pertinence of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and swami Vivekananda in the modern day scenario.’

This gentleman was ready to speak out on conditions of anonymity. In fact he did not speak at all when he was in the company of other devotees in the sitting room of the Mission’s office. A 45 years old man, he is a practicing advocate at the Puri civil court. However his main source of sustenance comes from the little shop that he owns close to his home. He said he wasted most of his youth in youthful exuberance and when he realized his folly it was too late. He studied LLB. However he soon realized that it was not his calling. He neither has the intelligence nor the wickedness to fight cases and win them. So he decided to open a shop. He has however not left the practice as it is a source of some money as well. Moreover this designation is his ‘status symbol’. According to him, his inefficiency made him feel worthless. With a wife and child to support, he was to a great extent, dependent on his married sisters and the pension of his old father. These circumstances produced in him a sense of worthlessness. Earlier he used to visit the Dakhina Kali temple every Saturday. However gradually he stopped that habit. He was angry with himself and with God. However his mother was a great help to him in this time of distress. She gave him the idea of opening a small cabin. Initially he was apprehensive. But gradually he too saw through the practicality of the idea. With great difficulty he mustered a capital of Rs.26750/- only. Thus started his business. In the mean time, on the suggestion of one of his friend he started attending the Arati of the Mission. He used to come to the Mission with utmost regularity. He felt that it was the ideal place to talk to himself and to convince himself that better times are imminent. Having already seen the worse part of life he is able to relate to the teachings of Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He continues further saying that it is necessary to do one’s duty. Duty is God. If this fact is well remembered then life will be much better and world a happier place to live in. He added that in situations where life demands more from individual, it is necessary not only to act but also to reflect- reflect on the power of the One who is ever ready to help us. Ramakrishna Mission with its unique thrust on a balance between materialism and spirituality, with its practical approach to life and living is like an ‘umbilical cord’ for the despaired, depressed souls.

Most of the other interviewees were present in the sitting room and were apart of the discussions stated above. They agreed to the points made and concern shown by the main speakers. One among them, Sukanta Jena, advised the researcher to learn a lesson or two from these discussions and not to make it just another piece of information for the fulfillment of the M.Phil work. He is a 47 years old gentleman and is a colleague of Kalashree madam. All of them agreed that what is most needed in today's world is 'faith' and what is most lacking is 'faith'. This is the irony of our existence. They are also unanimous about the fact that religion does not in any way connote rituals for them. Although there is a temple instituted in the name of Sri Ramakrishna there is hardly any elaborate rituals conducted in the temple. For they say that they believe in the utterances of Swami Vivekananda:

“The secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and to do good-that is the whole of religion.”

#### *SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THIS ENGAGEMENT*

The concept of faith has been taken to a new dimension in modern times. The interviews shows that most of the respondents considered faith to be an immense self belief , an inner calling which forbids man to cave in to worrisome materialistic temptations, propels one to be good and do good. This faith is one of the ways of realizing and feeling the presence of god in our day to day existence. This feeling helps us to be at peace with ourselves and the world. It can be seen that there is a moral connotation to the entire concept of faith and action and thus to spirituality. This suggests that, as Robert Bellah observed '*religion, for the modern man, is a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence*' (italics mine). This is partly the teaching of the Mission as well. So according to the modern man any search for ultimate meaning, for answers to questions concerning the meaning and purpose of life, is basically a religious or more aptly a spiritual quest, an act of faith. This spiritual quest has a moral connotation as well. The respondents have variously pointed out that a true spiritual

living is concerned not only with a quest for God realization but also with right action-action considered moral by society without being dogmatic. These actions facilitate the fulfillment of the self and helpful for others as well. This viewpoint has been explained earlier by Comte and then Durkheim. Comte defined morality as the subordination of our selfish to our sympathetic instincts. Both Comte and Durkheim believe that the essential element of morality is submission to a superior authority. Submission is based on the belief of the individual's total dependence. Through submitting him to a superior will, the person attaches himself to the power that guarantees his well being. In the present scenario, where belief in religious values and doctrines are either declining or being re-interpreted in a more universalistic, secular approach (as in the Mission) society and its welfare occupies the centrality. Moral duty consequently arises as a matrix of intense sentiments focused on society either directly or indirectly in transfigured form.

We, people of the modern world, have already witnessed and still are witnessing the power of our own mind and rational thought. However this immense power has been misled and misused because of our avariousness which ironically defies logic. Today the entire humanity is colonized- by the whirlpool of technological advancement. Although a material product of man's magnificent mind, technology has become almost indispensable for man. It has made man extremely dependent on technological devices. Man's excessive obsession with technology affects man's relation with man, man's relation with society and man's relation with his own physical environment or ecology. Life has lost its naturalness. A hectic day's work should end within the cozy confines of one's A.C. fitted living room. The call of the park no more appeals. As Herbert Marcuse commented 'a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced, industrial civilization, a token of technical progresses'<sup>1</sup>. This modernity, this technological advancement, this scientific knowledge is ever competing with itself. Thus there is immense change encountered at every step of our life. A market economy with ever expanding borders aggravates the situation. All these have led to a 'necessity of indulgence' very well defined in the realm of 'popular culture'. When it comes to sensual

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Avijit Pathak, *Modernity, Identity, and Globalization*, Aakar Publications, New Delhi, 2006.

pleasures, modern man seems to have abandoned his sense of discrimination and reasoning. In such an environment ‘ the people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split level home, kitchen equipment, and social control is anchored in the new needs that it has produced’. This is how the devotees lament when discussing how the beautiful project of modernity is being led off track to a certain extent.

But again the fact that the Ramakrishna Mission still holds relevance and modern man still resorts to it for its spiritual fulfillment provides hope and establishes the oft repeated idiom that all roads lead to Him. This fact has always been proved and is proved in the modern world as well when man takes recourse to the path of spirituality to heal himself of his problems. Now a days it has become a fashion, a kind of social current to consider oneself ‘spiritual but not religious’. This is because of the fact that modern man often equates the concept of religion with the rituals and orthodox beliefs. It thus becomes mandatory to reflect on the sayings of Swami Vivekananda (as discussed earlier) to get a clearer understanding of the nature of man and his existence. It also establishes the point that extreme importance given to objectivity and scientificity in our reasoning has its ill effects as well. The chapter reveals that modern man invariably takes recourse to spiritual practices for peace of mind. It implies that there are certain things in life which is beyond the scope of science. In this context it becomes pertinent to remember the prophetic words of Sri Aurobindo. According to him “reason alone could not create an ideal order.... Neither the market nor the state can replace what is urgently needed: man’s inner transformation. Each of us ought to realize the real source/inspiration behind an ideal, harmonious society: ‘the spiritual comradeship of oneness’. He further said “the solution lies not in the reason but in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual, an inner freedom that alone creates a perfect human order. It is a spiritual, a greater than the rational enlightenment that can illuminate the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seeking, antagonisms and discords”<sup>2</sup>. He also reflects on the colossal spiritual capacity of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and considers him to be God manifested in a human being.

<sup>2</sup>

Avijit Pathak, *Modernity, Identity, and Globalization*, Aakar Publications, 2006, pp. 56-57

It is the necessity of our times to realize, as Swami Vivekananda said, 'the potential divinity of each man'. Today man can sell himself for money without regret. So an imagination of the future of humanity evokes horror. However there still is hope. This ray of hope is provided by institutions like the Ramakrishna Mission and its true followers. It helps us build purpose in our hectic and utilitarian living without succumbing to the dogmas in religion and the politics played with it. It helps us build faith in life and humanity when we are in the gripping tentacles of depression and meaninglessness.

## CONCLUSION

The entire work has traversed the course of the relationship between religion and man at every phase of social change and social development. It is amazing to note the way man's attitude has altered in his dealing and understanding of religion and God. From a social order and an individual existence completely dictated by the fundamentals of religion as interpreted by the priests and the clergy a sea of change has been observed since then. Rooted in the rational philosophical discourse of the eighteenth century with new scientific discoveries for company, rehearsed in the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century and further entrenched in the globalization and consumerism of the twentieth century, there has been immense changes in the notion of religio-spiritual faith. Concentrating on the situation of the time different sociologists advocate different opinions. This has been dealt with in the first chapter of the dissertation. From derision of the role of religion (Karl Marx), there is a viewpoint suggesting the ever lasting importance of religion, though in different forms (Emile Durkheim). Yet another eminent viewpoint suggests the role of religion in promoting rationality as well as its role in countering the effects of immense rationality and consumerism in human life (Weber). Talking of the west, the western society's obsession with rationality and materialism has de-humanized it. Religious doctrines are not of a major help in such societies. But it does not imply that religion is lost rather it has become a private affair, a profane one, without its ritualistic pomp. It could be emphasized that all these western thinkers do feel that excess of materialism has led to disillusionment irrespective of the enviable progress in science and technology. If one takes a look at the present scenario it is well evident that the spirituality of the Indians is a major help in catering to the demands of today's society. It acts as a safety valve to the increasing insecurity in this globalized world. Intense competition, rapid economic changes, new cultural contacts, the corporate culture has led to precarious living conditions. Under such cases, the average Indian's mainstay is his spirituality. On the other hand, the western and the American world is also responding to and increasingly resorting to the Indian ways of meditation and yoga in their search for stability and peace. This underlines the importance of the science and

spirituality to go together and feed each other as envisioned by the 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritual philosophers and scientists.

Secular orientations no doubt stem from a modern, rational, and scientific education. But there are aberrations to this rule. Fundamentalism is not confined to the uneducated and the poor. An engineer can be a religious fanatic; a doctor can propagate religious violence duping people who are ignorant and innocent. So to explain the concept of modernity and to assess the position of religion in the entire dynamics is a complex affair.

Modernity facilitates the emphasis on man's individuality. However, today Emile Durkheim's worst fears are being realized. He said that 'individualism should not be equated with the utilitarian notion of man as a discrete individual concerned only with the maximization of his own pleasure'. But that is happening. In the metropolitans one would hardly even know one's neighbor. Every one seeks profit in relationships, in humanity. Every relation is a well calculated one. Investment and return is not just economics, it is politics, it is emotions, and it is the hallmark of modern existence. The concept of community living seems to have been lost. Growth of individuality does not in any way imply the loss of a common public space. But that is what is happening. This has led to a kind of alienation of the man from the community and from his own 'self' as well. Man's wants are defined by the way the market forces want to cultivate it. The understanding of the self is thereby pushed to the fringes. On the other hand, man's social network is hardly there. All these lead to various societal as well as individual problems. These create problems in realm of meaning. Man has money and can afford all luxuries but lacks the basic company to share his emotional upheavals. In such situations it is the spiritual faith which provides a ray of hope to our existence by providing it a definite meaning.

We can position ourselves thus:

Religion is, among other things, an attempt to understand but this desire to understand is not, as far as religious belief is concerned, motivated wholly by intellectual puzzlement



or curiosity about the world, nor necessarily by a need to manipulate material reality the better to deal with it and to survive and prosper within it. The need to understand stems from emotional sources and may in certain circumstances reach a high degree of intensity. Not to understand is to be bewildered, confused, and threatened. The human psyche is such that uncertainty, feelings of unfamiliarity and a sense of the alien are deeply disquieting and discomfiting. The need to understand the world and one's place in it does not stem from mere curiosity. It is necessary to know who and what we are and what place we occupy within the world. Religion seeks answers to existential questions which go to the heart of our sense of identity, worth, and purpose. Such things are of vital significance to us. As Berger<sup>1</sup> states, we are congenitally compelled to impose a meaningful order upon reality. Whether we are congenitally so compelled or whether it is possible to live without such a sense of order, it is certainly the case that many or most members of almost all known societies have sought such a sense of order and often with such energy and compulsion that it is difficult to deny that it must stem from emotional drives and needs which seem deeply rooted in the human condition. While it may be admitted that some may not feel the force of this need or feel it to a lesser extent than others, and perhaps this is increasingly the case in contemporary society, many seem unable to live without it being met in some way. Even in contemporary society, one suspects that while the unacceptability and implausibility of traditional religious messages, not to mention the competing attractions that modern affluence and a relatively secure existence provides, preclude many people from giving much attention to such questions, they lurk, nevertheless, in the background like unwelcome guests at the party.

In keeping with the above contention the findings of the field report in the third chapter can come handy. All the respondents of the interview were educated and were modern in outlook. But all of them believed in a transcendent faith. However they interpreted this faith as subsisting on the morality and rationality of everyday praxes. Their sense of religion and faith in God, however, does not stem from the meaning of sacred as Durkheim proposed it. There is no ritualistic pomp necessarily associated with it. Religion is a way to seek peace. One marked change is that religion is no longer an end in

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Penguin UK, 1973.

itself. Religion is morality and ethics and the understanding of one's 'self' in a better light. It is a philosophy to 'live and let live', and understanding of being good and doing well. It is also a refuge from the mundane material existence. So religion exists and is still strong. But it is interesting to note the form in which it exists. It can exist as a sect, a denomination, or as an entirely private affair. It can imply a good thought or a good deed. It is a universal fact that the role of religion is changing. But change to what extent? In which way is the change taking place? These are questions which do not possess a universal answer. It needs to be answered in a culture specific context- keeping in mind the cultural history and the cultural changes that have taken place in a particular region. In the present dissertation the site of fieldwork was Puri which is one of the four '*dhammas*'- the most holy place of a Hindu. So the findings in this place as regards to the religio-spiritual importance in the life of a modern man would definitely be different from that of a highly cosmopolitan area or region. So it is necessary to make comparative studies before arriving at any conclusions regarding the changing role of religion and its importance in the current world. Each culture and each society, structured diversely as they are, will produce different sorts of answer to questions of meaning. There may be various interpretations of the dominant religious tradition and often, particularly in modern societies, quite different sub cultures with wholly different answers to the relevant questions.

The report also reflects the fact that religion is a great psychological necessity, especially in the present world. Weber has thoroughly emphasized this point in his article "The social psychology of world religions"<sup>2</sup>. In this he sets out what is essentially a psychological approach to religion, but one which recognizes both the intellectual and emotional bases of it, and which is closely integrated with social factors that it has to be considered an eminently sociological account also. In the current report as is evident the faith is not irrational. As Weber rightly pointed modernity and rationality has created an "iron cage" around our existence. It is a belief in the transcendental to fill in the inner void that harasses us despite the outer abundance. A belief in religion and God does not in any way imply that they are not secular. Secularity is an 'attitude'- which is contingent

---

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, London, 1998.

on the way one regards others belief and non-beliefs. Faith in God does not make less credible one's secular orientations. Second in this craze for materialism modern man often falters to understand the purpose of his strivings and his existence as such. It is a faith, a belief in the Almighty which assuages him. The mushrooming of numerous spiritual centers and spiritual gurus is enough evidence of the desperation to which the modern man is driven to. Unfortunately many of these centers fall a prey to advertisement and capitalist orientation of profit making. It is these situations that a Mission like that of the Ramakrishna Mission provides hope and promise for humanity and above all towards the cause of humanity.

In the course of the entire dissertation it has sufficiently been established that the social structure of society or the plausibility structure, as Berger and Luckmann term it, has undergone immense change. It has also been observed that religion has been the greatest casualty in this entire scheme of things. However the irony lies in the fact, as already stated, that in spite of a decline in religious orientations and an acceleration of rationality and materialistic tendencies, there is a steady rise in the number and demand of God men and institutions offering spiritual help. This trend certainly is the desperate attempt of the disenchanted modern man, as Max Weber puts it, to release oneself from the 'iron cage' of extreme objectivity, technology, and materialism. The meaninglessness of this craze after materialism is too evident. In fact this factor was emphatically put across by one of the respondent. He turned to the Mission for spiritual progress at the height of his materialistic achievements as he could see through the futility of things. Science most definitely has an answer to the occurrences of the outer, perceivable world. But the inner world, which is very much a part of our existence, is often forgotten. There is where the problem occurs as we fail to comprehend many facets of our living. Berger and Luckmann said that life is meaningful because of the meaning men gave to it. The universe of meaning is a social construction of reality. However, this universe of meaning is arbitrary and thus precarious, insecure, and easily shattered. It requires legitimation and religion was an effective source. On the other hand, it has been established that the effectiveness of religion is no more emphatic. So where is the solution, where lies the help to this modern predicament? This has already been answered in the insiders' and

devotees' views of the Ramakrishna Mission. The Mission has helped produce a new universe of meaning. This construction is an excellent attempt to bring a balance between the material and the spiritual the spiritual requirements of man. The works and teachings of the Mission help re-establish 'faith' in modern

To conclude is to begin with a new perspective. Reflecting on the entire course of the dissertation it can thus be said that the advent of modernity has definitely succeeded in bringing about a change in the notion of religion. thus it becomes imperative to give new connotations to the term religion. It is also essential to delve more in to the fact of the transition noticed as religion moves from being a social construct with universal implications to more of an individual one with differing beliefs held in private by people in groups or just a very personal faith, to look at the way it affects modern man. It is also necessary to reflect on the paradox of the contemporary situation- as much as sociologists focus on the receding role of religion, what would otherwise explain the accelerating trend of fundamentalism and the reactionary measures to curtail it apparently with a rationalistic façade but with an agenda of religious vendetta. It is not the case that religion is losing its importance. In fact religion is discovering itself in new ways with new functions. It is however increasingly shorn of its ritualistic fervor. But again as much as the understanding and practice of religion becomes rational, the devotees at the Kumbh Mela in Uttar Pradesh or the Rath Yatra at Puri are ample evidence of the devotional fervor of the modern man. It would be interesting to empirically find out and sociologically reflect on these phenomena. It is also necessary to categorize and differentiate between true religious endeavors and institutions that preach true religion and the marketing of religion and selling it as a commodity to its ever willing disillusioned preys. The Sociology of Religion has been of late fascinated by the process of secularization. Fundamental to this positioning is religious atheism. Having looked at the entire work and also the reflections of the major sociologists it is essential to put to rest the dispute concerning the connotation of secularization. Is secularization the opposite of religiosity? Is it possible that a believer can be secular especially given the fact of the changing connotation of religion as such? How would one perceive the faith of a secular individual- as an instrumental to or inherent in the individual consciousness?

Again all these questions should be answered in their proper perspective. In other words, as Clifford Geertz had argued the cultural landscape has to be evaluated in dealing with any question of religious faith.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **BOOKS**

- Berger, P.L. 1969. *The Social Reality of Religion*. Faber and Faber: London.
- Berger, P.L. 1973. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Penguin: UK.
- Berger, P.L. 1973. *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*. Random House: New York.
- Brown, S.C.(ed). 1979. *Philosopher of Enlightenment*. The Harvester Press, Sussex: Great Britain.
- Beckerlegge, Gwilym. 2000. *The Ramakrishna Mission: The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement*. OUP: New Delhi.
- Chandra, Bipin. 1989. *India's Struggle for Independence*. Penguin Books: New Delhi.
- Chakrabarti, Pratik. 2004. *Western Science in Modern India: Metropolitan Methods, Colonial Practices*. Orient Longman: New Delhi.
- Cabral Amilcar. 1980. *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings of Amilcar Cabral*. Monthly Review Press: London and New York.
- Dahr, Niranjana, 1971. Vedanta and Bengal Renaissance (ed) Dumain, Ralph, in *The Autodidactic Project*. Minerva Associates: Calcutta.
- Desai, Neera. 1957. *Woman in Modern India*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd: London.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1987. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Vol. 3,4, 5, 6, 7,8,12.
- Farington, B.1951. *Francis Bacon: Philosopher of Industrial Science*. London.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays*. Basic Books: New York.
- Hamilton, Malcolm. 2001. *The Sociology of Religion*. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group: London and New York.
- Hyland, Paul (ed). 2003. *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader*. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group: London and New York.

Heimsath, Charles. 1964. *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1955. *On Religion*. Foreign Languages publishing House: Moscow.

Mukerji, D.P. *Modern Indian Culture*. 1948. Hind Kitab: Bombay.

O'Connell, Joseph, T. (ed). 1999. *Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements*. IAS: Shimla.

Pannikar, K.N. 1986. Intellectual and Cultural history of Colonial India: Some Conceptual and Historiographical Questions. (Eds) Bhattacharya, S, and Romila Thapar in *Situating Indian History*. OUP: New Delhi.

Pathak, Avijit. 2006. *Modernity, Globalization, and Identity*. Aakar Publications: New Delhi.

Rolland, Romain. 1988. *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*. Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Calcutta.

Stewart, David. 1980. *Exploring The Philosophy of Religion*. Prentice-Hill Inc, Englewood Cliffs: N.J.

Sen, Amiyo P. 2001. *Three essays on Sri Ramakrishna and his Times*. IAS, Rashtrapati Nivas: Shimla.

Sarkar, Susobhan. 1970. *Notes on Bengal Renaissance*. People's Publishing House: New Delhi.

Singh, Yogendra. 2005. *Modernization of Indian Tradition*. Rawat Publications: New Delhi and Jaipur.

Singh, Yogendra. 2002. *Culture Change in India: Identity and Globalization*. Rawat Publications: New Delhi and Jaipur.

Singh, Yogendra. 2002. *Social Change in India: Crisis and Resilience*. HarAnand Publications Pvt Ltd: New Delhi.

Sharma, Arvind. 1991. New Hindu Religious Movements in India. (ed) Beckford, James, A. in *New Religious movements and Rapid Social Change*. Sage Publications: New Delhi.

Seal, Anil. 1968. *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Late Nineteenth Century*. CUP: Cambridge.

Swami Budhananda. 1994. *True Religion Always Helps*. Ramakrishna Mission: New Delhi.

Swami Harshananda. 2000. *Relevance of Ramakrishna in Modern Life*. Ramakrishna math: Bangalore.

Swami Gahanananda. *Ramakrishna Movement for All*. Sri Ramakrishna Math: Madras.

Swami Vivekananda. 2002. *My Life and Mission*. Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Kolkatta.

Swami Bhuteshananda. 1997. *Thoughts On Spiritual Life*. Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Calcutta.

Swami Prabhananda. 2005. *The Early History of the Ramakrishna Movement*. Sri Ramakrishna Math: Chennai.

Swami Lokeshwarananda (ed). 1983. *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna – Vivekananda*, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture: Calcutta.

1989. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda By His Western and Eastern Disciples*. Vol 1, Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Calcutta.

2006. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Vol 1-8. Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road: Calcutta.

1990. *The Message of Ramakrishna*. Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Calcutta.

Veer, Peter van der. 2001. *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton University Press:

Weber, Max. 1988. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Charles Scribner and sons: New York.

Weber, Max. 1998. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group: London and New York.

Wilson, B.R. 1966. *Religion in a Secular Society*, C.A. Watts and co: London.

Wilson, B.R.. 1982. *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. OUP: Oxford.

Wilhelm, Windelband. 1988. *History of Philosophy*, Vol 2. Harper and Row Publishers: New York.

Webster, Charles. 1974. *The Intellectual Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, Routledge and Kegan Paul: London and Boston.



## JOURNALS

Berger, P.L. 'Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today' in *Sociology of Religion*. Winter, 2001, Vol.62, No.4, Special Issue.

Bruce, Steve. 'The Pervasive World View: Religion in Pre-modern Britain' in *The British Journal of Sociology*. Dec, 1997, Vol.48, No.4.

Chakraborty, Pratik. 'Science, Nationalism, and Colonial Contestations: P.C.Ray and his Hindu Chemistry' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*. 2000, Vol, 37, No.2.

Kumar, Nita. 'Languages, Families and the Plural Learning of the Nineteenth Century Intelligentsia' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*. 2001, Vol.38, No.1.

Kinnvall, Catarina. 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security in Political Psychology' in *Political Psychology*. 2004, Vol.25, No.5.

Turner, Bryan S. 'Talcott Parson's Sociology of Religion and the Expressive Revolution: The Problem of Western Individualism' in *Journal of Classical Sociology*. 2005, Vol.5.

Turner, Bryan S. 'Religion' in *Theory, Culture, and Society*. 2005, Vol.23.

Tschannen, Oliver. 'Sociological Controversies in Perspective' in *Review of Religious Research*. 1994, Vol 36, No.1.

Wilson, B.R.. 'The Return of the Sacred' in *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*. 1979, Vol 18, No.3.

Wilson, B.R. 'Aspects of Secularization in the West' in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 1976, 3/4.

