

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

MASTER OF ARTS-PHILOSOPHY

SEMESTER –I

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

ELECTIVE-105

BLOCK-2

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

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FOREWORD

The Self Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavors.



PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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BLOCK 2 : PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Introduction to the Block

Unit 8 deals with the Classical Concept of Avatar.

Unit 9 deals with the Classical Concept of Avatar as per Urobindo, Tagore and Gnadhi.

Unit 10 deals with the concept of Classical prayers (As it has been mentioned in Aadvaita Vedanta, Bhagavat Gita) and Contemporary concept of prayer.

Unit 11 deals with the Concept of Bhakti.

Unit 12 deals with the Theological discourse and its influences into the life.

Unit 13 dealss with the religious trends in post modern era.

Unit 14 deals with Comparative religion nd its importance.

UNIT 8: THE CONCEPT OF AVATARA-CLASSICAL (BHAGABATAGITA, SRIMAD- BHAGAVATA, MAHABHARATA)

STRUCTURE

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Concept of Avatar- Classical
- 8.3 Bhagabata Gita
- 8.4 Srimad Bhagavata
- 8.5 Mahabharata
- 8.6 Let us sum up
- 8.7 Key Words
- 8.8 Questions for Review
- 8.9 Suggested readings and references
- 8.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit we can able to understand the concept of:

- To know the Concept of Avatar- Classical
- To discuss the avatar concept as per Bhagabata Gita
- To discuss the concept of avatar in Srimad Bhagavata
- To discuss the concept of avatar according to Mahabharata

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In Hinduism, an avatar (from the Sanskrit avatāra: meaning "downcoming") refers to a "descent" of the divine into the realm of material existence, usually for the purpose of protecting or restoring dharma (cosmic order, righteousness). The avatar doctrine is a seminal concept in certain forms of Hinduism, such as Vaishnavism, which

worships Vishnu as the Supreme God. Hinduism states that the Absolute can take on innumerable forms and, therefore, the number of avatars is theoretically limitless; however, in practice, Hinduism recognizes ten major avatars, albeit the scriptural lists of these ten divine manifestations frequently differ. Due to the correspondences between the Hindu concept of avatar and the Christian concept of "Incarnation" ("Enfleshing" of God), a great deal of inter-religious Dialogue has taken place between these two communities in recent decades. Both doctrines are similar in so far as they postulate that God can enter into physical form on humanity's plane of existence; however, the doctrines differ in other significant ways. Nevertheless, it is notable that Hinduism and Christianity each teach that God can take a human form in order to protect and uphold justice, righteousness, and love.

Types of avatars

According to the Hindu scripture titled the Bhagavan Purana, countless avatars descend into the physical universe. Verse 1.3.26 explains that "the incarnations of the Lord are innumerable, like rivulets flowing from inexhaustible sources of water." Vaishnava theologians have categorized the many avatars into a number of different nomenclatures to better characterize their specific role or godly status. Not all are recognized as "full" or "direct" incarnations of Vishnu. Some avatars are believed to be souls blessed with certain abilities of "divine origin."

Full and partial avatars

Hindu traditions also typically distinguish between two different types of avatars: Those that are direct incarnations of Vishnu (purna avatara), and those in which the personality of Vishnu is only partially manifest (ansa avatara). In practice, the avatars that are most commonly worshiped today are Narasimha, Rama, and Krishna. Some Vaishnavite sects, such as Sri Vaishnavism, consider these figures to be the only avatars that are full incarnations of Vishnu. Among most Vaishnava traditions, Krishna is considered to be the highest kind of Purna avatar. The ansa avatars, meanwhile, are generally not worshiped as the Supreme Being. This

category of avatars is said to include the remainder of the Dasavatara, as well as many other incarnations. In any event, most Hindus believe that there is little or no difference between worship of Vishnu and worship of His avatars, since all such worship is essentially being directed toward the one supreme God.

This is not the case in all Vaishnavite sects, however. Followers of Caitanya (including the schools of ISKCON), Nimbarka, and Vallabhacharya, consider Krishna to be the ultimate Godhead, and thus not only an avatar but also the supreme personality of the divine, as well. As such, these schools hold that all other beings exist because of Krishna, including Vishnu himself, as well as his avatars. According to Madhvacharya, on the other hand, all avatars of Vishnu are alike in potency and every other quality, with no gradation among them. For Madhvacharya, perceiving or claiming any differences among avatars was sufficient cause for eternal damnation.

Other avatars

Additional variations of avatars include those of Purusha avatars, guna avatars, and Manvantara avatars. Purusha avatars are described as the original avatars of Vishnu in the context of the physical universe. They include: Vasudeva, the son of Śūrasena of the Yadava dynasty; Sankarshan, who ruled over all nagas, or nature spirits; Pradyumna, a son of Krishna; and Pradyumna's son Aniruddha. Each of these gods provided the primal ingredients for the creation of the material universe.

Guna avatars, however, are the avatars in control of the three modes of nature, or (gunas). They are: Brahma, controller of the mode of passion and desire (or rajas); Vishnu, controller of the mode of goodness (or sattva); and Shiva, controller of the mode of ignorance (or tamas). These three personas are together known as the Trimurti, the Hindu trinity. Manvantara avatars are beings responsible for creating progeny throughout the universe, and are said to be unlimited in number.

Another common type of avatars are "Lila avatars." The word Lila translates to "play," "sport," or "drama." Through the power of maya (illusion, magic), it is said that the divine can manipulate forms in the material world, and lila avatars are able to assume bodily forms in order to set in motion a divine drama, which typically involves the performance of a particular series of events in order to instruct others, navigating humanity toward the paths of dharma (righteousness), bhakti (devotion), and ultimately moksha (liberation). The Dasavatara, that is, the ten well-known avatars of Vishnu, as well as the other avatars from the Puranas are just a few examples of lila avatars. In total, Vaishnavites claim that there are too many lila-avatars to list.

Examples of avatars

Dasavatara: The ten avatars of Vishnu

The ten most famous incarnations of Vishnu are collectively known as the Dasavatara ("dasa" in Sanskrit means ten). This list is included in the Garuda Purana (1.86.10-11) and denotes those avatars most prominent in terms of their influence on human society. Each avatar performed their duty by restoring the stability of the world, thus, all upheld Vishnu's nature as sustainer of the universe. The majority of avatars in this list of ten are categorised as lila-avatars.

The first four avatars are said to have appeared in the Satya Yuga, the first of the four Yugas, or ages of the time cycle, described within Hinduism. They are: Matsya, the fish, Kurma, the tortoise, Varaha, the boar, and Narasimha, who was half-man and half-lion.

In Hindu mythology, Matsya saved Manu Vaisvasta, the eventual creator of the human species, by rescuing him from tempestuous waters during a great flood which ravaged the primordial earth. When gods and demons could not find a secure base upon which to churn the milk of order so they could extract the nectar of immortality, Kurma offered his broad shell so the mighty churning stick could be firmly set upon it. Varaha battled and defeated the demon Hiranyaksa beneath the cosmic ocean,

then proceeded to rescue the earth goddess Prthivi from a watery grave by placing her on his tusk and swimming to the surface. Narasimha used his status as neither fully human nor fully beast to defeat Hiranyaksipu, another oppressive demon who was invulnerable to both human beings and animals.

The next three avatars appeared in the Treta Yuga. They are: Vamana, the dwarf, Parashurama, the man bearing an ax, and Rama, the prince and king of Ayodhya. According to Hindu lore, after the earth had been taken over by the malevolent Bali, Vamana asked him for all the territory he could encompass in three strides. Bali gladly agreed, only to have Vamana assume his cosmic form as Vishnu and traverse the entire universe with his three steps. In a number of battles, Parashurama defeated the Kshatriyas, or militant caste, and restored the priority of the priestly caste, the Brahmins, who had been oppressed by their traditional underlings, the warriors. Rama, meanwhile, defeated Ravana and thereby freed the world from the demon's clutches, instituting a reign of virtue and prosperity. This kingdom would serve as an ideal societal structure for rulers in every generation that followed.

The eighth incarnation, Krishna (meaning "dark colored" or "all attractive"), is the only avatar to have appeared in the Dwapara Yuga. During his appearance on earth, Krishna defeated the oppressive demon Kamsa while aiding the Pandava brothers to victory over their malevolent cousins, the Kauravas. This battle is recorded in the great Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, which is best known for a poem included within it, the Bhagavadgita, wherein Krishna elucidates the path of righteousness for Arjuna, a Pandava warrior.

The identity of the ninth avatar is disputed. Normally, the Buddha is listed as the ninth avatar but sometimes Krishna's brother Balarama is listed instead. For instance, the Bhagavata Purana claims that Balarama was the ninth incarnation.[2] However, traditionally it is the Buddha who fulfills this role as the ninth avatar, albeit it should also be noted that Buddhists do not accept this doctrine and deny that the Buddha was an avatar of Vishnu. Some scholars suggest that the absorption of the

Buddha into the Vaisnavite theological framework was a polemic effort to mitigate the appeal of Buddhism among the Hindu masses.

The tenth avatar, Kalkin ("Eternity" or "The Destroyer of foulness") has yet to appear upon the earth, but is set to arrive at the end of the Kali Yuga, as predicted in verse 8.17 of the Bhagavadgita. Due to his pending arrival, Kalki is the most mysterious of the avatars, though he is described as a rider upon a white horse wielding a comet-like sword. It is said that Kalki will bring the world to its end, rewarding the virtuous, while punishing the wicked.

The 25 Avatars of the Puranas

The Puranas list twenty-five avatars of Vishnu in total. In addition to the ten listed above, these avatars include the Caturvana, the four sons of Brahma who are together considered one incarnation; Narada, the traveling sage; Yajna, an incarnation within whom Vishnu temporarily assumed the role of Indra; Nara-Narayana, twin brothers; Kapila, the philosopher; Dattatreya, the combined avatar of the Trimurti; Hayagriva, a horse; Hamsa, the swan; Prsnigarbha, creator of the planet known as Dhruvaloka; Rishabha, father of King Bharata; Prithu, monarch of the solar pantheon who introduced agriculture to humankind; Dhanvantari, father of ayurveda; Mohini, a beautiful woman; Ramachandra, the king of Ayodhya; Vyasa, writer of the Vedas, and Balarama, Krishna's elder brother. A full description of each of these incarnations is found in the Bhagavata Purana, Canto 1, Chapter 3.

Historical avatars

Besides the avatars listed in the Puranas and Vedas, many other figures are considered to be avatars by certain Hindus. For example, Caitanya Mahaprabhu (1485-1533) is listed as an avatar of Vishnu by followers of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, and is widely worshiped as such. Caitanya is often referred to as the "Golden Avatar," a moniker based upon the supposed hue of his skin. Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) is reported to have said to Swami Vivekananda, "he who was Rama and

Krishna is now, in this body, Ramakrishna," seemingly an endorsement of his incarnate godliness. Ramakrishna's wife, Sarada Devi, is likewise considered by many to be an incarnation of Kali.

In current times, the famous south Indian guru, Sathya Sai Baba (c. 1926-present), is believed by his devotees to be an avatar of Shiva, Shakti, and Krishna.

Some Hindus with an inclusivist outlook perceive the central figures of various non-Hindu religions to be avatars. Some of these religious figures include: Jesus (4 B.C.E.-c. 33 C.E.), the founder of Christianity, Zoroaster (a.k.a. Zarathustra), the founding prophet of Zoroastrianism, Mahavira (599-527 B.C.E.), promulgator of the tenets of Jainism, Gautama Buddha (563-483-543 B.C.E.) the key figure in Buddhism, as well as Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892 C.E.) the founder-prophet of the Bahá'í Faith, who is believed to be Kalkin Avatar.

However, many other Hindus reject the idea that avatars can exist outside of traditional Hinduism.

8.2 CONCEPT OF AVATAR- CLASSICAL

Influence of avatar philosophy

Within theosophy and the new age

In a series of four lectures delivered at the Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras, in December 1899, Annie Besant (1847-1933 C.E.), the president of the society, combined Theosophical concepts with classic Vaishnavite ideas.[3] A decade later, her co-worker Charles Webster Leadbeater would claim that his young protégé Jiddu Krishnamurti was actually the avatar of a Cosmic Christ-like being called the Maitreya. Many New Age teachings have been strongly influenced by Neo-Theosophical ideas as well, primarily through the works of Alice Bailey, Helena Roerich and Manly P. Hall, among others. These thinkers developed the idea of a celestial hierarchy of ascended masters: A group

of ordinary humans who have undergone transformation to become spiritually enlightened beings. Among these figures are Jesus, Confucius, Gautama Buddha, and Mary the Mother of Jesus; at the head of the hierarchy again is Maitreya. Many New Age teachings speak of the coming return of Christ, or the coming of the Maitreya, which will usher in a new cosmic Era. According to Benjamin Creme, a contemporary British esotericist, the Maitreya has already incarnated, and will soon reveal himself.

Evolutionary interpretation

The standard list of the Dasavatars bears striking resemblances to the modern scientific theory of Evolution. Matsya, the fish, represents life in water, and Kurma, the tortoise, represents the next stage, amphibianism (although technically, a tortoise is a reptile, not an amphibian). The third animal, the boar Varaha, marks the development of life upon land. Narasimha, the Man-Lion, represents the further development of mammals. Vamana, the dwarf, symbolizes the incomplete development of human beings, while Parashurama, the forest-dwelling hermit armed with an ax, connotes completion of the basic development of humankind, perhaps in the form of barbarism. Rama indicates humanity's ability to effectively govern nations, while Krishna, allegedly an expert in the sixty-four fields of science and art, indicates advancement in culture and civilization. Buddha represents the further intellectual advancement of man, culminating in the realization of even greater spiritual truths. Thus, the avatars represent the evolution of life and society with each epoch from Krita Yuga to Kali Yuga. This progression of animal life from the sea creature to the intellectually enlightened human is not incongruent with modern evolutionary theory. This connection gets particularly interesting when taking into considerations descriptions of Kalkin, who has sometimes been described as being a yantra-manava, or a "machine-man," which could be interpreted to suggest the future development some sort of technologically enhanced human being which is as of yet unknown.

Controversy

Research on the concept of avatars in Hinduism suggests that the avatar doctrine became an important feature in popular Hinduism during the time of the composition of the Bhagavadgita (c. 200 B.C.E.-200 C.E.). Due to the similarities between the concepts of avatar and incarnation, as well as the proposed time frame of the Gita, some scholars have speculated that either Hinduism influenced the development of the Incarnation doctrine found in Christianity, or else that Hinduism borrowed the idea of incarnation from the Christians. Scholarship is inconclusive on this matter. Such controversial arguments depend on anachronistic historical assumptions that are not easily supportable.

Another controversial aspect of the avatar doctrine is its potential abuse by dubious gurus and their followers. In recent decades, there have been a number of gurus who have been lauded as avatars. Due to this resultant surfeit of alleged avatars, claims to being an incarnation of God have come to be viewed with some suspicion by modern Hindus. Swami Tapasyananda of the Ramakrishna Mission has noted the widespread abuse of the avatar doctrine today, which has lead him to laud Christianity for limiting Divine Incarnation to a one-time phenomenon. In Swami Tapasyananda's view, followers should identify their guru as a conduit to God, rather than God incarnate. However, Swami Sivananda, founder of Divine Life Society, has said that a guru can be likened to God if he himself has attained realization and provides a link between the individual under his tutelage and the Absolute. Such a guru, according to this definition and interpretation, should have actually attained union with God, and should inspire devotion in others while radiating a presence that purifies all.

An avatar (Sanskrit: अवतार, IAST: avatāra), a concept in Hinduism that means "descent", is the material appearance or incarnation of a deity on earth. The relative verb to "alight, to make one's appearance" is sometimes used to refer to any guru or revered human being.

The word avatar does not appear in the Vedic literature, but appears in verb forms in post-Vedic literature and as a noun particularly in the Puranic literature after the 6th century CE. Despite that, the concept of an avatar is compatible with the content of the Vedic literature like the Upanishads as it is symbolic imagery of the Saguna Brahman concept in the philosophy of Hinduism. The Rigveda describes Indra as endowed with a mysterious power of assuming any form at will. The Bhagavad Gita expounds the doctrine of Avatara but with terms other than avatar.

Theologically, the term is most often associated with the Hindu god Vishnu, though the idea has been applied to other deities. Varying lists of avatars of Vishnu appear in Hindu scriptures, including the ten Dashavatara of the Garuda Purana and the twenty-two avatars in the Bhagavata Purana, though the latter adds that the incarnations of Vishnu are innumerable. The avatars of Vishnu are important in Vaishnavism theology. In the goddess-based Shaktism tradition of Hinduism, avatars of the Devi in different appearances such as Tripura Sundari, Durga and Kali are commonly found. While avatars of other deities such as Ganesha and Shiva are also mentioned in medieval Hindu texts, this is minor and occasional. The incarnation doctrine is one of the important differences between Vaishnavism and Shaivism traditions of Hinduism.

Incarnation concepts similar to avatar are also found in Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions. The scriptures of Sikhism include the names of numerous Hindu gods and goddesses, but it rejected the doctrine of savior incarnation and endorsed the view of Hindu Bhakti movement saints such as Namdev that formless eternal god is within the human heart and man is his own savior.

8.3 BHAGAVATA GITA

The Bhagavad Gita (/ˌbʌgəvəd ˈɡiːtɑː, -tə/; Sanskrit: भगवद्गीता, IAST: bhagavad-gītā, lit. "The Song of God"),[1] often referred to as the Gita, is a 700-verse Sanskrit scripture that is part of the Hindu epic Mahabharata (chapters 23–40 of Bhishma Parva).

The Gita is set in a narrative framework of a dialogue between Pandava prince Arjuna and his guide and charioteer Krishna. At the start of the Dharma Yudhha (righteous war) between Pandavas and Kauravas, Arjuna is filled with moral dilemma and despair about the violence and death the war will cause. He wonders if he should renounce and seeks Krishna's counsel, whose answers and discourse constitute the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna counsels Arjuna to "fulfill his Kshatriya (warrior) duty to uphold the Dharma" through "selfless action". The Krishna–Arjuna dialogue cover a broad range of spiritual topics, touching upon ethical dilemmas and philosophical issues that go far beyond the war Arjuna faces.

The Bhagavad Gita presents a synthesis of Hindu ideas about dharma, theistic bhakti, and the yogic ideals of moksha. The text covers jnana, bhakti, karma, and Raja Yoga (spoken of in the 6th chapter) incorporating ideas from the Samkhya-Yoga philosophy.

Numerous commentaries have been written on the Bhagavad Gita with widely differing views on the essentials. Vedanta commentators read varying relations between Self and Brahman in the text: Advaita Vedanta sees the non-dualism of Atman (soul) and Brahman as its essence, whereas Bhedabheda and Vishishtadvaita see Atman and Brahman as both different and non-different, and Dvaita sees them as different. The setting of the Gita in a battlefield has been interpreted as an allegory for the ethical and moral struggles of the human life.

The Bhagavad Gita is the best known and most famous of Hindu texts, with a unique pan-Hindu influence. The Gita's call for selfless action inspired many leaders of the Indian independence movement including Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi; the latter referred to it as his "spiritual dictionary".

The Gita in the title of the text "Bhagavad Gita" means "song". Religious leaders and scholars interpret the word "Bhagavad" in a number of ways. Accordingly, the title has been interpreted as "the Song of God" by the

theistic schools, "the Song of the Lord", "the Divine Song", and "Celestial Song" by others.

The work is also known as the Isvara Gita, the Ananta Gita, the Hari Gita, the Vyasa Gita, or simply the Gita.

Structure

The Bhagavad Gita is a poem written in the Sanskrit language. Its 700 verses are structured into several ancient Indian poetic meters, with the principal being the shloka (Anushtubh chanda). Each shloka consists of a couplet, thus the entire text consists of 1,400 lines. Each shloka line has two quarter verses with exactly eight syllables. Each of these quarters is further arranged into "two metrical feet of four syllables each", state Flood and Martin. The metered verse does not rhyme. While the shloka is the principal meter in the Gita, it does deploy other elements of Sanskrit prosody. At dramatic moments, it uses the tristubh meter found in the Vedas, where each line of the couplet has two quarter verses with exactly eleven syllables.

Narrative

The Gita is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna right before the start of the climactic Kurukshetra War in the Hindu epic Mahabharata. Two massive armies have gathered to destroy the other. The Pandava prince Arjuna asks his charioteer Krishna to drive to the center of the battlefield so that he can get a good look at both the armies and all those "so eager for war". He sees that some among his enemies are his own relatives, beloved friends, and revered teachers. He does not want to fight to kill them and is thus filled with doubt and despair on the battlefield. He drops his bow, wonders if he should renounce and just leave the battlefield. He turns to his charioteer and guide Krishna, for advice on the rationale for war, his choices and the right thing to do. The Bhagavad Gita is the compilation of Arjuna's questions and moral dilemma, Krishna's answers and insights that elaborate on a variety of philosophical concepts. The compiled dialogue goes far beyond the "a rationale for war", it touches

on many human ethical dilemmas, philosophical issues and life's choices. According to Flood and Martin, the Gita though set in the war context in a major epic, the narrative is structured for the abstract to all situations; it wrestles with questions about "who we are, how we should live our lives, and how should we act in the world". According to Sargeant, it delves into questions about the "purpose of life, crisis of self-identity, human soul, human temperaments, and ways for spiritual quest".

Characters

The thematic story of Arjuna and Krishna at the Kurukshetra war became popular in southeast Asia as Hinduism spread there in the 1st-millennium CE. Above, an Arjuna-Krishna chariot scene in Jakarta center, Indonesia.

Arjuna, one of the Pandavas

Krishna, Arjuna's charioteer and guru who was actually an incarnation of Vishnu

Sanjaya, counselor of the Kuru king Dhritarashtra (secondary narrator)

Dhritarashtra, Kuru king (Sanjaya's audience)

Chapters

Bhagavad Gita comprises 18 chapters (section 25 to 42) in the Bhishma Parva of the epic Mahabharata. Because of differences in recensions, the verses of the Gita may be numbered in the full text of the Mahabharata as chapters 6.25–42 or as chapters 6.23–40.[web 3] The number of verses in each chapter vary in some manuscripts of the Gita discovered on the Indian subcontinent. However, variant readings are relatively few in contrast to the numerous versions of the Mahabharata it is found embedded in, and the meaning is the same.

The original Bhagavad Gita has no chapter titles. Some Sanskrit editions that separate the Gita from the epic as an independent text, as well as translators, however, add chapter titles such as each chapter being a particular form of yoga. For example, Swami Chidbhavananda describes each of the eighteen chapters as a separate yoga because each chapter, like yoga, "trains the body and the mind". He labels the first chapter

"Arjuna Vishada Yogam" or the "Yoga of Arjuna's Dejection". Sir Edwin Arnold titled this chapter in his 1885 translation as "The Distress of Arjuna".

Chapter 1 (46 verses)

Some translators have variously titled the first chapter as Arjuna vishada yoga, Prathama Adhyaya, The Distress of Arjuna, The War Within, or Arjuna's Sorrow. The Bhagavad Gita opens by setting the stage of the Kurukshetra battlefield. Two massive armies representing different loyalties and ideologies face a catastrophic war. With Arjuna is Krishna, not as a participant in the war, but only as his charioteer and counsel. Arjuna requests Krishna to move the chariot between the two armies so he can see those "eager for this war". He sees family and friends on the enemy side. Arjuna is distressed and in sorrow. The issue is, states Arvind Sharma, "is it morally proper to kill?" This and other moral dilemmas in the first chapter are set in a context where the Hindu epic and Krishna have already extolled ahimsa (non-violence) to be the highest and divine virtue of a human being. The war feels evil to Arjuna and he questions the morality of war. He wonders if it is noble to renounce and leave before the violence starts, or should he fight, and why.

Chapter 2 (72 verses)

Face pages of chapters 1, 2 and 3 of historic Bhagavad Gita manuscripts. Top: Bengali script; Bottom: Gurmukhi script.

Some translators title the chapter as Sankhya Yoga, The Book of Doctrines, Self-Realization, or The Yoga of Knowledge (and Philosophy). The second chapter begins the philosophical discussions and teachings found in Gita. The warrior Arjuna whose past had focused on learning the skills of his profession now faces a war he has doubts about. Filled with introspection and questions about the meaning and purpose of life, he asks Krishna about the nature of life, soul, death, afterlife and whether there is a deeper meaning and reality. Krishna

answers. The chapter summarizes the Hindu idea of rebirth, samsara, eternal soul in each person (Self), universal soul present in everyone, various types of yoga, divinity within, the nature of Self-knowledge and other concepts. The ideas and concepts in the second chapter reflect the framework of the Samkhya and Yoga schools of Hindu Philosophy. This chapter is an overview for the remaining sixteen chapters of the Bhagavad Gita. Mahatma Gandhi memorized the last 19 verses of the second chapter, considering them as his companion in his non-violent movement for social justice during the colonial rule.

Chapter 3 (43 verses)

Some translators title the chapter as Karma yoga, Virtue in Work, Selfless Service, or The Yoga of Action. Arjuna, after listening to Krishna's spiritual teachings in Chapter 2, gets more confounded and returns to the predicament he faces. He wonders if fighting the war “not so important after all” is given Krishna's overview on the pursuit of spiritual wisdom. Krishna replies that there is no way to avoid action (karma), since abstention from work is also an action. Krishna states that Arjuna has an obligation to understand and perform his duty (dharma), because everything is connected by the law of cause and effect. Every man or woman is bound by activity. Those who act selfishly create the karmic cause and are thereby bound to the effect which may be good or bad. Those who act selflessly for the right cause and strive to do their dharmic duty do God's work. Those who act without craving for fruits are free from the karmic effects, because the results never motivated them. Whatever the result, it does not affect them. Their happiness comes from within, and the external world does not bother them. According to Flood and Martin, chapter 3 and onwards develops "a theological response to Arjuna's dilemma".

Chapter 4 (42 verses)

Some translators title the fourth chapter as Ana-Karma-Sanyasa yoga, The Religion of Knowledge, Wisdom in Action, or The Yoga of Renunciation of Action through Knowledge. Krishna reveals that he has

taught this yoga to the Vedic sages. Arjuna questions how Krishna could do this, when those sages lived so long ago, and Krishna was born more recently. Krishna reminds him that everyone is in the cycle of rebirths, and while Arjuna does not remember his previous births, he does. Whenever dharma declines and the purpose of life is forgotten by men, says Krishna, he returns to re-establish dharma. Every time he returns, he teaches about inner Self in all beings. The later verses of the chapter return to the discussion of motiveless action and the need to determine the right action, performing it as one's dharma (duty) while renouncing the results, rewards, fruits. The simultaneous outer action with inner renunciation, states Krishna, is the secret to the life of freedom. Action leads to knowledge, while selfless action leads to spiritual awareness, state the last verses of this chapter. The 4th chapter is the first time where Krishna begins to reveal his divine nature to Arjuna.

Chapter 5 (29 verses)

Some translators title this chapter as Karma–Sanyasa yoga, Religion by Renouncing Fruits of Works, Renounce and Rejoice, or The Yoga of Renunciation. The chapter starts by presenting the tension in the Indian tradition between the life of sannyasa (monks who have renounced their household and worldly attachments) and the life of grihastha (householder). Arjuna asks Krishna which path is better. Krishna answers that both are paths to the same goal, but the path of "selfless action and service" with inner renunciation is better. The different paths, says Krishna, aim for—and if properly pursued, lead to—Self-knowledge. This knowledge leads to the universal, transcendent Godhead, the divine essence in all beings, to Brahman — the Krishna himself. The final verses of the chapter state that the self-aware who have reached self-realization live without fear, anger, or desire. They are free within, always. Chapter 5 shows signs of interpolations and internal contradictions. For example, states Arthur Basham, verses 5.23–28 state that a sage's spiritual goal is to realize the impersonal Brahman, yet the next verse 5.29 states that the goal is to realize the personal God who is Krishna.

Selfless service

6th Chapter, verse 1, Bhagavad Gita, Sanskrit, Devanagari script.jpg

It is not those who lack energy
nor those who refrain from action,
but those who work without expecting reward
who attain the goal of meditation,
Theirs is true renunciation.

—Bhagavad Gita 6.1

Eknath Easwaran

Chapter 6 (47 verses)

Some translators title the sixth chapter as Dhyana yoga, Religion by Self-Restraint, The Practice of Meditation, or The Yoga of Meditation. The chapter opens as a continuation of Krishna's teachings about selfless work and the personality of someone who has renounced the fruits that is found in chapter 5. Krishna says that such self-realized people are impartial to friends and enemies, are beyond good and evil, equally disposed to those who support them or oppose them because they have reached the summit of consciousness. The verses 6.10 and after proceed to summarize the principles of Yoga and meditation in the format similar to but simpler than Patanjali's Yogasutra. It discusses who is a true yogi, and what it takes to reach the state where one harbors no malice towards anyone.

Chapter 7 (30 verses)

Some translators title this chapter as Jnana–Vijnana yoga, Religion by Discernment, Wisdom from Realization, or The Yoga of Knowledge and Judgment. The chapter 7 once again opens with Krishna continuing his discourse. He discusses jnana (knowledge) and vijnana (realization, understanding) using the Prakriti-Purusha (matter-soul) framework of the

Samkhya school of Hindu philosophy, and the Maya-Brahman framework of its Vedanta school. The chapter states that evil are the consequence of ignorance and the attachment to the impermanent, delusive Maya. It equates self-knowledge and the union with Purusha (Krishna) as the Self to be the highest goal of any spiritual pursuit.

Chapter 8 (28 verses)

Some translators title the chapter as Aksara–Brahma yoga, Religion by Devotion to the One Supreme God, The Eternal Godhead, or The Yoga of the Imperishable Brahman. The chapter opens with Arjuna asking questions such as what is Brahman and what is the nature of karma. Krishna states that his own highest nature is the imperishable Brahman, and that he lives in every creature as the adhyatman. Every being has an impermanent body and an eternal soul, and that "Krishna as Lord" lives within every creature. The chapter discusses cosmology, the nature of death and rebirth. This chapter contains eschatology of the Bhagavad Gita. Importance of the last thought before death, differences between material and spiritual worlds, and light and dark paths that a soul takes after death are described.

Chapter 9 (34 verses)

Some translators title the ninth chapter as Raja–Vidya–Raja–Guhya yoga, Religion by the Kingly Knowledge and the Kingly Mystery, The Royal Path, or The Yoga of Sovereign Science and Sovereign Secret. Chapter 9 opens with Krishna continuing his discourse as Arjuna listens. Krishna states that he is everywhere and in everything in an unmanifested form, yet he is not in any way limited by them. Eons end, everything dissolves and then he recreates another eon subjecting them to the laws of Prakriti (nature). He equates himself to being the father and the mother of the universe, to being the Om, to the three Vedas, to the seed, the goal of life, the refuge and abode of all. The chapter recommends devotional worship of Krishna. According to theologian Christopher Southgate, verses of this chapter of the Gita are panentheistic, while German physicist and philosopher Max Bernhard

Weinstein deems the work pandeistic. It may, in fact, be neither of them, and its contents may have no definition with previously-developed Western terms.

A frieze in the early 8th-century Virupaksha temple (Pattadakal) depicting Mahabharata scenes involving Arjuna-Krishna chariot. Pattadakal is a UNESCO world heritage site.

Chapter 10 (42 verses)

Some translators title the chapter as Vibhuti–Vistara–yoga, Religion by the Heavenly Perfections, Divine Splendor, or The Yoga of Divine Manifestations. Krishna reveals his divine being in greater detail, as the ultimate cause of all material and spiritual existence, one who transcends all opposites and who is beyond any duality. Krishna says he is the atman in all beings, Arjuna's innermost Self, also compassionate Vishnu, the Surya (sun god), Indra, Shiva-Rudra, Ananta, Yama, as well as the Om, Vedic sages, time, Gayatri mantra, and the science of Self-knowledge. Arjuna accepts Krishna as the purushottama (Supreme Being).

Chapter 11 (55 verses)

Some translators title the chapter as Visvarupa–Darsana yoga, The Manifesting of the One and Manifold, The Cosmic Vision, or The Yoga of the Vision of the Cosmic Form. On Arjuna's request, Krishna displays his "universal form" (Viśvarūpa). This is an idea found in the Rigveda and many later Hindu texts, where it is a symbolism for atman (soul) and Brahman (Absolute Reality) eternally pervading all beings and all existence. Chapter 11, states Eknath Eswaran, describes Arjuna entering first into savikalpa samadhi (a particular), and then nirvikalpa samadhi (a universal) as he gets an understanding of Krishna. A part of the verse from this chapter was recited by Robert Oppenheimer as he witnessed the first atomic bomb explosion.

Chapter 12 (20 verses)

Some translators title the chapter as Bhakti yoga, The Religion of Faith, The Way of Love, or The Yoga of Devotion. In this chapter, Krishna glorifies the path of love and devotion to God. Krishna describes the process of devotional service (Bhakti yoga). This chapter of the Gita, states Easwaran, offers a "vastly easier" path to most human beings to identify and love God in an anthropomorphic representation, in any form. He can be projected as "a merciful father, a divine mother, a wise friend, a passionate beloved, or even a mischievous child", according to Easwaran. The text states that combining "action with inner renunciation" with the love of Krishna as a personal God leads to peace. In the last eight verses of this chapter, Krishna states that he loves those who have compassion for all living beings, are content with whatever comes their way, who live a detached life that is impartial and selfless, unaffected by fleeting pleasure or pain, neither craving for praise nor depressed by criticism.

Chapter 13 (35 verses)

Bhagavad Gita and related commentary literature exists in numerous Indian languages.

Some translators title this chapter as Ksetra–Ksetrajna Vibhaga yoga, Religion by Separation of Matter and Spirit, The Field and the Knower, or The Yoga of Difference between the Field and Field-Knower. The chapter opens with Krishna continuing his discourse from the previous chapter. He describes the difference between transient perishable physical body (kshetra) and the immutable eternal soul (kshetrajna). The presentation explains the difference between ahamkara (ego) and atman (soul), from there between individual consciousness and universal consciousness. The knowledge of one's true self is linked to the realization of the soul. The 13th chapter of the Gita offers the clearest enunciation of the Samkhya philosophy, states Basham, by explaining the difference between field (material world) and the knower (soul), prakriti and purusha. According to Miller, this is the chapter which "redefines the battlefield as the human body, the material realm in which

one struggles to know oneself" where human dilemmas are presented as a "symbolic field of interior warfare".

Chapter 14 (27 verses)

Some translators title the fourteenth chapter as Gunatraya–Vibhaga yoga, Religion by Separation from the Qualities, The Forces of Evolution, or The Yoga of the Division of Three Gunas. The chapter once again opens with Krishna continuing his discourse from the previous chapter. Krishna explains the difference between purusha and prakriti, by mapping human experiences to three Guṇas (tendencies, qualities). These are listed as sattva, rajas and tamas. All phenomena and individual personalities are a combination of all three gunas in varying and ever-changing proportions. The gunas affect the ego, but not the soul, according to the text. This chapter also relies on the Samkhya theories.

Chapter 15 (20 verses)

Some translators title the chapter as Purusottama yoga, Religion by Attaining the Supreme Krishna, The Supreme Self, or The Yoga of the Supreme Purusha. The fifteenth chapter expounds on Krishna theology, in the Vaishnava Bhakti tradition of Hinduism. Krishna discusses the nature of God, according to Easwaran, wherein Krishna not only transcends impermanent body (matter), he also transcends the atman (soul) in every being. According to Franklin Edgerton, the verses in this chapter in association with select verses in other chapters make the metaphysics of the Gita to be dualistic. Its overall thesis is, states Edgerton, more complex however, because other verses teach the Upanishadic doctrines and "thru its God the Gita seems after all to arrive at an ultimate monism; the essential part, the fundamental element, in everything, is after all One — is God."

Chapter 16 (24 verses)

Some translators title the chapter as Daivasura–Sampad–Vibhaga yoga, The Separateness of the Divine and Undivine, Two Paths, or The Yoga

of the Division between the Divine and the Demonic. According to Easwaran, this is an unusual chapter where two types of human nature are expounded, one leading to happiness and the other to suffering. Krishna identifies these human traits to be divine and demonic respectively. He states that truthfulness, self-restraint, sincerity, love for others, desire to serve others, being detached, avoiding anger, avoiding harm to all living creatures, fairness, compassion and patience are marks of the divine nature. The opposite of these are demonic, such as cruelty, conceit, hypocrisy and being inhumane, states Krishna. Some of the verses in Chapter 16 may be polemics directed against competing Indian religions, according to Basham. The competing tradition may be the materialists (Charvaka), states Fowler.

Chapter 17 (28 verses)

Some translators title the chapter as Sraddhatraya-Vibhaga yoga, Religion by the Threefold Kinds of Faith, The Power of Faith, or The Yoga of the Threefold Faith. Krishna qualifies the three divisions of faith, thoughts, deeds, and even eating habits corresponding to the three modes (gunas).

Chapter 18 (78 verses)

Some translators title the chapter as Moksha–Sanyasa yoga, Religion by Deliverance and Renunciation, Freedom and Renunciation, or The Yoga of Liberation and Renunciation. In the final and long chapter, the Gita offers a final summary of its teachings in the previous chapters. It covers many topics, states Easwaran. It begins with discussion of spiritual pursuits through sannyasa (renunciation, monastic life) and spiritual pursuits while living in the world as a householder. It re-emphasizes the karma-phala-tyaga teaching, or "act while renouncing the fruits of your action.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. To know the Concept of Avatar- Classical

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2. To discuss the avatar concept as per Bhagabata Gita

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8.4 SRIMAD BHAGAVATA

If any scripture of the Hindus can be compared with the Bible, it is the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana. It consists of twelve books, the first nine of which are something like the Old Testament, and the Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth can be compared to the New Testament. In the earlier sections—the first nine books—we have a cosmology of the whole of creation, and practically the history of mankind as conceived from the point of view of a religious interpretation of the process of creation. Suka Maharishi placed before Raja Parikshit a picture of the Cosmic Being, through whose Being, through whose Person run all the levels of existence—seven realms above and seven realms below, from Patala to Brahmaloaka. Having described this wondrous structure of creation through every level which one has to pass in the process of spiritual evolution; Sri Suka now turns his attention to the possibility of self-purification through the worship of the lesser gods, who operate through every level of creation as the fingers of the Almighty working everywhere.

The gods in heaven cannot be counted, even as the fingers of God cannot be counted. They are like infinite triangles that can be drawn on the canvas of space, all which have a base and an apex, the apex connecting the relationship between the two points at the base, representing the perceiver and the perceived, the subject and the object, in a transcendent presence called the *adhidaiva*. The process goes on rising, one above the other, until the Supreme Person is reached. Thus, the gods in heaven represent the different layers of superintending authority in the levels of creation, and one may take them all together at one stroke for a total meditation on creation in its entirety, or each one of them can be taken separately for the purpose of concentration. For instance, Suka Maharishi says: *brahma-varcasakāmas tu yajeta brahmaṇaḥ patim* (S.B. 2.3.2). A human being has various desires, aspirations and longings. Every longing can be fulfilled by adoration of a particular divinity. If you aspire for radiance in your face, energy in your personality, and lustre in the whole of your being, then meditate on *Brahmanaspati*, who is the abode of all lustre; if you long for knowledge, enlightenment, wisdom, meditate on a person like Lord Siva; if you want health, vigour of personality and long life, offer your prostrations and adorations to *Surya*, the resplendent lord of the skies; if you want mental peace, balance of feeling, concentrate your mind on the moon as identical with yourself; if you want a warlike energy and strength in your person, meditate on *Skanda*, the generalissimo of the gods; and if you want to be free from every kind of obstacle along your successful approach in life, pray, offer your adoration to *Ganapathi*, or *Ganesha Bhagavan*, who is the remover of all obstacles. But having said all these things, Suka concludes by giving his final opinion: *akāmaḥ sarva-kāmo vā mokṣakāma udāra-dhīḥ, tīvreṇa bhakti-yogena yajeta puruṣam param* (S.B. 2.3.10). Infinite desires can be fulfilled by infinite adorations of different varieties, summoning the angels in heaven in different ways, which are the *upasanas* as mentioned; but if you want nothing or want all things at the same time, then your heart should be devoted to the Supreme *Narayana* who is the *mokshadata*—the giver of liberation. The condition to attain *Narayana* is that we want nothing or we want everything at the same time, because wanting everything is equal to wanting nothing. The trouble is that we want only certain things, and not all things. No one can humanly long for

all things in the world at the same time. But why does the mind make this discrimination in asking for things? Why does it ask only for little things? Here is the trouble with human nature: it wants, but it does not want everything. But in the condition of moksha, liberation, we have to either want everything or not want anything. Akamah means one who has no desires of any kind; sarva-kamo va means one who has desires for all things at the same time. Moksha-kama udaradhih—whose intent is on liberation alone; such a person has to worship the Supreme Purusha. That is the Great Person who superintends the whole creation—the Father in heaven, if we want to call Him so.

In the Eleventh Skandha there is the conversation of Sri Krishna with Uddhava as the last message, where Sri Krishna gives to everybody, through the mouthpiece of Uddhava, a large, very elaborate lecture on dharma, artha, kama and moksha, emphasising that devotion to God is the only way to attain Him. Bhakti is final. Thus, Sri Krishna completed his great mission of Divinity incarnate on Earth, and withdrew himself into the very form of Narayana that he himself originally was. In the Twelfth Skandha, Parikshit attains salvation, moksha. The last message of Suka is given, wherein he asks Parikshit to consider himself as a soul which is identical with the Universal Soul. Aham brahma param dhāma, brahmāham paramam padam (S.B. 12.5.11): “On that may you meditate. Forget the idea that you are Parikshit, and when the snake comes and bites, let it bite the body. After hearing this whole Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana katha, and the glory of Bhagavan Sri Krishna and the glory of Narayana, have no doubt in your mind that you will attain moksha.

8.5 MAHABHARATA

The *Mahabharata* is an ancient Indian epic where the main story revolves around two branches of a family - the **Pandavas** and **Kauravas** - who, in the Kurukshetra **War, battle** for the throne of Hastinapura. Interwoven into this narrative are several smaller stories about people dead or living, and philosophical discourses. **Krishna**-Dwaipayana Vyasa, himself a character in the epic, composed it; as, according to tradition, he dictated the verses

and **Ganesha** wrote them down. At 100,000 verses, it is the longest epic poem ever written, generally thought to have been composed in the 4th century BCE or earlier. The events in the epic play out in the Indian subcontinent and surrounding areas. It was first narrated by a student of Vyasa at a snake-sacrifice of the great-grandson of one of the major characters of the story. Including within it the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Mahabharata* is one of the most important texts of ancient Indian, indeed world, **literature**.

The prelude

Shantanu, the king of Hastinapur, was married to **Ganga** (personification of the **Ganges**) with whom he had a son called Devavrat. Several years later, when Devavrat had grown up to be an accomplished prince, Shantanu fell in love with Satyavati. Her father refused to let her marry the king unless the king promised that Satyavati's son and descendants would inherit the throne. Unwilling to deny Devavrat his rights, Shantanu declined to do so but the prince, on coming to know of the matter, rode over to Satyavati's house, vowed to renounce the throne and to remain celibate throughout his life. The prince then took Satyavati home to the **palace** so that the king, his father, could marry her. On account of the terrible vow that he'd taken that day, Devavrat came to be known as Bheeshm. Shantanu was so pleased with his son that he granted to Devavrat the boon of choosing the time of his own **death**.

In time, Shantanu and Satyavati had two sons. Soon thereafter, Shantanu died. Satyavati's sons still being minors, the affairs of the kingdom were managed by Bheeshm and Satyavati. By the time these sons reached adulthood, the elder one had died in a skirmish with some gandharvas (heavenly beings) so the younger son, Vichitravirya, was enthroned. Bheeshm then abducted the three princesses of a neighbouring kingdom and brought them over to Hastinapur to be wedded to Vichitravirya. The eldest of these princesses declared that she was in love with someone else, so she was let go; the two other princesses were married to Vichitravirya who died soon afterwards, childless.

DHRITARASHTRA WAS THE STRONGEST OF ALL PRINCES IN THE COUNTRY, PANDU WAS SKILLED IN WARFARE & ARCHERY, & VIDUR KNEW ALL THE BRANCHES OF LEARNING, POLITICS, & STATESMANSHIP.

Dhritarashtra, Pandu & Vidur

So that the family line did not die out, Satyawati summoned her son Vyasa to impregnate the two queens. Vyasa had been born to Satyawati of a great sage named Parashar before her marriage to Shantanu. According to the laws of the day, a child born to an unwed mother was taken to be a step-child of the mother's husband; by that token, Vyasa could be considered Shantanu's son and could be used to perpetuate the Kuru clan that ruled Hastinapur. Thus, by the *Niyog* custom, the two queens each had a son of Vyasa: to the elder queen was born a blind son called Dhritarashtra, and to the younger was born an otherwise healthy but extremely pale son called Pandu. To a maid of these queens was born a son of Vyasa called Vidur. Bheeshm brought up these three boys with great care. Dhritarashtra grew up to be the strongest of all princes in the country, Pandu was extremely skilled in warfare and archery, and Vidur knew all the branches of learning, politics, and statesmanship.

With the boys grown, it was now time to fill up the empty throne of Hastinapur. Dhritarashtra, the eldest, was bypassed because the laws barred a disabled person from being king. Pandu, instead, was crowned. Bheeshm negotiated Dhritarashtra's marriage with Gandhari, and Pandu's with Kunti and Madri. Pandu expanded the kingdom by conquering the surrounding areas, and brought in considerable war booty. With things running smoothly in the country, and with its coffers full, Pandu asked his elder brother to look after the state affairs, and retired to the forests with his two wives for some time off.

Kauravas & PAndavas

A few years later, Kunti returned to Hastinapur. With her were five little boys, and the bodies of Pandu and Madri. The five boys were the sons of

Pandu, born to his two wives through the *Niyog* custom from gods: the eldest was born of Dharma, the second of Vayu, the third of **Indra**, and the youngest - twins - of the **Ashvins**. In the meanwhile, Dhritarashtra and Gandhari too had had children of their own: 100 sons and one daughter. The Kuru elders performed the last rites for Pandu and Madri, and Kunti and the children were welcomed into the palace.



All of the 105 princes were subsequently entrusted to the care of a teacher: Kripa at first and, additionally, Drona later. Drona's school at Hastinapur attracted several other boys; Karna, of the Suta clan was one such boy. It was here that hostilities quickly developed between the sons of Dhritarashtra (collectively called the Kauravas, patronymic of their ancestor Kuru) and the sons of Pandu (collectively called the Pandavas, patronymic of their father).

Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava, tried - and failed - to poison Bheem, the second Pandava. Karna, because of his rivalry in archery with the third Pandava, **Arjuna**, allied himself with Duryodhan. In time, the princes learnt all they could from their teachers, and the Kuru elders decided to hold a public skills exhibition of the princes. It was during this exhibition that the citizens became plainly aware of the hostilities between the two branches of the royal family: Duryodhan and Bheem had a mace fight that had to be stopped before things turned ugly, Karna - uninvited as he was not a Kuru prince - challenged Arjuna, was insulted on account of his non-royal birth, and was crowned king of a vassal state on the spot by Duryodhan. It was also around this time that questions began to be raised about Dhritarashtra occupying the throne, since he was supposed to be holding it only in trust for Pandu, the crowned king. To keep peace in the

realm, Dhritarashtra declared the eldest Pandava, Yudhishtir, as the crown prince and heir apparent.



The first exile

Yudhishtir's being the crown prince and his rising popularity with the citizens was extremely distasteful to Duryodhan, who saw himself as the rightful heir since his father was the *de facto* king. He plotted to get rid of the Pandavas. This he did by getting his father to send the Pandavas and Kunti off to a nearby town on the pretext of a fair that was held there. The palace in which the Pandavas were to stay in that town was built by an agent of Duryodhan; the palace was made entirely of inflammable materials since the plan was to burn down the palace - together with the Pandavas and Kunti - once they'd settled in. The Pandavas, however, were alerted to this fact by their other uncle, Vidur, and had a counter plan ready; they dug an escape tunnel underneath their chambers. One night, the Pandavas gave out a huge feast which all of the townsfolk came to. At that feast, a forest woman and her five sons found themselves so well-fed and well-drunk that they could no longer walk straight; they passed out on the floor of the hall. That very night, the Pandavas themselves set fire to the palace and escaped through the tunnel. When the flames had died down, the townsfolk discovered the bones of the forest woman and her boys, and mistook them for Kunti and the Pandavas. Duryodhan thought his plan had succeeded and that the world was free of the Pandavas.

Arjuna & Draupadi

Meanwhile, the Pandavas and Kunti went into hiding, moving from one place to another and passing themselves off as a poor brahmin family. They would seek shelter with some villager for a few weeks, the princes would go out daily to beg for food, return in the evenings and hand over the day's earnings to Kunti who would divide the food into two: one half was for the strongman Bheem and the other half was shared by the others. During these wanderings, Bheem killed two demons, married a demoness, and had a demon child called Ghatotkach. They then heard about a *swayamvar* (a ceremony to choose a suitor) being organised for the princess of Panchal, and went at Panchal to see the festivities. According to their practice, they left their mother home and set out for alms: they reached the *swayamvar* hall where the king was giving away things most lavishly to alms seekers. The brothers sat themselves down in the hall to watch the fun: the princess Draupadi, born of fire, was famed for her beauty and every prince from every country for miles around had come to the *swayamvar*, hoping to win her hand. The conditions of the *swayamvar* were difficult: a long pole on the ground had a circular contraption spinning at its top. On this moving disc was attached a fish. At the bottom of the pole was a shallow urn of water. A person had to look down into this water-mirror, use the bow and five arrows that were provided, and pierce the fish spinning on top. Five attempts were allowed. It was evident that only an extremely skilled archer, such as the now-presumed-dead Arjuna, could pass the test.



One by one, the kings and princes tried to shoot the fish, and failed. Some could not even lift the bow; some could not string it. The Kauravas and Karna were also present. Karna picked up the bow and strung it in a moment, but was prevented from taking aim when Draupadi declared she would not marry anyone from the Suta clan. After every one of the royals had failed, Arjuna, the third Pandava, stepped up to the pole, picked up the bow, strung it, affixed all of the five arrows to it, looked down into the water, aimed, shot, and pierced the fish's eye with all of the five arrows in a single attempt. Arjuna had won Draupadi's hand.

The Pandava brothers, still in the guise of poor brahmins, took Draupadi back to the hut they were staying at and shouted for Kunti, "Ma, Ma, come and see what we've brought back today." Kunti, saying, "Whatever it is, share it among yourselves", came out of the hut, saw that it wasn't alms but the most beautiful woman she had ever set her eyes on, and stood stock still as the import of her words sank in on everybody present. Meanwhile, Draupadi's twin Dhrishtadyumna, unhappy that his royal sister should be married off to a poor commoner, had secretly followed the Pandavas back to their hut. Also following them secretly was a dark prince and his fair brother - Krishna and Balaram of the Yadava clan -

who had suspected that the unknown archer could be none other than Arjuna, who had been presumed dead at the palace-burning incident several months ago. These princes were related to the Pandavas - their father was Kunti's brother - but they had never met before. By design or happenstance, Vyasa also arrived at the scene at this point and the Pandava hut was alive for a while with happy cries of meetings and reunions. To keep Kunti's words, it was decided that Draupadi would be the common wife of all of the five Pandavas. Her brother, Dhrishtadyumna, and her father, the king Drupad, were reluctant with this unusual arrangement but were talked around to it by Vyasa and Yudhishtir.



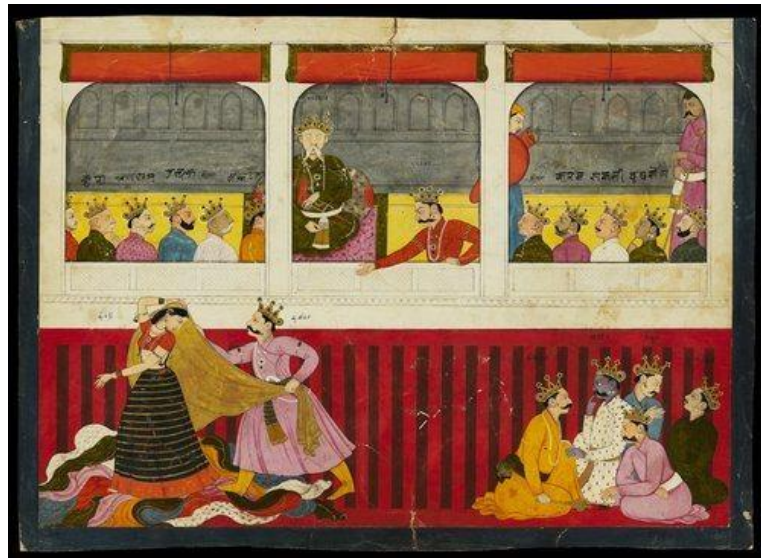
Indraprastha & the dice game

After the wedding ceremonies at Panchal were over, the Hastinapur palace invited the Pandavas and their bride back. Dhritarashtra made a great show of happiness on discovering that the Pandavas were alive after all, and he partitioned the kingdom, giving them a huge tract of barren land to settle in and rule over. The Pandavas transformed this land into a paradise. Yudhishtir was crowned there, and he performed a sacrifice that involved all of the kings of the land to accept - either

voluntarily or by force - his suzerainty. The **new kingdom**, Indraprastha, prospered.

Meanwhile, the Pandavas had entered into an agreement among themselves regarding Draupadi: she was to be wife of each Pandava, by turn, for a year. If any Pandava was to enter the room where she was present with her husband-of-that-year, that Pandava was to be exiled for 12 years. It so happened that once Draupadi and Yudhishtir, her husband of that year, were present in the armoury when Arjuna entered it to take his bow and arrows. Consequently, he went off in exile during which he toured the entire country, down to its southernmost tip, and married three princesses he met along the way.

The prosperity of Indraprastha and the power of the Pandavas was not something that Duryodhan liked. He invited Yudhishtir to a dice game and got his uncle, Shakuni, to play on his (Duryodhan's) behalf. Shakuni was an accomplished player; Yudhishtir staked - and lost - step by step his entire wealth, his kingdom, his brothers, himself, and Draupadi. Draupadi was dragged into the dice hall and insulted. There was an attempt to disrobe her, and Bheem lost his temper and vowed to kill each and every one of the Kauravas. Things came to such a boil that Dhritarashtra intervened unwillingly, gave the kingdom and their freedom back to the Pandavas and Draupadi, and set them off back to Indraprastha. This angered Duryodhan, who talked his father around, and invited Yudhishtir to another dice game. This time, the condition was that the loser would go on a 12-year exile followed by a year of life incognito. If they were to be discovered during this incognito period, the loser would have to repeat the 12+1 cycle. The dice game was played. Yudhishtir lost again.



The second exile

For this exile, the Pandavas left their ageing mother Kunti behind at Hastinapur, in Vidur's place. They lived in forests, hunted game, and visited holy spots. At around this time, Yudhishtir asked Arjuna to go to the heavens in quest of celestial weapons because, by now, it was apparent that their kingdom would not be returned to them peacefully after the exile and that they would have to fight for it. Arjuna did so, and not only did he learn the techniques of several divine weapons from the gods, he also learnt how to sing and dance from the gandharvas.

After 12 years, the Pandavas went incognito for a year. During this one-year period, they lived in the Virat kingdom. Yudhishtir took up employment as a king's counsellor, Bheem worked in the royal kitchens, Arjuna turned himself into a eunuch and taught the palace maidens how to sing and dance, the twins worked at the royal stables, and Draupadi became a handmaiden to the queen. At the end of the incognito period - during which they were not discovered despite Duryodhan's best efforts - the Pandavas revealed themselves. The Virat king was overwhelmed; he offered his daughter in marriage to Arjuna but he declined since he had been her dance teacher the past year and students were akin to children. The princess was married, instead, to Arjuna's son Abhimanyu.

At this wedding ceremony, a large number of Pandava allies gathered to draw out a war strategy. Meanwhile, emissaries had been sent to Hastinapur to demand Indraprastha back but the missions had failed.

Krishna himself went on a peace mission and failed. Duryodhan refused to give away as much land as was covered by the point of a needle, let alone the five villages proposed by the peace missions. The Kauravas also gathered their allies around them, and even broke away a key Pandava ally - the maternal uncle of the Pandava twins - by trickery. War became inevitable.



The Kurukshetra war & aftermath

Just before the war bugle was sounded, Arjuna saw arrayed before him his relatives: his great-grandfather Bheeshm who had practically brought him up, his teachers Kripa and Drona, his brothers the Kauravas, and, for a moment, his resolution wavered. Krishna, the warrior *par excellence*, had given up arms for this war and had elected to be Arjuna's charioteer. To him Arjuna said, "Take me back, Krishna. I can't kill these people. They're my father, my brothers, my teachers, my uncles, my sons. What good is a kingdom that's gained at the cost of their lives?" Then followed a philosophical discourse that has today become a separate book on its own - the ***Bhagavad Gita***. Krishna explained the impermanence of life to Arjuna, and the importance of doing one's duty and of sticking to the right path. Arjuna picked up his bow again.

The battle raged for 18 days. The army totalled 18 *akshauhinis*, 7 on the Pandava side and 11 on the Kaurava (1 *akshauhini* = 21,870 chariots +

21,870 elephants + 65,610 horses + 109,350 soldiers on foot). Casualties on both sides were high. When it all ended, the Pandavas had won the war but lost almost everyone they held dear. Duryodhan and all of the Kauravas had died, as had all of the menfolk of Draupadi's family, including all of her sons by the Pandavas. The now-dead Karna was revealed to be a son of Kunti's from before her marriage to Pandu, and thus, the eldest Pandava and the rightful heir to the throne. The grand old man, Bheeshm, lay dying; their teacher Drona was dead as were several kinsfolk related to them either by blood or by marriage. In about 18 days, the entire country lost almost three generations of its men. It was a war not seen on a scale before, it was the Great Indian war, the *Maha-bharat*.

After the war, Yudhishtir became king of Hastinapur and Indraprastha. The Pandavas ruled for 36 years, after which they abdicated in favour of Abhimanyu's son, Parikshit. The Pandavas and Draupadi proceeded on foot to the Himalayas, intending to live out their last days climbing the slopes heavenwards. One by one, they fell on this last journey and their spirits ascended to the heavens. Years later, Parikshit's son succeeded his father as king. He held a big sacrifice, at which this entire story was recited for the first time by a disciple of Vyasa called Vaishampayan.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. To discuss the concept of avatar in Srimad Bhagavata

.....
.....
.....

2. To discuss the concept of avatar according to Mahabharata

.....
.....
.....

8.6 LET US SUM UP

“Avatar” is a Sanskrit word meaning a “descent.” In general, it can refer to a new, unexpected, or revolutionary person or event. Specifically, it has been used to refer to the appearance of a deity on earth, whether in human form or as an apparition. As a descent of the Divine into animal or human form, “avatar” primarily refers to descents of Vishnu, the divine power which preserves and maintains the universe. There were traditionally said to be ten avatars of Vishnu, although some texts list twenty-six. The ten are: Fish (Matsya); Turtle (Kurma); Boar (Varaha); Man-lion (Narasimha); Dwarf (Vamana); Parashurama; Rama; Krishna; Buddha; and Kalki, who is yet to appear.

“Avatar” is a Sanskrit word meaning a “descent.”

This short list covers all human history and apparently the animal world as well. Three of the ten avatars are animals and one is a mythological figure. The fish and turtle are common mystical symbols, and the man-lion incarnation also appears in Egypt as the sphinx. Only the last five avatars are human and between each of them are periods of hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Thus, if all those who have been called avatars in the modern age actually are avatars, there have been more avatars in the last hundred years than in all of history.

In the ancient tradition of yoga, avatars are seen as symbols. The demons they defeat represent obstacles that the aspirant encounters in his spiritual practices. This list of avatars does not include the most famous sages in the Indian tradition, such as the seven rishis of the Vedas; Yajnavalkya, the foremost of the Upanishadic sages; the great philosopher Shankaracharya; Kapila, the founder of the Sankhya system; or Patanjali, the compiler of the Yoga Sutras. Thus, it is obviously not intended to encompass all the great teachers of India.

In fact, the worship of avatars is not seen as essential in yogic and meditative traditions, which emphasize Self-knowledge rather than outer worship. In the Vedantic tradition, those seeking Self-realization are not encouraged to worship an avatar any more than they are required to worship a particular deity, though they can do so if the avatar or deity is seen as a form of the Self.

8.7 KEY WORDS

Avatar: a manifestation of a deity or released soul in bodily form on earth; an incarnate divine teacher.

Srimad Bhagavad: The Bhagavad Gita (/ˌbʌgəvəd ˈɡiːtɑː, -tə/; Sanskrit: भगवद्गीता, IAST: bhagavad-gītā, lit. "The Song of God"),[1] often referred to as the Gita, is a 700-verse Sanskrit scripture that is part of the Hindu epic Mahabharata (chapters 23–40 of Bhishma Parva).

8.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Discuss the Concept of Avatar- Classical
2. Write the avatar concept as per Bhagabata Gita
3. Discuss the concept of avatar in Srimad Bhagavata
4. Write about the concept of avatar according to Mahabharata

8.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 8.2
2. See Section 8.3

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 8.4
2. See Section 8.5

UNIT 9: THE CONCEPT OF AVATARA- CONTEMPORARY (GANDHI, AUROBINDO, TAGORE)

STRUCTURE

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Concept of Avatar- Contemporary
- 9.3 Gandhi
- 9.4 Aurobindo
- 9.5 Tagore
- 9.6 Let us sum up
- 9.7 Key Words
- 9.8 Questions for Review
- 9.9 Suggested readings and references
- 9.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit we can able to know:

- To know about Concept of Avatar- Contemporary
- To discuss the concept by Gandhi
- To know the concept by Aurobindo
- To discuss the understanding and philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Avatar means to appear, to descend, to take birth or manifest. In Hinduism, an avatar means the form of a deity and usually refers to an incarnation of God or His aspects such as Vishnu on planet earth either as a man or an animal or some mythical creature. An avatar is not mere materialization or appearance of God in physical form for the sake of his devotees. It is neither a disguise nor a trick played upon our senses.

God has been appearing to people from time to time either to pass on some message or accomplishing some task through the beholder. His voice has been heard by countless people upon earth either internally through the subtle channels or externally through actual hearing. He appeared personally to several sages, seers and even demons like Ravana or Hiranya who did severe penances to obtain boons from Him. He conversed with them blessed them and helped them in the pursuit of their goals, be it enlightenment or invincible power or victory against enemies or even invincibility against Himself.

On occasions he also assumed distinct forms to help both men and gods. For example, Lord Vishnu assumed the form of Mohini, a beautiful damsel to help the gods when they and the demons churned the oceans for amrit, the elixir of life and needed His help to distract the demons. Lord Siva appeared as a tribal warrior to Arjuna and challenged him for a fight to test his devotion and determination. He responds to us in His own mysterious ways even today, if we pray to Him sincerely, with faith and devotion. These are however not incarnations, but manifestations of God.

By definition an incarnation is different. It requires the birth of God in physical form, through the natural process and his existence upon earth in physical form undergoing the same experiences as living beings. It is not necessary that the physical form needs to be that of human always. It can be a human, animal or semi human or even mythical form. The incarnation may exist for a brief period of time or for a life time. The incarnation may have all the powers and awareness of God in His absolute aspect or only a necessary portion of it. It is also said that when God incarnates upon earth, He does not incarnate alone. A number of associate divinities and evolved souls also incarnate upon earth to play their part in His incarnation and assist Him. At the same time a number of demons also become active either physically or astrals to counter and thwart the purpose of the incarnation and provide the necessary opposition to the divine drama that is played out.

An incarnation is essentially an interference in the affairs and progression of the manifested worlds. It is an intervention that becomes necessary due to the activity of beings endowed with free will. The law of karma makes each individual being responsible for its action. But in some cases that alone may not deter some from causing a great imbalance in the working of the worlds or interfering with the lives of other people through their actions. When their number increases disproportionately, God decides to take matter into His own hands and comes down to earth in physical form to restore order and morality. Some times He may manifest Himself indirectly through His emanations or directly as an incarnation.

This is the justification and the purpose of incarnatin which the followers of Vaishnavism accept as undeniable truth. They believe that, as promised in the Bhagavadgita by the Supreme Being, from time to time whenever there is excessive presence of evil and suffering of virtuous people Lord Vishnu incarnates upon earth upon earth to restore order and destroy evil. But followers of Saivism hold a contradictory opinion. According to them Siva would not incarnate because God is the knower of past, present and future and controller of all. Every thing happens to according to his will and even evil cannot act itself out unless he wills. So what needs to be accomplished can be accomplished through the will of Siva without the need for a separate incarnation. If at all there is a need to interfere as per his will, Siva would manifest Himself directly and take necessary action. So Siva would only manifest or act through his agencies such as a Guru or an aspect or emanation but would not incarnate. However not all followers of Siva would agree with this argument.

The Ten Great Incarnations of Vishnu

There is a divergence of opinion as to the number of incarnations of Vishnu. According to some his incarnations are many and difficult to enumerate. But others believe that his primary incarnations are only ten, while his secondary incarnations are several. There is also no unanimity among his followers as to what the ten primary incarnations are. The

most commonly accepted list of ten primary incarnations are as shown below:

- Matsyavatara, the incarnation as the fish in the Satya Yuga or the age of truth.
- Kurmavatara, the incarnation as the tortoise, in the Satya Yuga.
- Varahavatara, the incarnation as boar, again in the Satya Yuga.
- Narasimhavatara, the incarnation as Man-Lion (Nara = man, simha = lion), also in the Satya Yuga.
- Vamanavatara, the incarnation as the Dwarf, in the Treta Yuga.
- Parashuramavatara, the incarnation as priestly warrior with an axe, in the Treta Yuga.
- Sri Ramavatara, incarnation as virtuous prince and king of Ayodhya, in the Treta Yuga.
- Sri Krishnavatara, incarnation as cowherd and leader of the Yadus in the Dwapara Yuga to slay his uncle Kamsa and many other demons and assist the Pandavas in the Mahabharata war against their evil cousins.
- Buddhavatara, incarnation as an enlightened Buddha in the Kali Yuga to establish a new religion called Buddhism for those disinterested in ritualism and casteism. (Some include Balarama, the brother of Krishna here instead of the Buddha.)
- Kalkyavatara, incarnation as a sword wielding and horse riding Kalki who will destroy the evil forces before the end of the of Kaliyuga.

Many claim that the ten avatars represent the evolution of life and of mankind on earth. Matsya, the fish, represents life in water. Kurma, the tortoise, represents the next stage, amphibianism. The third animal, the boar Varaha, symbolizes life on land. Narasimha, the Man-Lion, symbolizes the commencement development of mammals. Vamana, the dwarf, symbolizes this incomplete development of human. Then, Parashurama, the forest-dwelling hermit armed with an axe, connotes completion of the basic development of humankind. The King Rama signals man's ability to govern nations. Krishna, an expert in the sixty-

four fields of science and art according to Hinduism, indicates man's advancement in culture and civilization. Balarama, whose weapon was a plough could stand for the development of agriculture. Buddha, the enlightened one, symbolizes social advancement of man.

Note that the time of the avatars also has some significance: Thus, kings rule reached its ideal state in Treta Yuga with Rama Avatar and social justice and Dharma were protected in Dwapar Yuga with the avatar of Krishna. Thus the avatars represent the evolution of life and society with changing epoch from Krita Yuga to Kali yuga. The animal evolution and development connotations also bear striking resemblances to the modern scientific theory of Evolution.

The avatars described above are of Vishnu, which in a sense a symbol of the "current state" of the society. The wife of Vishnu is "Laxmi" the goddess of Wealth. The Wealth is generated by the society, and is required to keep it going. This is symbolized by keeping Laxmi at the feet of Vishnu and basically taking care of him. Brahma, the "Creator" god, is the god of Knowledge. He is supposed have created knowledge. Again this symbolizes the generation of knowledge by the society, (as it is settled and growing and backed by wealth).

The four Yugas are again the symbolically represented. The description of each Yuga is given as follows: Krita Yuga is represented by a man carrying a small piece of pot (kamandalu). Treta Yuga is represented by a man carrying a Cow and an Anchor. Dwapar Yuga is represented by a man carrying a Bow and Parashu (Axe). Kali Yuga is represented by a man who is ugly, without clothes and making offensive gestures holding in his hand his genitals (sex organ).

If the above descriptions are seen carefully, one realizes that this also represents several technological advancements of the human society. In the first yuga there is a development of pottery, language and yagna (yadnya) rituals etc. The second yuga shows the mastering of agricultural techniques. The third yuga tells the development of weapons technology whereby the agricultural society (now staying in groups) and their

generated wealth needs to be protected. The last yuga represents the complete anarchy of the values developed so far and is basically the last phase in the development of any society. The symbolic gesture of holding the sex-organ in hand shows the importance given to the materialistic pleasures of life and finally destroying the peace of mind.

9.2 CONCEPT OF AVATAR- CONTEMPORARY

Avatar derives from a Sanskrit word meaning "descent," and when it first appeared in English in the late 18th century, it referred to the descent of a deity to the earth—typically, the incarnation in earthly form of Vishnu or another Hindu deity. It later came to refer to any incarnation in human form, and then to any embodiment (such as that of a concept or philosophy), whether or not in the form of a person. In the age of technology, avatar has developed another sense—it can now be used for the image that a person chooses as his or her "embodiment" in an electronic medium.

It is apparent that Gandhi's philosophy has much in common with several Western philosophies which uphold the ideal of a more just and equitable society. For example, the Gandhian social order has been described as "communism minus violence". (However, Marxists have traditionally rejected Gandhi because of what they regard as his "bourgeois" outlook. Gandhi rejected violent class conflict and the centralization of political and economic power in the hands of the State as counterproductive to the development of a nonviolent society.) Nevertheless, Gandhian philosophy, particularly in the Sarvodaya ideal, does contain many socialist sentiments. In fact, such an entity as Gandhian Socialism emerged in theoretical literature during the 1970s and 1980s. Gandhi's thought has been likened also to Utopian Socialism and Philosophical Anarchism, and can be compared with strands of Maoist thought (though not a Western philosophy), and even Western liberal thought. However, Gandhi is incompatible with many aspects of Liberalism and is virtually entirely incompatible with the modern, intensely competitive, ecologically destructive and materialistic capitalism of the West.

9.3 GANDHI

His is the One Luminous, Creator of all, Mahatma
Always in the hearts of people enshrined,
Revealed through Love, Intuition and Thought
Whoever knows Him, Immortal becomes!!!

Bless us O Bapu, so that we may attain Success in all that we do!

Source: Adapted From: "Why Gandhi is Relevant in Modern India: A
Western Gandhians Personal Discovery", Gandhi Peace Foundation,
New Delhi; Academy of Gandhian Studies, Hyderabad, 1991.)

This summary will attempt to describe Gandhi's philosophy in as simple a way as possible. Inevitably this must be a personal interpretation, but I hope it has some merit.

What is Gandhian philosophy? It is the religious and social ideas adopted and developed by Gandhi, first during his period in South Africa from 1893 to 1914, and later of course in India. These ideas have been further developed by later "Gandhians", most notably, in India by, Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. Outside of India some of the work of, for example, Martin Luther King Jr. can also be viewed in this light. Understanding the universe to be an organic whole, the philosophy exists on several planes - the spiritual or religious, moral, political, economic, social, individual and collective. The spiritual or religious element, and God, is at its core. Human nature is regarded as fundamentally virtuous. All individuals are believed to be capable of high moral development, and of reform.

The twin cardinal principles of Gandhi's thought are truth and nonviolence. It should be remembered that the English word "truth" is an imperfect translation of the Sanskrit, "satya", and "nonviolence", an even more imperfect translation of "ahimsa". Derived from "sat" - "that which exists" - "satya" contains a dimension of meaning not usually associated by English speakers with the word "truth". There are other variations, too, which we need not go into here. For Gandhi, truth is the relative truth of truthfulness in word and deed, and the absolute truth - the

Ultimate Reality. This ultimate truth is God (as God is also Truth) and morality - the moral laws and code - its basis. Ahimsa, far from meaning mere peacefulness or the absence of overt violence, is understood by Gandhi to denote active love - the pole opposite of violence, or "Himsa", in every sense. The ultimate station Gandhi assigns nonviolence stems from two main points. First, if according to the Divine Reality all life is one, then all violence committed towards another is violence towards oneself, towards the collective, whole self, and thus "self"-destructive and counter to the universal law of life, which is love. Second, Gandhi believed that ahimsa is the most powerful force in existence. Had himsa been superior to ahimsa, humankind would long ago have succeeded in destroying itself. The human race certainly could not have progressed as far as it has, even if universal justice remains far off the horizon. From both viewpoints, nonviolence or love is regarded as the highest law of humankind.

Although there are elements of unity in Gandhi's thought, they are not reduced to a system. It is not a rigid, inflexible doctrine, but a set of beliefs and principles which are applied differently according to the historical and social setting. Therefore there can be no dogmatism, and inconsistency is not a sin. Interpretation of the principles underwent much evolution during Gandhi's lifetime, and as a result many inconsistencies can be found in his writings, to which he readily admitted. The reader of Gandhi's works published by Navajivan Trust will notice that many are prefaced with the following quotation from an April 1933 edition of "Harijan", one of Gandhi's journals. He states straightforwardly: "I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things.... What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he still has any faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject."

That there are inconsistencies in Gandhi's writings accords with the fact that the ideas are not a system. In coming to grips with Gandhi's way of thinking it is most important to understand that the perception of truth undergoes an ongoing process of refinement which is evolutionary in nature.

In Gandhi's thought the emphasis is not on idealism, but on practical idealism. It is rooted in the highest religious idealism, but is thoroughly practical. One label (and almost the only one) Gandhi was happy to have pinned on him was that of "practical idealist". The important principle of compromise is relevant here, as is the acknowledgement that perfect truth and perfect nonviolence can never be attained while the spirit is embodied.

As alluded to above, Gandhian philosophy is certainly considered by Gandhians as a universal and timeless philosophy, despite the fact that on the more superficial level it is set in the Indian social context. They hold that the ideals of truth and nonviolence, which underpin the whole philosophy, are relevant to all humankind. (Recently some have been suggesting that a distinction can be made between the core elements of Gandhi's thought and peripheral elements which, depending on the particular element under consideration, may or may not have timeless relevance.) Also, it can be universal despite being fundamentally religious, as its religious position stresses not so much the Hindu interpretation of reality as the beliefs which are common to all major religions, and that commonality itself. It holds all religions to be worthy of equal respect and in one sense to be equal. As all are creations of mortal and imperfect human beings, no single religion can embody or reveal the whole or absolute truth.

Gandhian philosophy is also compatible with the view that humankind is undergoing gradual moral evolution. While conflict is seen as inevitable, in fact not always undesirable, violence as the result of conflict is not regarded as inevitable. Simply put, human beings do have the capacity to resolve conflict nonviolently. This might be difficult, but it is not

impossible. Liberation from a violent society is seen as requiring many decades or longer - but it is not an impossible ideal.

Importantly also, it is not an intellectual doctrine. Gandhi was not an intellectual. Rather, Gandhi's thought was conceived, to a great extent, out of action and as a guide to action, by a man of action. He hesitated to write about anything of which he did not have personal, first-hand experience. In the sense of it being a call to action, Gandhi's thought can also be seen as an ideology.

As a guide to action, Gandhian philosophy is a double-edged weapon. Its objective is to transform the individual and society simultaneously (rather than in sequence, as Marxism describes), in accordance with the principles of truth and nonviolence. The historic task before humankind is to progress towards the creation of a nonviolent political, economic and social order by nonviolent struggle. The social goal was described by Gandhi as Sarvodaya, a term he coined in paraphrasing John Ruskin's book *Unto This Last*, meaning the welfare of all without exception. Its political aspect was expressed by the late eminent Gandhian Dr R.R. Diwakar in the following words: "The good of each individual in society consists in his efforts to achieve the good of all."

As the foundation of the Gandhian or nonviolent social order is religious or spiritual, economic and political questions are seen from the moral or humanistic perspective. The welfare of human beings, not of systems or institutions, is the ultimate consideration. Materially, it centres on the following concepts and ideals:

Political decentralization, to prevent massive concentrations of political power in the hands of too few; rather, to distribute it in the hands of many. The Gandhian political order takes the form of a direct, participatory democracy, operating in a tier structure from the base village-level tier upward through the district and state levels to the national (and international) level.

Economic decentralization, to prevent massive concentrations of economic power in the hands of too few, and again, to distribute it in the hands of many. Therefore villages, which are anyway geographically

decentralized, become the basic economic units. However, where unavoidable, certain industries may be organized on a more centralized basis, and their ownership and control come under the umbrella of the State.

- The minimization of competition and exploitation in the economic sphere, and instead, the encouragement of cooperation.
- Production on the basis of need rather than greed, concentrating, where India is concerned, first on the eradication of poverty (and on the worst extreme of poverty).
- Recognition of the dignity of labour and the greater purity of rural life.
- The practice of extensive self-reliance by individuals, villages, regions and the nation.
- Absence of oppression on the basis of race, caste, class, language, gender or religion.

A deep respect for mother nature, necessitating an economic system based upon the preservation rather than destruction of the natural environment.

Such concepts clearly represent pillars for a new social order.

A theory closely linked to the concept of Sarvodaya, also developed by Gandhi, is that of Trusteeship. Its fundamental objective is to create nonviolent and non-exploitative property relationships. Gandhi believed that the concepts of possession and private property were sources of violence, and in contradiction with the Divine reality that all wealth belongs to all people. However, he recognized that the concept of ownership would not wither easily, nor would the wealthy be easily persuaded to share their wealth. Therefore a compromise was to encourage the wealthy to hold their wealth in trust, to use themselves only what was necessary and to allow the remainder to be utilized for the benefit of the whole society.

As already observed, Gandhi's thought is equally a philosophy of self-transformation. The individual's task is to make a sincere attempt to live according to the principles of truth and nonviolence. Its fundamental

tenets are therefore moral. They include - resisting injustice, developing a spirit of service, selflessness and sacrifice, emphasising one's responsibilities rather than rights, self-discipline, simplicity of life-style, and attempting to maintain truthful and nonviolent relations with others. It should be understood that by simplicity is meant voluntary simplicity, not poverty, which has no element of voluntarism in it. If there is one thing Gandhi does not stand for, it is poverty. A Gandhian should also avoid political office. He or she should remain aloof from formal party politics and equi-distant from all political groupings. But this is not to say, and in my view Gandhi does not require, that the individual should remain aloof from all politics. For often injustice cannot be resisted unless the political power holders and structures are engaged nonviolently. What was the freedom struggle itself if not a political struggle, against the greatest concentration of political power the world had ever known, the British Empire? In my eyes, there is no particular virtue in attempting to avoid contact with politics. What must be avoided, however, is assumption of political power by a Gandhian (at least this is necessary in the short and medium terms in India), and cooperation with un-virtuous holders of political power on their terms.

The ultimate responsibility of a Gandhian is to resist clear injustice, untruth, in conjunction with others or alone. Resistance should be nonviolent if at all possible. But Gandhi did condone use of violent means in certain circumstances, in preference to submission which he regarded as cowardice and equivalent to cooperation with evil. In relation to the use of violence he stated categorically: "Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence I would advise violence..." As surprising as it no doubt sounds, Gandhi disliked most not violence, but cowardice and apathy. The eminent peace researcher Johan Galtung has correctly observed that Gandhi preferred first, nonviolent resistance, second, violence in a just cause, and third, meaning least of all, apathy. In general, however, it is held that immoral means, such as violence, cannot produce moral ends, as means are themselves ends or ends in the making.

For the individual self-transformation is attempted with deliberateness rather than with haste. One should not seek to become a Mahatma overnight, because such attempts will surely fail, but to reform oneself over the whole of one's life, as far as one is capable. (Nor should there be any question of superficial imitation of Gandhi.) Gandhi viewed his own life as a process of development undertaken "one step at a time". He saw the need to continually "experiment with truth" (from which he derived the title of his autobiography) in whatever field, in order to come to see the truthful path. Though they were rooted in the highest idealism, the experiments were carried out on a very down-to-earth plane - India's moral, political and social needs as he saw them. Such an approach is available to all at all time. Gandhi believed his own moral and spiritual development to be far from complete at the time of his death. Despite the great heights he had attained, this was indeed true. He had not achieved perfection, as some of those who were close to him have testified.

The perception of what is the truthful path is largely a matter for the individual's reason and conscience, which therefore play key roles. The individual should subject each idea to the test of his or her own conscience and reason. Reason and rationality have enormous roles to play in the Gandhian way of thinking. This, I feel, is one of the major Western influences in Gandhi. If there is genuine, sincere disagreement, an idea can be discarded. However, once a principle is accepted a sincere attempt must be made to adhere to it. Ideally there should be harmony between thought, word and action. In this way the outer life becomes a true reflection of the inner, and a mental harmony is also achieved.

The remaining central concept in Gandhi's philosophy is Satyagraha. Defined most broadly (as Gandhi defined it), Satyagraha is itself a whole philosophy of nonviolence. Defined most narrowly, it is a technique or tool of nonviolent action. Because of the intention here to keep this discussion as simple as possible, Satyagraha will be described here in its latter guise. As a technique, Satyagraha was developed by Gandhi in South Africa to give the Indian population there a weapon with which to resist the injustices being perpetrated upon it by the colonial government. But Satyagraha can be practiced in any cultural environment - provided

the necessary ingredients are present, not least Satyagrahis (those capable of Satyagraha). A Satyagraha campaign is undertaken only after all other peaceful means have proven ineffective. At its heart is nonviolence. An attempt is made to convert, persuade or win over the opponent. It involves applying the forces of both reason and conscience simultaneously. While holding aloft the indisputable truth of his or her position, the Satyagrahi also engages in acts of voluntary self-suffering. Any violence inflicted by the opponent is accepted without retaliation. But precisely because there is no retaliation (which can make the opponent feel his violence is justified), the opponent can only become morally bankrupt if violence continues to be inflicted indefinitely.

Several methods can be applied in a Satyagraha campaign, primarily non-cooperation and fasting. The action is undertaken in the belief in the underlying goodness of the opponent, and in his or her ability to acknowledge the injustice of the action and to cease the injustice, or at least to compromise. Satyagraha in this sense is highly creative. It creates no enemies, hatred or lasting bitterness, but ultimately only mutual regard. After a successful campaign there is not the least hint of gloating, nor is there any desire to embarrass the opponent. The former opponent becomes a friend. There are no losers, only winners. A truthful Satyagraha campaign, though it demands courage, self-discipline and humility on the part of the Satyagrahi, brings to bear tremendous moral pressure on the opponent and can bring about remarkable transformations.

Two factors are absolutely crucial to understand. There can be no Satyagraha in a cause which is not indisputably just and truthful. Nor can there be any element of violence or bitterness in a Satyagraha campaign - it must be conducted in a spirit of genuine nonviolence. Any campaign which is insincere in its spirit of nonviolence, or is not undertaken in a clearly just cause is not Satyagraha as Gandhi meant it.

To sum up, Gandhian philosophy is not only simultaneously political, moral and religious, it is also traditional and modern, simple and complex. It embodies numerous Western influences to which Gandhi

was exposed, but being rooted in ancient Indian culture and harnessing eternal and universal moral and religious principles, there is much in it that is not at all new. This is why Gandhi could say: "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills." Gandhi was concerned even more with the spirit than with the form. If the spirit is consistent with truth and nonviolence, the truthful and nonviolent form will automatically result. Despite its anti-Westernism, many hold its outlook to be ultra-modern, in fact ahead of its time - even far ahead. Perhaps the philosophy is best seen as a harmonious blend of the traditional and modern. The multifaceted nature of Gandhi's thought also can easily lead to the view that it is extremely complex. Perhaps in one sense it is. One could easily write volumes in describing it! Yet Gandhi described much of his thoughts as mere commonsense. Dr. Diwakar sums up Gandhi's thoughts in a few words: "The four words, truth, nonviolence, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha and their significance constitute Gandhi and his teaching." These are indeed the four pillars of Gandhian thought.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Describe about Concept of Avatar- Contemporary.

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2. Discuss the concept by Gandhi

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9.4 AUROBINDO

Thus shall the earth open to divinity?

And common natures feel the wide uplift,

Illumine common acts with the Spirit's ray

And meet the deity in common things.

Nature shall live to manifest secret God,

The Spirit shall take up the human play,

This earthly life become the life divine.

SRI AUROBINDO (Savitri, Book 11, Canto 1, pp. 710-711)

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is rooted in Vedanta, but has a distinct tilt, a unique emphasis, and a significant extension. Vedanta is a spiritual philosophy, the three pillars of which are the Upanishads, the Gita, and the Brahm Sutras. A key feature of Vedanta is that the creation of the material universe was the result of a non-material Supreme Consciousness itself becoming the universe. In other words, the Creator did not create the creation; It became the creation. Thus, through the process of creation, the Creator became visible in a material form, or manifested itself. Hence all creation is the Creator (called God or the Divine) itself in a material form. As a corollary, it follows that the Divine is present in every bit of the creation.

For example, if a child takes a square piece of paper, folds it, and makes a boat out of it, we do not need any evidence to prove that the paper is present in every bit of the boat. Since the boat is nothing but the paper in another form, the paper has an all-pervasive presence throughout the boat. Similarly, the universe is nothing but the Divine in another form.

Therefore, the Divine has an all-pervasive presence throughout the universe. The universal presence of the Divine is what is called the Spirit, and the presence of the Divine in an individual is what is called the Soul. With this basic background, let us examine three highlights of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

A life-affirming tilt

The basic philosophy remaining the same, its implications for life can be diametrically opposite depending on the way we interpret it. *One interpretation* is that since the fundamental imperishable and constant Reality of all creation is the One Divine, the multiplicity, plurality and differentiation that characterize creation are an illusion. Although our ordinary life revolves around that illusion, the aim of life is to overcome that illusion. Therefore, we should treat this illusion with the contempt that it deserves, treat the illusion as an obstacle to the Realization of the One Reality that is truly real, and at best tolerate the illusion as a necessary evil till we shed the body and, hopefully, attain the bliss of liberation in heaven. This makes everlasting *moksha* (liberation) and escape from the cycle of birth and death the highest goal of life. This is a life-negating tilt, and its logical consequence is a dichotomy between worldly life and spiritual life. A select few go to the Himalayas or a cave and pursue the One that really matters; but the vast majority cannot afford such a luxury, and are therefore condemned to a worldly life full of suffering and injustice till death provides some respite. *Another interpretation* of Vedanta is that the world is not an illusion but a manifestation of the Divine. If the Divine is Real, its manifestation cannot be unreal. We cannot accept the invisible form of the Divine as Real, and reject Its visible form as unreal. That would be rejecting one aspect of the very Reality that we consider to be Imperishable. Although the visible form of the Divine is perishable, it is only the form that is perishable; the essence is Imperishable. Although the visible form is temporary, it is eternal in its recurrence. To give an analogy, the deeper reality of pots is clay, but while the pots exist, the pots are not unreal. They may break, and the clay we get from them may be recycled to give us new pots of a different shape, but that does not mean that the pots are

an illusion. Thus the world may be a temporary reality, not the Absolute Reality, but it is not unreal. Further, if the universe is real, and to take it as the entire reality is the result of ignorance, the aim of life should be to get rid of the ignorance so that we can see the world and worldly life as imperfect manifestations of the perfect Divine. That is possible only by engaging with the world with love and a feeling of oneness. As we overcome the ignorance, the world becomes a better place to live in. Thus the goal of life is to use worldly life as a vehicle for overcoming ignorance. Hence, the world and worldly life should not be rejected, but transformed to be worthy of the One that they manifest. This is an interpretation that affirms life, accepts life, and embraces life wholeheartedly. Through this interpretation, worldly life is enriched and moves towards its highest possibilities. It is this life-affirming tilt that Sri Aurobindo gave to Vedanta.

The emphasis on evolution

When the Supreme Consciousness chose to manifest as the material universe, it became matter, which seemed to know nothing and could apparently do nothing. What a great fall! The all-knowing, all-powerful assumed a form that was highly ignorant and powerless. Thus, creation was an act of gross self-limitation, which may be called involution. However, the Supreme Consciousness did not disappear by becoming matter; it only hid itself. Then began the process of expressing the Supreme Consciousness, bit by bit, through the process of evolution. First came life, which expressed the Consciousness of the Supreme a little better than matter. Then came the mind, which expressed it still better. Man is the latest product of the process of evolution. Man has, by far, the best developed mind. But even man expresses only a small fraction of the Supreme Consciousness. However, man is unique in being able to evolve in consciousness during life through its 'own efforts'. Self-realized seers and mystics express the Supreme Consciousness almost completely, but what enables them to express It is not a better developed mind but an element that is qualitatively different from the mind. These seers and mystics give a glimpse of what the next stage in

evolution will be like. The evolutionary perspective finds a very prominent place in Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy.

A futuristic extension

Sri Aurobindo has given the assurance that the next leap in evolution, which will introduce a principle higher than the mind (the supermind or the supramental) on a significant scale in the world, is round the corner. As a result, a consciousness significantly higher than the mental, which has been so far confined to a rare few will become the norm. Further, since man can evolve during its lifetime, if a sufficiently large number of human beings engage consciously in living a life that would lead to accelerated growth of consciousness, the average level of consciousness in the world would register a significant rise. Thus, man can collaborate with nature and thereby accelerate the process of evolution. A collective rise in consciousness of our planet is the goal of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. The practical implication of a rise in the average level of earth consciousness is that the affairs of the world would then be conducted from that higher plane of awareness. At that plane, the ego-driven ignorant consciousness that works on the basis of superficial differences and divisions is replaced by a knowledgeable consciousness that acts on the basis of the underlying oneness. That will be the ultimate solution to the problems of human existence such as evil, injustice and suffering. The highly optimistic futuristic extension of spiritual philosophy is Sri Aurobindo's unique contribution to Vedanta.

9.5 TAGORE

Tagore's religion based on the divinization of man and humanization of God. While explaining the meaning of humanization of God, he said 'Humanization of God does not merely mean that God is God of humanity but also it mean that it is the God in every human being. According to Tagore the essence of religion is humanity. It is this human aspect which forms the basis of religion. Tagore believed that humanity and divinity do not belong to two different orders. They are just like two

sides of the same coin. The aim of religion is to awaken the element of divinity that lie latent in man. To Tagore, religion should be always a uniting force but not a dividing force. True religion is that which accepts the unity of all people instead of their differences in religious faiths. True religion is inner development of the individual that makes a man to rise above his society, country and sect. True religion is the realization of one's own nature. Tagore never believed in any religious institution and religious practices whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Christianity. Tagore believed that organized religions that act as a barrier to communal harmony.

'For it is evident that my religion is a poet's religion, and neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian. Its touch comes to me through the unseen and trackless channel as does the inspiration of my songs. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life.

Somehow they are wedded to each other and, though their betrothal had a long period of ceremony, it was kept secret from me'. ~ Rabindranath Tagore in the chapter 'The Vision' in *The Religion of Man*.

'My religion is my life ~ it is growing with my growth ~it has never been grafted on me from outside.' ~ Tagore to Robert Bridges, 8 July 1914.

Religion is a part and parcel of our life, it is a unique dimension of human nature. Today's age is considered as the Age of Communication. We have seen science and technology making a mind-boggling progress. What was considered impossible about fifty years ago, has become a reality today due to the progress in science and technology. All the same, even in this age, people offer sacrifices to their Gods before setting out on an important work; they break coconut in order to lay the foundation stone to build a bridge. There have been incidents where people arranged frog marriages to please the rain gods and so on. All these are indications of the superstitious attitudes of the people of our nation. Very often these attitudes are equated with religion. Can religion be equated with our feelings and emotions? Does it satisfy the human longings? Is there a

universal 2 religion? Whatever be the answer, people have been fighting in our country today in the name of religion. As a growing child, I have witnessed what a religious conflict is. It was a Hindu-Christian conflict in the early 1980s at Nanesera in Simdega District, Jharkhand. Both the Christian and the Hindu crowds had gone into frenzy over a hillock, which had been a place of worship for the local Christian community for a long period. It is with pain and a heavy heart that I remember today how my villagers, both Hindus and Christians, got divided into two opposite camps and almost fought each other. However, it was the providence of God that the police were able to control the angry mobs. The conflict was resolved but the seed of enmity still remains in the local people.

Tagore does not believe in any borrowed religion. He calls his religion “a poet’s religion.” Religion, for him is the essence of human being. Tagore sees God behind the multiplicity which is a creative principle of unity. God cannot be grasped by reason and logic. This implies not only that the divine is immanent in creation but also that the creation itself is a manifestation of the divine. Human beings, for Tagore, are the fullest expressions of the divine. We are created in the image of God. God manifests Himself in the creation. Thus, Tagore sees a harmonious relationship among God, human being and nature. He holds that the world and its particulars are real because they are an expression of the divine.

Tagore sees the beauty of this universe in the harmonious relationship in the face of diversity. Communal disharmony and religious divisions are the results of our limited vision which does not penetrate into the harmonious relationship of the world, but settles for usefulness and efficiency. In order to lead a good life, we need to transcend our egoistic desire for gain in the love of the divine and its creation. The path to realisation of the divine includes creative activity and this creative activity for Tagore was his writing, painting, composing and educating. Thus, Tagore challenges us to discover the creative spirit within us so that we can be better religious and better people.

Tagore is considered as the soul of Bengal—the real rural Bengal. One must know about Tagore in order to know Bengal. Tagore had an indomitable love for God and people. He has written many soul-inspiring, God-oriented songs and poems. At a time when hatred, divisions and narrow-mindedness have plagued our country and the world, Rabindranath Tagore stands as a symbol of peace and universal fellowship. His religious fervour and insights could be the answer to our troubled world. My attempt to understand Tagore's vision of religion is to have a personal experience of God, to deepen my faith in God and thus grow as a religious person.

Tagore occupies a very high pedestal in our country. He received worldwide recognition for his *Gitanjali*, which won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Today, his name evokes in us a sense of wonder and pride. Today, no creative writer, living or dead, is ruling the minds of the people in Bengal more than Rabindranath Tagore. He is perhaps the only poet to whom two different countries owe their national anthems. It is from him that India received her national anthems as also Bangladesh.

9.5.1 The Influence of Other Religions

Tagore's religion is not a body of written doctrines or theological principles; rather it is something that is inseparable from one's core. He admits that he cannot define it, but he says that the aim of religion is neither idle tranquillity nor the enjoyment of languid beauty. Somehow his mind initially remained coldly aloof, absolutely uninfluenced by any religion whatsoever. When he was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to his life and passed away leaving in his memory a direct message of spiritual reality.

9.5.2 The Influence of the Upanishads

Tagore had been greatly touched by the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha and he has used them in his life as well as in his

preaching. He was born in a family which, at that time, was earnestly developing a monotheistic religion based upon the philosophy of the Upanishads. Tagore reproduces the idea of the immanence of God reflected in the Upanishads. Brahman is the Supreme Reality which makes itself manifest in and through the finite world. Tagore recognises the real spirit of the Upanishads. The Upanishadic seers sacrifice not material prosperity for the attainment of spiritual truth. In order to find him, one must embrace all. Tagore follows the Upanishadic understanding of Brahman: Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam (Truth, Knowledge, Infinity). He also discovers the Supreme Being in and through nature. Tagore says, “The first stage of any realisation was through my feeling of intimacy with nature.”

The concept of dualism of self has also been derived from the Upanishads: finite self in human beings who confines to the boundaries of human limitations and divine soul existing within them. The individual divine soul is the manifestation of “Jivan Devata.” What differentiates Tagore from the Upanishads is his three-fold conception of reality against the Upanishad’s advaitavada and dvaitavada. Tagore attaches equal importance to humanity, world and God. There is no doubt that he is influenced by the Upanishads, but he has a free integral and independent way of thinking. The Upanishads taught Tagore how human beings can transcend themselves and get a glimpse of the Infinite.

9.5.3 The Bhagavad-Gita

Tagore accepts that the meaning of our self cannot be found in its separateness from God and others, but in the ceaseless realisation of yoga, of union. He, therefore, accepts the three yogas of the Gita as effective ways of the realisation of the Supreme Being. As in the Gita, he gives importance to action. This is the karma yoga of the Gita, the way to be one with the infinite activity by the practice of disinterested goodness, i.e., nishkama karma. Tagore’s understanding of God can be traced to Gita’s Supreme Person, Purushothama, far above the level of an average person. Purushothama pervades this universe; He is the Iswara existing in the hearts of all beings, is within the world and beyond it. This

conception of Purushothma in the Gita is unique. The spiritual thoughts found in the Gita present love for God by human being and the love of God for human being. Purushothama is not separate from the world and human beings, is never absent from creation. God is the immanent spirit controlling and guiding everything in the universe. Tagore finds God existing in every form of life. Tagore discovers God within the life of human being. He says that we know God by realising Him in each and all. God manifests himself in human beings and all objects and thus realisation is possible within the soul and in nature. For Tagore, too, salvation consists in the integral divine perfection of the whole being of human being.

9.5.4 Vaishnavism

Whether there was any influence of Vaishnavism in Tagore's life is debatable since Vaishnavism neglects present life whereas Tagore gives immense value to human life and the world. A divine life on earth is the supreme condition for salvation. Tagore observes that Vaishnava religion has boldly declared that God has bound himself to human beings, and in that consists the greatest human existence. The possibility of transforming human love into divine love held by Tagore must have been derived from Vaishnavism. Vaishnavism taught Tagore the message of friendly union between God and human being. Vaishnavites view the world as real with its various colours and combination. They put emphasis on a firm organic relation between God and human being. God is everything and all actions of human being should be dedicated to Him. Tagore was fortunate to have got some lyrical poems of the poets of the Vaishnava sect. This made him aware of some underlying idea deep in the obvious meaning of those love songs. He knew that those poets were speaking about the Supreme Lover, whose touch one experiences in all his relations of love—the love of nature's beauty, of animal, the child, the comrade, the beloved, the love that illuminates his consciousness of reality.

9.5.5 Buddhism

What appealed to Tagore is the practical side of Buddha's teaching. Buddha preached the discipline of self-restraint and moral life; it is a complete acceptance of law. His teaching speaks of nirvana as the highest end. To understand its real character, one should know the path of its attainment, which is not merely through the negation of evil thoughts and deeds but through the elimination of all limits to love. For Tagore, the path Buddha pointed to was not merely the practice of self-abnegation, but a widening of love and therein lies the true meaning of Buddha's preaching. Tagore does not want to get into the controversy whether Buddhism accepts God or not. In *The Religion of Man* Tagore says, "Buddha's idea of the infinite is not the spirit of an unbounded cosmic activity, but the infinite whose meaning is in the position of ideal of goodness and love, which cannot be otherwise than human." The bond of unity in Buddhism is its friendship and the universal love preached by Buddha that has destroyed the barriers that separated human beings from other human beings. Thus, Buddhism also made a deep impact on Tagore because he saw in Buddhism what the role of love and compassion could be.

9.5.6 Christianity

Dr. Aronson, in his book, *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes*, says that Tagore seemed to be more Christian than the Christians. Tagore says, "Nobody has exalted man more in every sphere than Jesus. The divinity of man is stressed by Jesus as by Vaishnava saints." Tagore discovers a message of friendly union between God and human being in Christianity. He agrees that like other Indian religions, Christianity, too, proclaims the ideal of selflessness. If Tagore was attracted to Christian theism, it is because it conforms to the ideas which he has already absorbed from the Upanishads and for nothing else. Tagore was a unique, an oriental occidentalist.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

3. Discuss the concept by Aurobindo.

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4. What do you know about the understanding and philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore?

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5. Discuss the Buddhism and Christianity as per Tagore.

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9.6 LET US SUM UP

Avatar derives from a Sanskrit word meaning "descent," and when it first appeared in English in the late 18th century, it referred to the descent of a deity to the earth—typically, the incarnation in earthly form of Vishnu or another Hindu deity. It later came to refer to any incarnation in human form, and then to any embodiment (such as that of a concept or philosophy), whether or not in the form of a person. In the age of technology, avatar has developed another sense—it can now be used for the image that a person chooses as his or her "embodiment" in an electronic medium.

Tagore never had any training in philosophy. Neither did he claim himself to be a philosopher. He only asserted that he is a poet and an artist. Can we, therefore, regard a poet or an artist as a philosopher? If we do, in what sense? A philosopher tries to explain the basic concepts, assumptions which is known as formulation and clarification of concepts. Philosophers have always asked questions concerning the worth, validity and justification of whatever they are considering. If we take this to be the meaning of philosophy, Tagore cannot be classified as a philosopher because his concern has not been to clarify, formulate any concepts. He, however, deliberates on what a poet should do and what he ought not to do. Tagore thought that a poet should not borrow his medium ready-made from some shop of orthodox respectability. He should have his own seeds and prepare his own soil. Tagore is for freedom and independence of whatever activity humans engage them.

9.7 KEY WORDS

Avatar: Avatar is a term used in Hinduism for a material manifestation of a deity.

Philosopher: A philosopher is someone who practices philosophy. The term "philosopher" comes from the Ancient Greek, φιλόσοφος, meaning "lover of wisdom". The coining of the term has been attributed to the Greek thinker Pythagoras.

Religion: Religion is a social-cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements.

9.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

6. Describe about Concept of Avatar- Contemporary
7. Discuss the concept by Gandhi
8. Discuss the concept by Aurobindo
9. What do you know about the understanding and philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore?

9.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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9.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 9.2
2. See Section 9.3

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 9.4
2. See Section 9.5
3. See Sub Section 9.5.5 and 9.5.6

UNIT 10: THE CONCEPT OF PRAYER – CLASSICAL (ADVAITA VEDANTA, BHAGAVATAGITA ETC.) AND CONTEMPORARY (GANDHI, VIVEKANANDA, AUROBINDO)

STRUCTURE

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Concept of Prayer – Classical
- 10.3 Advaita Vedanta
- 10.4 Bhagavat Gita
- 10.5 Concept of Prayer – Contemporary
- 10.6 Gandhi
- 10.7 Aurobindo
- 10.8 Vivekananda
- 10.9 Let us sum up
- 10.10 Key Words
- 10.11 Questions for Review
- 10.12 Suggested readings and references
- 10.13 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

After finishing up this unit we can able to understand:

- To know the Concept of Prayer – Classical as per Advaita Vedanta, Bhagavat Gita
- To understand the Concept of Prayer – Contemporary as per Gandhi, Aurobindo and Vivekananda.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Prayer is an invocation or act that seeks to activate a rapport with an object of worship through deliberate communication. In the narrow

sense, the term refers to an act of supplication or intercession directed towards a deity (a god), or a deified ancestor. More generally, prayer can also have the purpose of thanksgiving or praise, and in comparative religion is closely associated with more abstract forms of meditation and with charms or spells.

Prayer can take a variety of forms: it can be part of a set liturgy or ritual, and it can be performed alone or in groups. Prayer may take the form of a hymn, incantation, formal credal statement, or a spontaneous utterance in the praying person.

The act of prayer is attested in written sources as early as 5000 years ago. Today, most major religions involve prayer in one way or another; some ritualize the act, requiring a strict sequence of actions or placing a restriction on who is permitted to pray, while others teach that prayer may be practised spontaneously by anyone at any time.

Scientific studies regarding the use of prayer have mostly concentrated on its effect on the healing of sick or injured people. The efficacy of prayer in faith healing has been evaluated in numerous studies, with contradictory results.

10.2 CONCEPT OF PRAYER – CLASSICAL

Various spiritual traditions offer a wide variety of devotional acts. There are morning and evening prayers, graces said over meals, and reverent physical gestures. Some Christians bow their heads and fold their hands. Some Native Americans regard dancing as a form of prayer. Some Sufis whirl. Hindus chant mantras. Jewish prayer may involve swaying back and forth and bowing. Muslims practice salat (kneeling and prostration) in their prayers. Quakers keep silent. Some pray according to standardized rituals and liturgies, while others prefer extemporaneous prayers. Still others combine the two.

Friedrich Heiler is often cited in Christian circles for his systematic Typology of Prayer which lists six types of prayer: primitive, ritual, Greek cultural, philosophical, mystical, and prophetic. Some forms of prayer require a prior ritualistic form of cleansing or purification such as in ghusl and wudhu.

Prayer may be done privately and individually, or it may be done corporately in the presence of fellow believers. Prayer can be incorporated into a daily "thought life", in which one is in constant communication with a god. Some people pray throughout all that is happening during the day and seek guidance as the day progresses. This is actually regarded as a requirement in several Christian denominations, although enforcement is neither possible nor desirable. There can be many different answers to prayer, just as there are many ways to interpret an answer to a question, if there in fact comes an answer. Some may experience audible, physical, or mental epiphanies. If indeed an answer comes, the time and place it comes is considered random. Some outward acts that sometimes accompany prayer are: anointing with oil; ringing a bell; burning incense or paper; lighting a candle or candles; See, for example, facing a specific direction (i.e. towards Mecca or the East); making the sign of the cross. One less noticeable act related to prayer is fasting.

A variety of body postures may be assumed, often with specific meaning (mainly respect or adoration) associated with them: standing; sitting; kneeling; prostrate on the floor; eyes opened; eyes closed; hands folded or clasped; hands upraised; holding hands with others; a laying on of hands and others. Prayers may be recited from memory, read from a book of prayers, or composed spontaneously as they are prayed. They may be said, chanted, or sung. They may be with musical accompaniment or not. There may be a time of outward silence while prayers are offered mentally. Often, there are prayers to fit specific occasions, such as the blessing of a meal, the birth or death of a loved one, other significant events in the life of a believer, or days of the year that have special religious significance.

Anthropologically, the concept of prayer is closely related to that of surrender and supplication. The traditional posture of prayer in medieval Europe is kneeling or supine with clasped hands, in antiquity more typically with raised hands. The early Christian prayer posture was standing, looking up to heaven, with outspread arms and bare head. This is the pre-Christian, pagan prayer posture (except for the bare head, which was prescribed for males in Corinthians 11:4, in Roman paganism, the head had to be covered in prayer). Certain Cretan and Cypriote figures of the Late Bronze Age, with arms raised, have been interpreted as worshippers. Their posture is similar to the "flight" posture, a crouching posture with raised hands, observed in schizophrenic patients and related to the universal "hands up" gesture of surrender. The kneeling posture with clasped hands appears to have been introduced only with the beginning high medieval period, presumably adopted from a gesture of feudal homage.

Although prayer in its literal sense is not used in animism, communication with the spirit world is vital to the animist way of life. This is usually accomplished through a shaman who, through a trance, gains access to the spirit world and then shows the spirits' thoughts to the people. Other ways to receive messages from the spirits include using astrology or contemplating fortune tellers and healers.

Some of the oldest extant literature, such as the Sumerian temple hymns of Enheduanna (c. 23rd century BC) are liturgy addressed to deities and thus technically "prayer". The Egyptian Pyramid Texts of about the same period similarly contain spells or incantations addressed to the gods. In the loosest sense, in the form of magical thinking combined with animism, prayer has been argued as representing a human cultural universal, which would have been present since the emergence of behavioral modernity, by anthropologists such as Sir Edward Burnett Tylor and Sir James George Frazer.

Reliable records are available for the polytheistic religions of the Iron Age, most notably Ancient Greek religion (which strongly influenced Roman religion). These religious traditions were direct developments of

the earlier Bronze Age religions. Ceremonial prayer was highly formulaic and ritualized.

In ancient polytheism, ancestor worship is indistinguishable from theistic worship (see also Euhemerism). Vestiges of ancestor worship persist, to a greater or lesser extent, in modern religious traditions throughout the world, most notably in Japanese Shinto and in Chinese folk religion. The practices involved in Shinto prayer are heavily influenced by Buddhism; Japanese Buddhism has also been strongly influenced by Shinto in turn. Shinto prayers quite frequently consist of wishes or favors asked of the kami, rather than lengthy praises or devotions. The practice of votive offering is also universal, and is attested at least since the Bronze Age. In Shinto, this takes the form of a small wooden tablet, called an ema.

Prayers in Etruscan were used in the Roman world by augurs and other oracles long after Etruscan became a dead language. The Carmen Arvale and the Carmen Saliare are two specimens of partially preserved prayers that seem to have been unintelligible to their scribes, and whose language is full of archaisms and difficult passages.

Roman prayers and sacrifices were often envisioned as legal bargains between deity and worshipper. The Roman principle was expressed as *do ut des*: "I give, so that you may give." Cato the Elder's treatise on agriculture contains many examples of preserved traditional prayers; in one, a farmer addresses the unknown deity of a possibly sacred grove, and sacrifices a pig in order to placate the god or goddess of the place and beseech his or her permission to cut down some trees from the grove.

The valkyrie Sigrdrífa says a pagan Norse prayer in *Sigrdrífumál*;
Illustration by Arthur Rackham

Celtic, Germanic and Slavic religions are recorded much later, and much more fragmentarily, than the religions of classical antiquity. They nevertheless show substantial parallels to the better-attested religions of the Iron Age. In the case of Germanic religion, the practice of prayer is reliably attested, but no actual liturgy is recorded from the early (Roman

era) period. An Old Norse prayer is on record in the form of a dramatization in skaldic poetry. This prayer is recorded in stanzas 2 and 3 of the poem *Sigrdrífumál*, compiled in the 13th century Poetic Edda from earlier traditional sources, where the valkyrie *Sigrdrífa* prays to the gods and the earth after being woken by the hero *Sigurd*. A prayer to *Odin* is mentioned in chapter 2 of the *Völsunga saga* where King *Rerir* prays for a child. In stanza 9 of the poem *Oddrúnargrátr*, a prayer is made to "kind wights, *Frigg* and *Freyja*, and many gods. In chapter 21 of *Jómsvíkinga saga*, wishing to turn the tide of the Battle of *Hjörungavágr*, *Haakon Sigurdsson* eventually finds his prayers answered by the goddesses *Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr* and *Irpa*. Folk religion in the medieval period produced syncretisms between pre-Christian and Christian traditions. An example is the 11th-century Anglo-Saxon charm *Æcerbot* for the fertility of crops and land, or the medical *Wið færstice*. The 8th-century *Wessobrunn Prayer* has been proposed as a Christianized pagan prayer and compared to the pagan *Völuspá* and the *Merseburg Incantations*, the latter recorded in the 9th or 10th century but of much older traditional origins.

10.3 ADVAITA VEDANTA

Advaita Vedanta refers to the non-dualistic school of Hindu philosophy, which is derived mostly from the *Upanishads* and elaborated in detail by eminent scholars like *Gaudapada* and *Sri Adishankaracharya*. *Dvaita* means duality, and *Advaita* means nonduality. In simple terms, *Advaita* means absence of the duality between subject and object. In our wakeful consciousness we experience duality, but in deep sleep only nonduality.

Advaita School believes that *Brahman* is the one and only reality and everything else is a mere appearance, projection, formation or illusion. One of the most common examples used to describe the state is momentarily seeing a snake in a rope when it is lying in the darkness. The snake is an illusion, and the rope is the reality. In the same manner the world appears in the mind as a formation over the Self.

The school also believes that Atman, the individual self, has no separate existence of its own. It is but a projection or reflection of Brahman only in each being. A jiva is deluded soul by egoism, desires, and other impurities and thereby experiences duality and separation. Because of it each being is bound to the cycle of births and deaths and the laws of karma as long and remains so until liberation is achieved.

Brahman is real, but the world in which we live is a mere illusion, like a mirage. It appears in our consciousness because of the activity of the mind and the senses. Since we totally depend upon them, we do not perceive Brahman, the ultimate reality, who is hidden in all. When they are fully withdrawn and made silent through detachment, purity and renunciation, one can see the Supreme Self hidden in all and attain liberation.

Advaita Vedanta believes that an enlightened guru, having the knowledge of both the scriptures and Brahman, is indispensable for anyone seeking salvation. Mandukya Karika of Gaudapada is considered to be the first available treatise on Advaita Vedanta, while the monumental works of Shankaracharya constitute its core literature. Successive generations of scholars enriched the school of Advaita through their teachings and scholarly works. Advaita school also forms part of Vaishnavism, Saivism and Shaktism under different names.

A few important concepts of Advaita Vedanta are presented below.

Sadhana Chatushtayam

Sadhana Chatushtayam means the tetrad which are imperative for spiritual practice and liberation. The following four sets of qualifications are considered essential to achieve salvation, which each aspirant is expected to cultivate.

Nityanitya vastu viveka: The ability to discriminate between what is eternal (nitya) and what is temporary (anitya). The absence of it is responsible for the delusion.

Ihamutrartha phala bhoga viraga: Disinterestedness in enjoying the fruit of one's actions and sense objects here and here after. This will arrest the continuation and formation of karma.

Sama adi satka sampatti: Qualities such as sama (control of internal sense organs), dama (control of external sense organs), uparati (abstinence), titiksha (quietness), sraddha (sincerity and faith) and samadhana. They are important for self-transformation and the predominance of sattva, without which one cannot be free from the triple impurities of egoism, attachments and delusion.

Mumukhatva: Intense aspiration for salvation. It arises mainly due to the good works (karma) in the past. According to the Bhagavadgita only after repeated births a person feels a strong drive to achieve salvation and turns to the path of salvation.

Pramanas

They are the standards of ascertaining right knowledge, truth, or valid knowledge. In this world duality it is very difficult to know which right knowledge is and which is reliable for salvation or to ascertain truth. Advaita Vedanta recognizes six Pramanas, of which three were proposed by Shankaracharya and three by his followers.

10.4 BHAGAVAT GITA

The Bhagavadgita is a spiritual discourse delivered by Lord Krishna in the middle of the battlefield. It contains 18 chapters, which deal with a variety of subjects such as the nature of the self, the need to restrain the mind and the senses, withdrawing them from the sense objects through the practice of yoga, performing desireless actions, the vision of the Universal Self, the qualities of Nature, incarnation of God and reincarnation of individual souls, devotion to God, liberation and so on.

The various topics discussed in the scripture can be grouped under four main headings: the individual self, God or the Universal Self, the

relationship between the two and liberation of the individual self. The Bhagavadgita encourages us to perform our obligatory duties as a sacrificial offering to God and not to turn our back upon them. It explains how delusion arises and how we become bound to our present conditions, suggesting the various alternatives that are available to us to escape from them.

The main paths

Although on a superficial note the Bhagavadgita seems to favor the path of devotion, a careful student of the scripture cannot ignore its obvious connection with the other paths described in it such as jnanayoga (the path of knowledge), karmayoga (the path of action) and karma sanyasa yoga (the path of renunciation of attachment to the fruit of our actions).

Jnanayoga is the first stage. Every student engaged in the religious studies is a practitioner of this path. On this path a person acquires the knowledge of the inner self through study and contemplation and becomes aware of the importance of realizing his true self and achieving salvation.

After a person spends time acquiring the knowledge of the scriptures, he should turn to karma yoga to discharge his responsibilities towards himself, his family and society by performing his obligatory duties in deference to his dharma and as a sacrificial offering to God.

The culmination of the practice of karmayoga is karma sanyasa yoga in which the seeker realizes either because of the knowledge he has already gained or through experience that it is not actions but attachment to the results of his actions which is responsible for his bondage. So he begins to perform his actions without desire and attachment, renouncing the sense of doer-ship and offers the fruit of his actions to God.

When a seeker practises these different types of yoga for a considerable time, he develops sattva or purity and divine qualities which are enumerated in the Bhagavadgita. With these refinements in his lower self

or the outer consciousness, he eventually comes to the fourth and the final stage, which make him fit for the practice of bhakti yoga, or the yoga of devotion. In this stage he experiences intense devotion and unconditional love for God. He surrenders to God completely and spends his time in His service and contemplation. His mind and senses become fixed on the thoughts of God. He sees Him everywhere and in himself and experience oneness with Him.

Having developed distaste for the things of the world, he withdraws mentally from the distractions of the external world and contemplates upon God. As his mind is now totally occupied with the thoughts of God, he lives in the constant pain of not being able to find Him. When his devotion reaches its crescendo, God reciprocates with abundant love, just as He promised in the Bhagavadgita, and releases Him from the bonds of mortal life forever.

A holistic teaching of duty, discipline and devotion

Thus we can see that the Bhagavadgita is not just about bhakti yoga but a holistic spiritual effort which demands from people physical and mental purity, self-control, performance of duty, renunciation and devotion to God for their liberation. We learn from it that while bhakti yoga is the most direct solution to achieve liberation its true practice is possible only for those who have progressed on the path of salvation through their previous effort.

True devotion in which all sense of egoism becomes dissolved and only the thought of God remains is a product of years of practice and self-discipline. It is possible only for those who are able to restrain their senses, stabilize their minds, cultivate purity and perform their obligatory duties in the society and their families.

Only those whose hearts and minds are infused with the love of God can practise true devotion. Where there is love for one's self, there is truly not much love left for God. Where there is a consideration for the self, devotion to God is just an excuse for furthering that self. Therefore,

people who claim they to be devotees of God should search their hearts and minds to see how their egos are still active and seeking.

If you are still in love with yourself, will it be possible for you to love God unconditionally all the time? This question, we must all ask ourselves to see whether we are qualified enough to be considered the true devotees of God. The fact becomes obvious when we study the Bhagavadgita from a wider perspective and begin to connect the various seemingly divergent approaches and practices discussed by it into one broad based solution.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the Concept of Prayer – Classical thought.

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2. What has been discussing in Advaita Vedanta?

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3. Discuss the concept of Prayers according to Bhagavat Gita.

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10.5 CONCEPT OF PRAYER – CONTEMPORARY

Many contemporary philosophers assume that, before one can discuss prayer, the question of whether there is a God or not must be settled. In

this title, first published in 1965, D. Z. Phillips argues that to understand prayer is to understand what is meant by the reality of God. Beginning by placing the problem of prayer within a philosophical context, Phillips goes on to discuss such topics as prayer and the concept of talking, prayer and dependence, superstition and the concept of community. This is a fascinating reissue that will be of particular value to students with an interest in the philosophy of religion, prayer and religious studies more generally.

Now we may come to the first lesson of prayer—the meaning of prayer. May I ask you, brothers and sisters, what is prayer? What is prayer all about? What is the meaning of prayer? Many people, upon hearing the term prayer, immediately think that it means man coming before God to make supplication. Because man is in want and needs material supply, or is sick and needs healing, or has other problems and needs some solution, he goes before God asking Him to supply his needs, heal his sickness, and solve his problems. Men consider these as prayers. Apparently, there are examples of such prayers in the Bible. For example, the widow in Luke continually went to the judge asking him to avenge her of her grievance. However, brothers and sisters, please remember that this is not the proper meaning of prayer as it is revealed in the Bible. We dare not say that such a definition is wrong, but it is too superficial and lacks both depth and accuracy. If we desire to know what real prayer is today, we must clearly realize that it is not man merely making supplications before God for his own needs.

We know that we should not judge any truth of the Bible merely on the basis of a single passage or aspect. In the same way, you cannot tell what a house looks like simply by one of its corners or rooms. You need to view it from various sides as a whole, and then you will be able to make an accurate judgment. In the same principle, if we collect all the Bible passages concerning prayer and view them as a whole, we will see that prayer is not just a matter of man making supplication to God because he has some needs. This may be partially the meaning of prayer but not entirely. If we have the time, we should gather all the specific examples of prayer in the Bible. For example, in the Old Testament there are the

prayers of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Nehemiah, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, and others, while in the New Testament there are the prayers of the Lord Jesus and of the disciples. If we study every one of these prayers and look at them as a composite, we will be able to see clearly what prayer is all about. It is not the intention of this writing to study them in such a detailed way; we will only use a simple word to speak concerning the meaning of prayer.

Prayer is not just man contacting God; it is the mutual contact between man and God. This matter of the contact between God and man is a very great subject in the Bible. We have often said that the purpose of man's living is to be God's vessel. In the universe God is man's content and man is God's container. Without man, God has no place to put Himself—He becomes a homeless God. I do not understand why this is so, but I know that it is a fact. In the universe God's greatest need is man. God as an entity in Himself is complete, but as far as His operation in the universe is concerned, He still needs man to fulfill that operation.

By this you can understand the last sentence of Ephesians 1, which says that the church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of Christ. The term fullness is very hard to translate. It not only denotes the fullness of Christ, but also implies the completeness of Christ. Hence, the church is, on the one hand, the fullness of Christ, and on the other hand, the completeness of Christ. In other words, without the church it seems that Christ is not at all complete.

We all must be very careful in understanding this word, for it can stir up vehement arguments in theology. I do not mean that God is incomplete and that He needs man to make Him complete. What I mean is that God in Himself is perfectly complete, but without man He is not complete in the universe according to His plan. Oh, brothers and sisters, this matter is too glorious.

In His eternal plan, God has ordained man to be His vessel, or, in other words, to be His completion. Hence, Genesis chapters one and two show us that when God created man He made two preparations concerning

man. The first preparation was that He created man in His image and according to His likeness. As man was created according to God, he resembles God in many aspects. The various aspects of man's expression such as his pleasure, anger, sorrow, joy, preference, choice, etc.—whether it be his emotion, will, or disposition—express God to a certain degree and are miniatures of all that is in God.

Another preparation was that God created for man a spirit in the depths of his being. Of the countless varieties of living things in the universe, only man has a spirit. The angels are spirits, but that is a different matter. In the whole creation there is one kind of created being that is not spirit yet has a spirit, and that is man. Why did God create a spirit for man in the depths of his being? We all know it was because God wants man to receive Him, Who is Spirit. In the same way He created a stomach for man because He wants man to take in food. Consider this: suppose God did not create a stomach for man—how could we take in food? Because we have a stomach, we can receive food into us, enjoy it, digest it, and assimilate it into our being, making it our constituent. In the same manner, since we have a spirit within us, we can receive God into us and assimilate Him, making Him our very constituent.

When God created man to be His vessel, He made these two steps of preparation: one step was to create man to be like Him, and the other was to put a spirit within man that man might receive Him. After He had made these two preparations He placed Himself before man in the form of the tree of life in order that man might receive Him and obtain Him as life. Brothers and sisters, it is in man's spirit that the contact between God and man is made. Once there is such a contact between God and man, God enters into man to be his content, and man becomes God's vessel to express Him outwardly. Thus God's eternal intention is fulfilled in man.

Please remember, a real prayer is the mutual contact between God and man. Prayer is not just man contacting God, but also God contacting man. If in prayer man does not touch or contact God, and God does not touch or contact man, that prayer is below the proper standard. Every

prayer that is up to the standard is one which is a mutual flow and contact between God and man. God and man are just like electric currents flowing into one another. It is hard for you to say that prayer is solely God in man or solely man in God. According to the fact and experience, prayer is the flowing between God and man. Every prayer that is truly up to the standard surely will have a condition of mutual flowing between God and man so that man may actually touch God and God may actually touch man; thus, man is united with God and God with man. Therefore, the highest and most accurate meaning of prayer is that it is the mutual contact between God and man.

10.6 GANDHI

MEANING OF AND NECESSITY FOR PRAYER

- Prayer is nothing else but an intense longing of the heart. You may express yourself through the lips; you may express yourself in the private closet or in the public; but to be genuine, the expression must come from the deepest recesses of the heart.
- There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim to the powers of darkness.
- Begin, therefore, your day with prayer, and make it so soulful that it may remain with you until the evening. Close the day with prayer so that you may have a peaceful night free from dreams and nightmares.

I am glad that you all want me to speak to you on the meaning of and the necessity for prayer. I believe that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and, therefore, prayer must be the very core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion. There are some who in the egotism of their reason declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes but that he has no nose. Whether by reason, or by instinct, or by superstition, man acknowledges some sort of

relationship with the divine. The rankest agnostic or atheist does acknowledge the need of a moral principle, and associates something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance. Bradlaugh, whose atheism is well known, always insisted on proclaiming his innermost conviction. He had to suffer a lot for thus speaking the truth, but he delighted in it and said that truth is its own reward. Not that he was quite insensible to the joy resulting from the observance of truth. This joy, however, is not at all worldly, but springs out of communion with the divine. That is why I have said that even a man who disowns religion cannot and does not live without religion. Now I come to the next thing, viz., that prayer is the very core of man's life, as it is the most vital part of religion. Prayer is either petitional or in its wider sense is inward communion. In either case the ultimate result is the same. Even when it is petitional, the petition should be for the cleansing and purification of the soul, for freeing it from the layers of ignorance and darkness that envelop it. He, therefore, who hungers for the awakening of the divine in him must fall back on prayer. But prayer is no mere exercise of words or of the ears, it is no mere repetition of empty formula. Any amount of repetition of Ramanama is futile if it fails to stir the soul. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. It must be in clear response to the spirit which hungers for it. And even as a hungry man relishes a hearty meal, a hungry soul will relish a heart-felt prayer. And I am giving you a bit of my experience. And that of my companions when I say that he who has experienced the magic of prayer may do without food for days together but not a single moment without prayer. For without prayer there is no inward peace. If that is the case, someone will say, we should be offering our prayers every minute of our lives. There is no doubt about it, but we, erring mortals, who find it difficult to retire within ourselves for inward communion even for a single moment, will find it impossible to remain perpetually in communion with the divine. We, therefore, fix some hours when we make a serious effort to throw off the attachments of the world for a while; we make a serious endeavour to remain, so to say, out of the flesh. You have heard Surdas' hymn. It is the passionate cry of a soul hungering for union with the divine. According to our standards he was a saint, but according to his own he was a proclaimed sinner. Spiritually he

was miles ahead of us, but he felt the separation from the divine so keenly that he has uttered that anguished cry in loathing and despair. I have talked of the necessity for prayer, and there through I have dealt with the essence of prayer. We are born to serve our fellowmen, and we cannot properly do so unless we are wide awake. There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and he who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim to the powers of darkness. The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world, the man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable. Apart therefore from its bearing on man's condition after death, prayer has incalculable value for man in this world of the living. Prayer is the only means of bringing about orderliness and peace and repose in our daily acts. We inmates of the Ashram who came here in search of truth and for insistence on truth professed to believe in the efficacy of prayers, but had never up to now made it a matter of vital concern. We did not bestow on it the care that we did on other matters. I woke from my slumbers one day and realized that I had been woefully negligent of my duty in the matter. I have, therefore, suggested measures of stern discipline and far from being any the worse, I hope we are the better for it. (From "A Discourse on Prayer " by M.D.)

PRAYER IS NECESSARY FOR ALL

(From a Letter) In my opinion all selfless service leads to self-purification. Economic and moral development should go hand in hand. Atma is that which animates the body. Realization comes through purification. Prayer is necessary for all, if food is. Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. 2 (Gujarati Edn., 1949), p. 114

10.7 AUROBINDO

We are not here to do (only a little better) what the others do. We are here to do what the others cannot do because they do not have the idea that it can be done.

We are here to open the way of the Future to children who belong to the Future.

Make of us, the hero warriors we aspire to become. May we fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be born against the past, which seeks to endure; so that the new things may manifest and we are ready to receive them.

(The Mother On Education, Page 112, 6 January 1952)

Foresight

To foresee destiny! How many have attempted it, how many systems have been elaborated how many sciences of divination have been created and developed only to perish under the charge of charlatanism or superstition. And why is destiny always so unforeseeable? Since it has been proved that everything is ineluctably determined, how is it that one cannot succeed in knowing this determinism with any certainty?

Here again the solution is to be found in Yoga. And by yogic discipline one can not only foresee destiny but modify it and change it almost totally. First of all, Yoga teaches us that we are not a single being, a simple entity which necessarily has a single destiny that is simple and logical. Rather we have to acknowledge that the destiny of most men is complex, often to the point of incoherence. Is it not this very complexity which gives us the impression of unexpectedness, of indeterminacy and consequently of unpredictability?

To solve the problem one must know that, to begin with, all living creatures, and more especially human beings, are made up of a combination of several entities that come together, interpenetrate, sometimes organizing themselves and completing each other, sometimes opposing and contradicting one another. Each one of these beings or states of being belongs to a world of its own and carries within it its own

destiny, its own determinism. And it is the combination of all these determinisms, which is sometimes very heterogeneous, that results in the destiny of the individual. But as the organization and relationship of all these entities can be altered by personal discipline and effort of will, as these various determinisms act on each other in different ways according to the concentration of the consciousness, their combination is nearly always variable and therefore unforeseeable.

For example, the physical or material destiny of a being comes from his paternal and maternal forebears, from the physical conditions and circumstances in which he is born; one should be able to foresee the events of his physical life, his state of health and approximately how long his body will last. But then there comes into play the formation of his vital being (the being of desires and passions, but also of impulsive energy and active will) which brings with it its own destiny. This destiny affects the physical destiny and can alter it completely and often even change it for the worse. For example, if a man born with a very good physical balance, who ought to live in very good health, is driven by his vital to all kinds of excesses, bad habits and even vices, he can in this way partly destroy his good physical destiny and lose the harmony of health and strength which would have been his but for this unfortunate interference. This is only one example. But the problem is much more complex, for, to the physical and vital destinies there must be added the mental destiny, the psychic destiny, and many others besides.

In fact, the higher a being stands on the human scale, the more complex is his being, the more numerous are his destinies and the more unforeseeable his fate seems to be as a consequence. This is however only an appearance. The knowledge of these various states of being and their corresponding inner worlds gives at the same time the capacity to discern the various destinies, their interpenetration and their combined or dominant action. Higher destinies are quite obviously the closest to the central truth of the universe, and if they are allowed to intervene, their action is necessarily beneficent. The art of living would then consist in maintaining oneself in one's highest state of consciousness and thus allowing one's highest destiny to dominate the others in life and action.

So one can say without any fear of making a mistake: be always at the summit of your consciousness and the best will always happen to you. But that is a maximum which is not easy to reach. If this ideal condition turns out to be unrealizable, the individual can at least, when he is confronted by a danger or a critical situation, call upon his highest destiny by aspiration, prayer and trustful surrender to the divine will. Then, in proportion to the sincerity of his call, this higher destiny intervenes favorably in the normal destiny of the being and changes the course of events insofar as they concern him personally. It is events of this kind that appear to the outer consciousness as miracles, as divine interventions.

A Dream

There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment. In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organize; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organization not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities. Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position. For in this ideal place

money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's Subsistence and sphere of action. In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.

The earth is certainly not ready to realize such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess sufficient knowledge to understand and adopt neither it nor the conscious force that is indispensable in order to execute it; that is why I call it a dream.

And yet this dream is in the course of becoming a reality; that is what we are striving for in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, on a very small scale, in proportion to our limited means. The realization is certainly far from perfect, but it is progressive; little by little we are advancing towards our goal which we hope we may one day be able to present to the world as a practical and effective way to emerge from the present chaos, to be born into a new life that is more harmonious and true.

Bulletin, August 1954

10.8 VIVEKANANDA

"Thou art He that berth the burdens of the universe; help me to bear the little burden of this life."

Extract from a prayer Swami Vivekananda delivered at the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions September 1893.

"At the head of all these laws, in and through every particle of matter and force, stands One through whose command the wind blows, the fire

burns, the clouds rain, and death stalks upon the earth. And what is His nature? He is everywhere the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All Merciful. Thou art our Father. Thou art our beloved Friend."

Extract from a prayer Swami Vivekananda delivered at the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions September 1893.

ON RAMAKRISHNA

"And so to Thou—Ramakrishna... I betake myself. For in Thy Feet alone is the refuge of man." ...

a prayer Vivekananda uttered in Nivedita's presence...

TWO PRAYERS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

At Ridgely Manor in November, 1899, Sister Nivedita heard Swami Vivekananda say these two prayers.

She was to write of them to Josephine MacLeod.

1

That Mother who is manifest in all beings—Her we salute.
She whom the world declares to be the great Maya. Her we salute.
Thou Giver of all Blessings, Thou the Giver of Strength,
Thou the Giver of Desires, Thou the Merciful One,
To Thee our salutation, Thee we salute Thee we salute,
Thou terrible black night—Thou the night of Delusion,
Thou the night of Death.
To Thee our salutation—Thee we salute, Thee we salute.

2

The breeze is making for righteousness. The seas are showering blessings on us— Our Father in Heaven is blissful, The trees in the forest

are blissful, so are the cattle. The very dust of the earth is luminous with bliss-It is all bliss,—all bliss—all bliss.

Pray, "Take us by the hand as a father takes his sons and leave us not."

Pray, "I do not want wealth or beauty, this world or another, but Thee, O God! Lord! I have become weary. Oh, take me by the hand, Lord, I take shelter with Thee. Make me Thy servant. Be Thou my refuge."

Pray, "Thou our Father, our Mother, our dearest Friend! Thou who bearest this universe, help us to bear the little burden of this our life. Leave us not. Let us never be separated from Thee. Let us always dwell in Thee."

Thou art Our Father, our Mother, our dear Friend. Thou bearest the burden of the world. Help us to bear the burden of our lives. Thou art our Friend, our Lover, our Husband, Thou art ourselves!

(Notes from a lecture On Jnana Yoga)

Constantly tell yourself, 'I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am not the thought, I am not even consciousness; I am the Atman.' When you can throw away all, only true Self will remain."

Through all the evils under the sun, say: 'My God, my Love! Thou art here, I see Thee. Thou art with me, I feel Thee. I am Thine, take me. I am not the world's but Thine —leave Thou not me.'

From a letter written from Greenacre July 1894

Blessed be Thy name, O Lord! And Thy will be done. Lord, we know that we are to submit; Lord, we know that it is the Mother's hand that is striking, and "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." There is. Father of Love, an agony at the heart which is fighting against that calm resignation which Thou teaches". Give us strength, O Thou who sawest Thy whole family destroyed before Thine eyes, with Thine hands crossed

on Thy breast. Come, Lord, Thou Great Teacher, who has taught us that the soldier is only to obey and speak not. Come, Lord, come Arjuna's Charioteer, and teach me as Thou once taughtest him, that resignation in Thyself is the highest end and aim of this life, so that with those great ones of old, I may also firmly and resignedly cry, Om Shri Krishnârpanamastu.

(Written Bombay May, 23, 1893 for D. R. Balaji Rao)

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

4. Write about the Contemporary Concept of Prayer.

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5. What is Gandhi's perception for prayers?

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6. Discuss Aurobindo's concept of prayers.

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7. Describe Swami Vivekananda's philosophy on prayers.

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10.9 LET US SUM UP

Scientific studies regarding the use of prayer have mostly concentrated on its effect on the healing of sick or injured people. Meta-studies have been performed showing evidence only for no effect or a potentially small effect. For instance, a 2006 meta-analysis on 14 studies concluded that there is "no discernable effect" while a 2007 systemic review of studies on intercessory prayer reported inconclusive results, noting that seven of 17 studies had "small, but significant, effect sizes" but the review noted that the most methodologically rigorous studies failed to produce significant findings. Some studies have indicated increased medical complications in groups receiving prayer over those without

Advaita Vedanta recognizes two forms of causation, the material cause and the instrumental cause. According to the school Brahman is both the material and instrumental cause of creation. In other words, Brahman provides not only the will and direction but also the material and energy needed to manifest the things, beings and worlds. Brahman is both Purusha (Self) and Prakriti (Nature). This is in contrast to some schools of Hindu philosophy, which argue that Brahman is the instrumental cause while Prakriti or nature is the material cause.

The Bhagavadgita has been interpreted in many ways from ancient times, by scholars belonging to various religious traditions or sampradayas in support of their respective schools of thought. For example, Shankaracharya (8th-9th century A. D) wrote a commentary upon it from the perspective of advaita vedanta or the philosophy of monism, declaring Brahman to be the only reality and ignorance as the main cause for our inability to recognize the truth.

10.10 KEY WORDS

Prayer: an address (such as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought

Pratyaksha: knowledge that comes through perception. This is objective knowledge which is experienced directly either through the senses or in deeper states of consciousness.

Anumana: knowledge that comes by means of inference. This is speculative knowledge based upon supposition or belief.

Upamana: Knowledge that comes by means of analogy, comparison and contrasting. This is relational knowledge.

Arthapatti: knowledge obtained by meaningful assumptions based on common sense and previous experience. This is hypothetical knowledge.

Anupalabdhi: Knowledge gained through negation.

Agama: Knowledge that comes through study of scriptures. This is pure theoretical knowledge.

10.11 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

8. Discuss the Concept of Prayer – Classical
9. What has been discussing in Advaita Vedanta?
10. Discuss the concept of Prayers according to Bhagavat Gita.
11. Write about the Contemporary Concept of Prayer.
12. What is Gandhi's perception for prayers?
13. Discuss Aurobindo's concept of prayers.
14. Describe Swami Vivekananda's philosophy on prayers.

10.12 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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10.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 10.2
2. See Section 10.3
3. See Section 10.4

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 10.5
2. See Section 10.6
3. See Section 10.7
4. See Section 10.8

UNIT 11: THE CONCEPT OF BHAKTI

STRUCTURE

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Concept of Bhakti
- 11.3 Ramanauja
- 11.4 Narada
- 11.5 Vivekananda
- 11.6 Sri Chaitanya
- 11.7 Critical Analysis
- 11.8 Let us sum up
- 11.9 Key Words
- 11.10 Questions for Review
- 11.11 Suggested readings and references
- 11.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVES

Bhakti Movement brought about revolutionary changes in moral, social, political perspectives of people of India. It is important to realize that Bhakti Movement unfolded the uniformities existing among the various religions. Once again, it is important to note that it played a significant role against the divisive and destructive forces in society. Bhakti Movement through Bhakti Yoga asserted itself as a method / pathway, to God on par with Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga. The objectives of this unit are:

- To make the pupil acquire knowledge about Bhakti Movement in ancient and medieval India.
- To enable the pupil understand the aims and services of the leaders of the movement.

- To motivate the pupil appreciate the work of the leaders of the Bhakti Movement.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The term Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root “Bhaj” means to serve. Dharma means the natural internal characteristics of a thing. The meaning of “movement” is the practice that influences a large section of a society. In the early beginning, the word Bhakti is first mentioned in Rig-Veda as worship to Indra and Surya Devata. It is also noted in the famous discourse on Bhakti by Narad in Narad Bhakti Sutra. Similarly it also appears in Vishnu-sookta.

Later, Upanishads emphasized Para Bhakti. Bhakti and Upasana of Vishnu, Shiv, Roodra, Narayan, Surya is also indicated in Upanishad. The great epic Ramayana emphasized Pitra Bhakti and Guru Bhakti. Principles of Bhakti Movement: The main principles of Bhakti movement are: (1) God is one, (2) To worship God man should serve humanity, (3) All men are equal, (4) Worshipping God with devotion is better than performing religious ceremonies and going on pilgrimages, (5) Caste distinctions and superstitious practices are to be given up. The Hindu saints of the Bhakti Movement and the Muslim saints of the Sufi movement became more liberal in their outlook. They wanted to get rid of the evils which had crept into their religions. There were a number of such saints from the 8th to 16th century A.D.

11.2 CONCEPT OF BHAKTI

The term bhakti is defined as “devotion” or passionate love for the Divine. Moksha or liberation from rebirth was not in the following of rules, regulations or societal ordering, but it was through simple devotion to the Divine. Within the movement at large, useful distinctions have been made by contemporary scholars between those poet saints who composed verses extolling God with attributes or form, namely, “saguna” bhaktas, and, Those extolling God without and beyond all attributes or form, “nirguna.” As mentioned above, the feeling of Bhakti or devotion can be traced back to the Rig Veda. It is the very first hymn

of Rig Veda, which gives expression to a feeling of intimacy with the highest God. In the Katha Upanishad it is said that the divine help, which is the reward to Bhakti, is necessary before one can be saved. The Sveta – Svataara Upanishad speaks of the highest devotion to God. Panini refers to the object of devotion in the Astadhyayi. The earliest God connected with Bhakti is Vishnu – Krishna. In the Bhagwad Gita there is emphasis on Love and devotion to God. The attitude of love to the supreme God continued to be recommended in the Bhagwat Purana.

Causes for the birth of Bhakti Movement:

Prior to the coming of Islam to India, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism were the dominant religions. Hinduism lost its simplicity. Many philosophical schools appeared. Two different sects, i.e., Vaishnavism and Saivism also appeared within Hinduism. In course of time Sakti worship also came into existence. Common people were confused on the way of worshipping God. When Islam came to India, the Hindus observed many ceremonies and worshipped many Gods and Goddesses. There were all sorts of superstitious beliefs among them. Their religion had become complex in nature. Added to these, the caste system, untouchability, blind worshipping and inequality in society caused dissensions among different sections of the people. On the other hand Islam preached unity of God and brotherhood of man. It emphasized monotheism. It attacked idol worship. It preached equality of man before God.

The oppressed common people and the people branded as low castes were naturally attracted towards Islam. It only increased the rivalry among religions. Fanaticism, bigotry, and religious intolerance began to raise their heads. It was to remove such evils religious leaders appeared in different parts of India. They preached pure devotion called Bhakti to attain God.

Origin of the Bhakti Movement :

Bhakti means personal devotion to God. It stresses the Union of the individual with God. Bhakti movement originated in South India between the 7th and the 12th centuries A.D. The Nayanmars, who worshipped Siva, and the Alwars, who worshipped Vishnu, preached the idea of Bhakti. They carried their message of love and devotion to various parts of South India through the medium of the local language. They preached among common people. It made some of the followers of the Vedic faith to revive the old Vedic religion. Saints like Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa gave their concepts of God and the individual soul.

Bhakti Movement in the North:

The Bhakti movement in North India gained momentum due to the Muslim conquest. The saints of the Bhakti Movement were men and women of humble origin. They came from all castes and classes. They had visited from place to place singing devotional songs. They had also preached the Unity of God and brotherhood of man. They had stressed tolerance among various religious groups. Their preaching was simple. The Hindu tradition has generally been divided into a number of important historical and religious periods through its long development. The formative time frame from 2500—400 B.C.E. is highlighted by what are known as the sacred texts, the Vedas, and a nomadic people known as the Indo-Aryans; this period is classified as the Vedic Period. Central to the Vedas was the visionary figure of the rishi, or seer, one who was able to communicate with and about the various gods of the Vedic pantheon through a complex system of rituals that could only be conducted by an increasingly powerful priesthood. Liberation, or moksha, was to be found through the precise performance of ritual. The Epic and Classical Periods, from 400 B.C.E.—600 C.E. are so named because of their focus on important texts, namely, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. These epics are concerned with heroes and heroic battles, kings, queens and ideal roles of individuals. Also of central importance to this time frame were Law Books concerned with the ideal nature of society. Social order and stability were to be found in a hierarchical ordering of people as well as specific roles assigned to each individual's life stage (ashrama) and

position in society (varna) or caste. On the upper rung of this system was the Brahmin priesthood, followed by Kshatriyas (warriors) and Vaishyas (merchants), also known as twice-born classes. Only these groups were enabled to take part in an initiation ceremony known as the “sacred thread,” study the Vedas and take part in Vedic rituals. Beneath these three groups were the Shudras, those who were servants to the upper three varnas. Underneath this rung came another subsection, the Untouchables, those whose occupations were so polluting that they did not even qualify to fit within an ordered society. The way to liberation from rebirth or moksha was in a true understanding of dharma, recognition and maintenance of the good of the social order, as exemplified and regulated by the Epics and Law Books.

Nature of Bhakti Movement

Generally speaking the religious movement of this period lies between 1300 – 1550 A.D. It was non ritualistic and mainly based on Bhakti. It emphasized a religion or faith, which was essentially Hindu but reflected the vigorous monotheism of Islam. All Bhakti cults are essentially monotheistic. It is immaterial whether he is called Shiva, Krishna or Devi. They all symbolize the One and the Eternal. It is the religion; philosophy and social thinking that were created during this revival, which enabled Hinduism to reassert itself in the following period. In the religious life of India the glory of period is most resplendent. Ramanand, Kabir, Mira, and Vallabhacharya in the north, Chaitanya in Bengal, Madhava, Vedanta Desika and numerous others in the south give to the religious life of the period a vitality that Hinduism never seems to have enjoyed before.

Characteristics of Bhakti Movement.

One chief characteristic of the Bhakti Movement can be mentioned as belief in One God. Devotee could worship God by love and devotion. The second characteristic of Bhakti Movement was that there was no need to worship Idols or to perform elaborate rituals for seeking his grace. The third feature on which the Bhakti Saints laid stress was the

equality of all castes. There was no distinction of high or low as far as devotion to God was concerned. The fourth feature was the emphasis, which these saints laid on the Hindu – Muslim Unity. According, to these saints all men, irrespective of their religion are equal in the eyes of the God. The saints preached in the language of the common people. They did not use Sanskrit, which was the language of the cultured few. These saints laid stress on purity of heart and practice of virtues like Truth, Honesty, Kindness and Charity. According to these saints, only virtuous man could realize God. These saints considered God as Omnipresent and Omnipotent. Even a householder could realize God by love and devotion. Some regarded God as formless or Nirguna while others considered him as having different forms or Saguna. The basic principles of Bhakti Movement namely love and devotion to one personal God and the Unity of God were mainly Hindu. But as a result of contact with Islam, more emphasis was laid on these principles than performance of outward rituals such as Yjnas, fasts, going to sacred places, bathing in the Ganges or worship of images. The movement had two main objects in view. One was to reform Hindu religion to enable it withstand the onslaught of Islamic propaganda. And the second was to bring about a compromise between Hinduism and Islam.

Check your progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What do you understand by Bhakti Movement?

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2. Explain the factors contributing towards development of Bhakti Movement.

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11.3 RAMANAUJA

Ramanuja or Ramanujacharya (1017–1137 CE; IAST: Rāmānujā; [ɾaːmaːnʊdʒɐ]) was an Indian theologian, philosopher, and one of the most important exponents of the Sri Vaishnavism tradition within Hinduism. His philosophical foundations for devotionalism were influential to the Bhakti movement.

Ramanuja's guru was Yādava Prakāśa, a scholar who was a part of the more ancient Advaita Vedānta monastic tradition. Sri Vaishnava tradition holds that Ramanuja disagreed with his guru and the non-dualistic Advaita Vedānta, and instead followed in the footsteps of Tamil Alvārs tradition, the scholars Nāthamuni and Yamunāchārya. Ramanuja is famous as the chief proponent of Vishishtadvaita subschool of Vedānta, and his disciples were likely authors of texts such as the Shatyayaniya Upanishad. Ramanuja himself wrote influential texts, such as bhāṣya on the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita, all in Sanskrit.

His Vishishtadvaita (qualified monism) philosophy has competed with the Dvaita (theistic dualism) philosophy of Madhvāchārya, and Advaita (monism) philosophy of Ādi Shankara, together the three most influential Vedantic philosophies of the 2nd millennium. Ramanuja presented the epistemic and soteriological importance of bhakti, or the devotion to a personal God (Vishnu in Ramanuja's case) as a means to spiritual liberation. His theories assert that there exists a plurality and distinction between Ātman (soul) and Brahman (metaphysical, ultimate reality), while he also affirmed that there is unity of all souls and that the individual soul has the potential to realize identity with the Brahman.

Ramanuja was born to Tamil parents in the village of Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu. His followers in the Vaishnava tradition wrote hagiographies, some of which were composed in centuries after his death, and which the tradition believes to be true.

The traditional hagiographies of Ramanuja state he was born to mother Kānthimathi and father Asuri Kesava Somayāji, in Sriperumbudur, near modern Chennai, Tamil Nādu.[16] He is believed to have been born in the month of Chaitra under the star Tiruvadhirai. They place his life in the period of 1017–1137 CE, yielding a lifespan of 120 years. These dates have been questioned by modern scholarship, based on temple records and regional literature of 11th- and 12th-century outside the Sri Vaishnava tradition, and modern era scholars suggest that Ramanuja may have lived between 1077-1157 CE.

Ramanuja married, moved to Kānchipuram, studied in an Advaita Vedānta monastery with Yādava Prakāśa as his guru. Ramanuja and his guru frequently disagreed in interpreting Vedic texts, particularly the Upanishads. Ramanuja and Yādava Prakāśa separated, and thereafter Ramanuja continued his studies on his own.

He attempted to meet another famed Vedanta scholar of 11th-century Yamunāchārya, but Sri Vaishnava tradition holds that the latter died before the meeting and they never met. Ramanuja was the great-grandson of Yamunāchārya through a grand-daughter. However, some hagiographies assert that the corpse of Yamunāchārya miraculously rose and named Ramanuja as the new leader of Sri Vaishnava sect previously led by Yamunāchārya. One hagiography states that after leaving Yādava Prakāśa, Ramanuja was initiated into Sri Vaishnavism by Periya Nambi, also called Māhapurna, another Vedānta scholar. Ramanuja renounced his married life, and became a Hindu monk. However, states Katherine Young, the historical evidence on whether Ramanuja led a married life or he did renounce and became a monk is uncertain.

Ramanuja became a priest at the Varadharāja Perumal temple (Vishnu) at Kānchipuram, where he began to teach that moksha (liberation and release from samsara) is to be achieved not with metaphysical, nirguna Brahman but with the help of personal god and saguna Vishnu. Ramanuja has long enjoyed foremost authority in the Sri Vaishnava tradition.

Ramanuja, through his doctrine of sharanagati (self-surrender to God), opened the gates of salvation to all, even to the lowliest and the meek, and reinstalled confidence and dignity in their social living. He took revolutionary steps to allow the so-called untouchables into temples and even admitted Muslims into his fold. Imbibing this spirit of Ramanuja, Ramananda became an influential social reformer in Northern India and took a very radical approach to include the poor and the downtrodden into a common fold. Kabir strived to interfuse ideas of Hinduism and Islam so that both Hindus and Muslims can tread the spiritual path harmoniously. For him, Bhakti not only transcended its caste boundaries but also the religious boundaries. E k n a t h w a s o n e of the earliest reformers of untouchability in Maharashtra and Annamacharya initiated reforms in Andhra Pradesh. Saints like Samartha Ramdas not only inspired the people in devotionals, but also urged them to initiate and implement social and political reforms to establish a healthy and secure society. Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa addressed social issues through their compositions. Kanakadasa graphically portrays through allegories in his unique literary work, Ramadhanyacharitre, the conflict between the rich and the poor. Kanakadasa vociferously condemned the social evils and took great efforts in reforming the under privileged communities. As a result, India's spiritual culture regained its strength to resist pressures from socio-political forces from abroad and the decadent atheistic reform movements within the nation, and marched on with its unparalleled adaptability to the needs of time and to inspire generation after generation to regain faith in their religion and spiritual heritage that was rightly theirs.

11.4 NARADA

To begin with, the words of Radhakrishnan “Bhakti can be considered as the emotional attachment distinct from other paths like knowledge or action”. Vivekananda considers bhakti as an ordinary emotion that can be converted into powerful feelings, ordinary love can be converted into Divine love or Supreme Devotion i.e is the Bhakti Maya. Bhakti philosophy i.e. devotion to a personal God became a movement in medieval period of India history. The bhakti cult also known as Vaisnavism, where Vishnu is the Bhagavata (glorious), Purusottoma (the supreme person), Narayana, Hari as the sole lord . The history of bhakti however can be traced back to the Rig Vedic Age. In Rig Veda, the Sanskrit word ‘Bhaj’ shows it marks. Bhaj meant divide, share or distribute. Bhakti is a derivation from the word Bhaj. The supreme deity of the bhakti philosopher was Vishnu and his two incarnations Rama and Krishna. ‘Bhaj’ is the root of the word bhakti, bhakta and Bhagavata. Maitri-upanishad, and Svetasastra Upanishad also refers to bhakti. Maitri-Upanishad refers bhagavat Vishnu as food that helps sustaining in this world. Svetasastra Upanishad mentions bhakti in reference to devotion to a personal God.

In Maitri-upanishad, the word Bhagavata was used for first time in relation to Vishnu, which refers as bhagavata Vishnu. However, the term bhagavata was related in the epic age with Narayana, who was a new and personal god. With his introduction, bhakti imbibed the idea of personal love and devotion to the deity. The worshipness of Narayana was referred as Bhagavata. Chandogya-Upanishad refers to the beginning of the cult of Krishna-Vasudeva. It refers to the virtues of asceticism, charity, non-injury and selfishness and rejects the sacrificial ritual. Mahabharata brings in the concept of bhakti with Narayaniya and Bhagavad Gita ,the two section of work. These two works were particularly significant in the evolution of bhakti with Narayana-Vishnu.

The Bhagavad Gita became the base of bhakti marga. With Bhagavad Gita, the worship of Krishna-Vasudeva and Vishnu become one of the most important creeds. It became one of the most inspiring books of bhakti movement that grew in medieval period. It talks about three principal path of attaining union with god knowledge (Gyan)

action(Karma) and devotion(bhakti).Bhagavad Gita refers to surrender at the feet of lord(ek sarana).It says to believe in god, to love and to devoted to him and to meet him. It states that one could attain union with Supreme Being by the path of knowledge action and devotion. The greatest contribution of the Bhagavata Gita in the bhakti movement that it brought the concept of ultimately reality as a personal deity, who responds to intimate love and devotion (bhakti). Narayaniya brings in forth the other name of Vishnu i.e. Narayana. In the Gupta period, the Vaishnavite bhakti faith flourished in the territories under the Gupta Empire. The inscriptions of Gupta period give indication that the Gupta kings were devotee of Vishnu. Upanisadic upasanas are regarded as the origin of the bhakti movement by R.G. Bhandarkar. In Panini's Astadhyayi (5th century, B.C), the word bhakti is used to mean a thing to be liked or loved But it was not necessarily to god. S. Radakrishnan opines that- according to the Upanishads, the Absolute and God are one, he is the supreme Brahman to emphasizes its transcendence of the finite and he is called Isvara to emphasize the personal aspect for religious devotion. The Pancararta Samhitas describe the devotion to the Vasudeva cult. These samhitas are considered to be written around 600-800 A.D. These samhitas describes the devotion to Vishnu. However, Vishnu was not worshipped in the devotional manner as found in Bhagawad Gita. It is a kind of tantric mode of Vishnu worship. Naradapancaratra describes the love between Krishna and Radha. During the bhakti movement it is seen that Radha-Krishna was the main deity of devotion of Vallabhacharya and Chaitanya. The Pancratra Samhitas also refers to devotion to lord as the highest form to attain liberation. The Puranas brought in a new character of Vishnu- the Gopala-krishna i.e. cowherd boy Krishna. The bhakti philosopher's doctrine of bhakti in medieval India mainly centered on this child- Krishna, who is considered as the soul of this universe. The Puranas like Harivamsa, Vishnu-purana and Bhagavata-purana brings in the life of Krishna's childhood in Vrindavana. Harivamsa Purana describes the early life of child Krishna. It brings a new phase in devotion to lord, bhakti to child Krishna. The VishnuPurana refers to the Vaishnava in theology. The Puranas describes the stories of child devote of Krishna like Dhruva and Prahlad. In the literatures and compositions of the bhakti poets of medieval India, have

described the child-activity of Krishna. The Purana refers to nama, nama-kirtana, sravana, smarana, arcana among the other form worships. The Bhagavataa Purana is the main inspiring book of the bhakti movement. Bhagavata Purana expresses bhakti in a new excellence. It mainly describes the early life of Krishna, and also depicts the role of gopis of Vrindavana. Bhakti in Bhagavata Purana is so intricate and magnificent exposition of bhakti that brings active all the emotion of person of pleasure, sadness etc. The Bhagavata Purana describes the nine mode of bhakti sravana, kirtana, smarana, padasevana, arcana, vandana, dasya, sakhya, atmanivedana. After Bhagavata Purana, the bhakti poets followed Narada-sutras and Sandilya sutras.

Sandilya sutra considers bhakti the supreme love for one personal God, while Narada sutras consider it as intensric love for the supreme. Sandilya refers to bhakti in the following manner honoring him, or honoring everything that made to remember him, aversion to all that are not associated with, singing the glory of him and that he is immanent in all things. Narada describes bhakti as love for attributes and greatness of god, for his beauty, worship, recollection, love for him as a servant, a friend, a parent and a beloved wife love of self-consecration to him, to absorb in him, and the pang of separation from him.

The blossoming of bhakti began in South India with the rise of a group called Alvars from 6th – 9th century. They followed the path of spiritual liberation through the medium of music and dance, songs and poetry. Their movement was a reaction against the caste and ritual ridden society. They began to compose and sing their songs in the vernacular language, as a reation against Sanskrit language which was considered as the language of elite. Their poems reflect the struggle of a living person questioning his own experience in native speech. These saints went from temple to temple and by singing and dancing chanted the name of the lord. A large group of people (devotee) followed their path and it took the shape of movement. In the early phase of the movement, it was more spiritual in nature then social. There were twelve Alwar poets Nammalwar, Madhur Kavi, Periya, Aantal (Andal), Paigaiyer, Pudatta, Tirumalsiar, Tiruppan, Tundaradipuri, Tirumangalai, Kulsekhar and

among them one was Brahmin, Periyalwar and one woman Andal. The early Alvars Pundarikāṣṭhā, Pēyālvar and Pōygaialvar were probably present around 7th century A.D. They started composing the Pirabandhams in Tamil. During 7th -8th century, the Alvar poets Tiruppan, Tirumalāsai, Tirumangai, Kulasekhara, Jondaradipodi, Periyalwar, Andal or Godadevi flourished. And in 9th -10th century, Nammalvar, the greatest of the Alvar poets flourished. The Alvar poets however never reacted against the Vedas and Puranas rather their movement was a reaction against.

11.5 VIVEKANANDA

Swami Vivekananda (Bengali: [ʃami bibekanāṇdo] (About this soundlisten); 12 January 1863 – 4 July 1902), born Narendranath Datta (Bengali: [nārendronath̪ d̪oto]), was an Indian Hindu monk, a chief disciple of the 19th-century Indian mystic Ramakrishna. He was a key figure in the introduction of the Indian philosophies of Vedānta and Yoga to the Western world and is credited with raising interfaith awareness, bringing Hinduism to the status of a major world religion during the late 19th century. He was a major force in the revival of Hinduism in India, and contributed to the concept of nationalism in colonial India.[9] Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. He is perhaps best known for his speech which began with the words - "Sisters and brothers of America ...," in which he introduced Hinduism at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893.

Born into an aristocratic Bengali Kayastha family of Calcutta, Vivekananda was inclined towards spirituality. He was influenced by his guru, Ramakrishna, from whom he learnt that all living beings were an embodiment of the divine self; therefore, service to God could be rendered by service to humankind. After Ramakrishna's death, Vivekananda toured the Indian subcontinent extensively and acquired first-hand knowledge of the conditions prevailing in British India. He later travelled to the United States, representing India at the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions. Vivekananda conducted hundreds

of public and private lectures and classes, disseminating tenets of Hindu philosophy in the United States, England and Europe. In India, Vivekananda is regarded as a patriotic saint, and his birthday is celebrated as National Youth Day.

11.6 SRI CHAITANYA

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (IAST: Kṛṣṇa Chaitanya), honorific: "Mahāprabhu" ("Great Lord"), (18 February 1486 – 14 June 1534), was a Bengali Hindu mystic, saint, and the chief proponent of the Achintya Bheda Abheda (Inconceivable Difference/One-ness) Vedanta school and the Gaudiya Vaishnavism tradition within Hinduism. He also expounded the Vaishnava school of Bhakti yoga (meaning loving devotion to God), based on Bhagavata Purana and Bhagavad Gita. Of various forms and direct or indirect expansions of Krishna such as Lord Narasimha (Man-Lion; Krishna in mood of anger), Mahavishnu and Garbhodaksayi Vishnu respectively, he is Krishna in the mood of a devotee. He popularised the chanting of the 'Hare Krishna mantra' and composed the Siksastakam (eight devotional prayers) in Sanskrit. His followers, Gaudiya Vaishnavas, revere him as a Krishna with the mood and complexion of his source of inspiration Radha. His birthday is celebrated as Gaura-purnima.

Chaitanya popularized the Sankirtan (group devotional singing accompanied with ecstatic dancing) in the homes, in the temples, and even on the streets. One should also mention the Baul movement in Bengal with following both among the Hindus and Muslims. Later, Bengal produced saints like Ramprasad and Kamalakanta who left a legacy of songs to the Divine Mother. The Influence on Language and Literature Another profound cultural enrichment through the Bhakti Movement, closely related to Indian music, was to Indian literature. Indian literature had always commanded the deepest attention of any inquisitive student of Indian Culture with its overwhelming volume, profundity and sublimity. Since the earliest sacred writings of the Vedas, there had been a dynamic development of literature through the ages, especially in Sanskrit. The Bhakti Movement has its own contributions to

the Sanskrit literature through the learned theological and devotional works of the Acharyas and rapturous masterpieces like Gita Govinda by Jayadeva (12th century). However, the Bhakti Movement had something more to contribute to the Indian literary heritage—the development of regional languages in India. Alvars and Nayanmars composed their mystical songs in Tamil. Ramananda initiated philosophical and theological discussions in Hindi through his works like Matanbuj Bhaskar, Sri Ramarachan Padhti and Anandabhashya. Surdas and Meera enriched Hindi literature through their entreating songs. Tulsidas, though attempted to compose songs in Sanskrit, ended up writing his classics in Awadhi and Braja dialects, thereby giving scope for these dialects to develop and flourish.

Chaitanya has left one written record in Sanskrit called Siksastakam (though, in Vaishnava Padavali it is said: "Chaitanya himself wrote many songs on the Radha-Krishna theme").

Chaitanya's epistemological, theological and ontological teachings are summarized as ten root principles called dasa mula.

The statements of amnaya (scripture) are the chief proof. By these statements the following nine topics are taught.

- Krishna is the Supreme Absolute Truth.
- Krishna is endowed with all energies.
- Krishna is the source of all rasa- flavor, quality, or spiritual rapture/emotions.
- The jivas (individual souls) are all separated parts of the Lord.
- In bound state the jivas are under the influence of matter, due to their tatastha (marginal) nature.
- In the liberated state the jivas are free from the influence of matter.
- The jivas and the material world are both different from and identical to the Lord.
- Pure devotion is the only way to attain liberation.
- Pure love of Krishna is the ultimate goal.

Despite having been initiated in the Madhvacharya tradition and taking sannyasa from Shankara's tradition, Chaitanya's philosophy is sometimes regarded as a tradition of his own within the Vaishnava framework – having some marked differences with the practices and the theology of other followers of Madhvacharya. He took Mantra Upadesa from Isvara Puri and Sanyasa Diksha from Keshava Bharati.

Chaitanya is not known to have written anything himself except for a series of verses known as the Siksastaka, or "eight verses of instruction", which he had spoken, and were recorded by one of his close colleagues. The eight verses created by Chaitanya are considered to contain the complete philosophy of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in condensed form. Chaitanya requested a select few among his followers (who later came to be known as the Six Goswamis of Vrindavan) to systematically present the theology of bhakti he had taught to them in their own writings. The six saints and theologians were Rupa Goswami, Sanatana Goswami, Gopala Bhatta Goswami, Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, Raghunatha dasa Goswami and Jiva Goswami, a nephew of brothers Rupa and Sanatana. These individuals were responsible for systematising Gaudiya Vaishnava theology.

Narottama Dasa, Srinivasa Acarya and Syamananda Pandit were among the stalwarts of the second generation of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Having studied under Jiva Goswami, they were instrumental in propagating the teachings of the Goswamis throughout Bengal, Odisha and other regions of Eastern India. Many among their associates, such as Ramacandra Kaviraja and Ganga Narayan Chakravarti, were also eminent teachers in their own right.

In the early 17th century Kalachand Vidyalankar, a disciple of Chaitanya, made his preachings popular in Bengal. He traveled throughout India popularizing the gospel of anti-untouchability, social justice and mass education. He probably initiated 'Pankti Bhojon' and Krishna sankirtan in eastern part of Bengal. Several schools (sampradaya) have been practicing it for hundreds of years. Geetashree

Chabi Bandyopadhyay and Radharani Devi are among many who achieved fame by singing kirtan. The Dalits in Bengal, at that time a neglected and underprivileged caste, readily accepted his libertarian outlook and embraced the doctrine of Mahaprabhu. His disciples were known as Kalachandi Sampraday, who inspired the people to eradicate illiteracy and casteism. Many consider Kalachand as the Father of Rationalism in East Bengal (Purba Banga).

The festival of Kheturi, presided over by Jahnava Thakurani, the wife of Nityananda, was the first time the leaders of the various branches of Chaitanya's followers assembled together. Through such festivals, members of the loosely organised tradition became acquainted with other branches along with their respective theological and practical nuances. Around these times, the disciples and descendants of Nityananda and Advaita Acharya, headed by Virabhadra and Krishna respectively, started their family lineages (vamsa) to maintain the tradition. The vamsa descending from Nityananda through his son Virabhadra forms the most prominent branch of the modern Gaudiya tradition, though descendants of Advaita, along with the descendants of many other associates of Chaitanya, maintain their following especially in the rural areas of Bengal. Gopala Guru Goswami, a young associate of Chaitanya and a follower of Vakresvara Pandit, founded another branch based in Odisha. The writings of Gopala, along with those of his disciple Dhyanaandra Goswami, have had a substantial influence on the methods of internal worship in the tradition.

From the very beginning of Chaitanya's bhakti movement in Bengal, Haridasa Thakur and others, Muslim or Hindu by birth, were participants. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the great sage of Dakshineswar, who lived in the 19th century, emphasized the bhakti marga of Chaitanya, whom he referred to as "Gauranga." (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna). This openness received a boost from Bhaktivinoda Thakura's broad-minded vision in the late 19th century and was institutionalised by Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati in his Gaudiya Matha in the 20th century. In the 20th century the teachings of Chaitanya were brought to the West by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-

1977), a representative of the Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati branch of Chaitanya's tradition. Prabhupada founded his movement known as The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) to spread Chaitanya's teachings throughout the world. Sarasvata gurus and acharyas, members of the Goswami lineages and several other Hindu sects which revere Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, including devotees from the major Vaishnava holy places in Mathura District, West Bengal and Odisha, also established temples dedicated to Krishna and Chaitanya outside India in the closing decades of the 20th century. In the 21st century Vaishnava bhakti is now also being studied through the academic medium of Krishnology in a number of academic institutions

11.7 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The nectar of Bhakti or devotion not only flowed from the devotee towards the Lord, but also flowed into the hearts of millions of Indians down the centuries. Right from the seed of Bhakti in the fervent prayers of the seers in the Vedic period to Vedic gods, through the more articulate conception in the Shvetasvara Upanishad, the emotion of Bhakti coursed through the centuries of Indian history. It went on widening its influence through the epics like Ramayana and the Mahabharata, deepening its intensity through the Puranas like the Bhagavata Purana and the Vishnu Purana, and rationalizing its approach through the works like Narada Bhakti Sutras and Sandilya Bhakti Sutras. Although the flow seemed to have ebbed, the passion of love can never dry out of the Indian heart. Thus arose a great movement in the religious and cultural history of India—the Bhakti Movement.

With reference to the early beginning of Bhakti Movement in southern India, on the philosophical side the most important fact is the new interpretation of the ancient philosophical texts given by Ramanuja, who in the eleventh century provided an intellectual foundation for bhakti, which the monistic philosophy had done so much to undermine. It was this influence which was most powerful in what has been called the Hindu Reformation, and in the ` Four Churches of the Reformation we

have evidence of the new strength and vitality which had been imparted to the spirit of bhakti. These Churches are known respectively as

- (1) the Srisampradaya of Ramanuja,
- (2) the Brahma-sampradaya of Madhva,
- (3) the Rudra-sampradaya of Vishnuswamin, and
- (4) the Sanakadi-sampradaya of Nimbarka.

These Churches are based on different theological foundations. The first held a qualified monism—visishtadvaita, the second a dualism on the lines of the Samkhya-Yoga, the third a pure monism—suddhadvaita, and the fourth a philosophy which is a curious blend of monism and pluralism. Yet all agree on certain points. They hold to the belief in God as in some way personal. They also agree in holding that the soul is essentially personal and possessed of inalienable individuality. It is also immortal, finding its true being not in absorption in the Supreme, but in a relation with him of inextinguishable love. All agree accordingly in rejecting the doctrine of Maya. Sir R. G. Bhandarkar has well summarized what is to be said regarding the relations of the various Vaishnava systems to each other in the following paragraph: The points of contact between these various Vaishnava systems are that their spiritual elements are essentially derived from the Bhagavadgita, that Vasudeva as the name of the Supreme Being, stands in the background of all, and that spiritual monism and world-illusion are denounced by them equally. The differences arise from the varied importance that they attach to the different spiritual doctrines; the prominence that they give to one or other of the three elements that were mingled with Vasudevism ; the metaphysical theory that they set up; and the ceremonial that they impose upon their followers. The Bhagavadgita was supplemented in later times by the Pancaratra Samhitas and the Puranas such as the Vishnu and the Bhagavata, and other later works of that description. These occasionally elucidated some of the essential doctrines, laid down the ceremonial, and brought together a vast mass of legendary matter to

magnify the importance of their special teachings and render them attractive. The Bhaktiratnavali, a work, dating from about A. D. 1400, which consists of extracts from the Bha-gavata Purana, shows how this influence wrought in one of its lines. It commends the bhakti-marga as the only way of deliverance. Neither charity, nor asceticism, nor sacrifices, nor purificatory rites, nor penances and religious vows please him. He is pleased with pure devotion. Everything else is futile, mere mockery.

Effects of Bhakti Movement: The Bhakti movement had brought the Hindus and the Muslims closer to each other. The equality concept preached by the leaders reduced the rigidity of the caste system to a certain extent. The suppressed people gained a feeling of self-respect. The reformers preached in local languages. It led to the development of Vernacular literature. They composed hymns and songs in the languages spoken by the people. Therefore there was a remarkable growth of literature in all the languages. A new language Urdu, a mixture of Persian and Hindi, was developed. The Bhakti movement freed the common people from the tyranny of the priests. It checked the excesses of polytheism. It encouraged the spirit of toleration. The gap between the Hindus and the Muslims was reduced. They began to live amicably together. It emphasized the value of a pure life of charity and devotion. Finally, it improved the moral and spiritual ways of life of the medieval society. It provided an example for the future generation to live with the spirit of toleration.

Check your progress 3

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Mention some ethical implications of Bhakti Movement.

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2) Explain the effects of Bhakti Movement

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11.8 LET US SUM UP

The social significance of Bhakti Movement was remarkable. It also attempted to do away with all the distinctions of caste and creed. It is well known fact that in Maharashtra saints like Jnanesvara, Eknath, Tukaram and others tried to overcome the evils which were meted out to women and lower caste people. Bhakti Movement brought about a kind of “reformation” in India with reference to the attitude of people belonging to variety of religions. It also led to respecting other religions. Following a religion and achieving salvation was made more simple for all down trodden people. The divisive and destructive forces from various religions were also checked. This led to the change in the mind sets of Indian people. To certain extent it contributed towards strengthening of spirituality of people belonging to various religions.

11.9 KEY WORDS

Bhakti: The term Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root “Bhaj” means to serve. The term bhakti is defined as “devotion” or passionate love for the Divine.

Alwars: The Alwars were the worshippers of Lord Vishnu who were twelve in number

11.10 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) What do you understand by Bhakti Movement?
- 2) Explain the factors contributing towards development of Bhakti Movement.
- 3) Mention some ethical implications of Bhakti Movement.
- 4) Explain the effects of Bhakti Movement

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11.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress 1

1. The term Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root “Bhaj” means to serve. Dharma means the natural internal characteristics of a thing. The meaning of “movement” is the practice that influences a large section of a society. In the early beginning, the word Bhakti is first mentioned in Rig-Veda as worship to Indra and Surya Devata. It is also noted in the famous discourse on Bhakti by Narad in Narad Bhakti Sutra. Similarly it also appears in Vishnu-sookta.

2. There were a number of factors which contributed to the rise and growth of the Bhakti Movement during the Medieval Period. The first important factor can be presumed as the persecution of Hindus by the Muslim rulers, who tried to convert them to Islam and imposed Jaziya if they were not prepared to become followers of Islam. This led to the very strong reactions of Hindus leading to preservation of their religion through Bhakti Movement. Secondly, the ill-treatment of the lower classes in Hindu society by the persons of upper castes, the people of the lower caste had to suffer injustice and cruelties . so the teachings of the Bhakti saints who preached equality of castes as far as the devotion to God was concerned appealed to the people of lower castes. Thirdly, the elaborate rituals and rigor in religion was not liked by common man. The Bhakti saints preached the path of devotion and discarded all rituals hence it appealed to the common man.

Check your progress 2

1. With reference to the early beginning of Bhakti Movement in southern India, on the philosophical side the most important fact is the new interpretation of the ancient philosophical texts given by Ramanuja, who in the eleventh century provided an intellectual foundation for bhakti, which the monistic philosophy had done so much to undermine. It was

this influence which was most powerful in what has been called the Hindu Reformation, and in the ` Four Churches of the Reformation we have evidence of the new strength and vitality which had been imparted to the spirit of bhakti. These Churches are known respectively as (1) the Srisampradaya of Ramanuja, (2) the Brahma-sampradaya of Madhva, (3) the Rudra-sampradaya of Vishnuswamin, and (4) the Sanakadi-sampradaya of Nimbarka. These Churches are based on different theological foundations. The first held a qualified monism—visishtadvaita, the second a dualism on the lines of the Samkhya-Yoga, the third a pure monism—suddhadvaita, and the fourth a philosophy which is a curious blend of monism and pluralism. Yet all agree on certain points. They hold to the belief in God as in some way personal. They also agree in holding that the soul is essentially personal and possessed of inalienable individuality. It is also immortal, 14 finding its true being not in absorption in the Supreme, but in a relation with him of inextinguishable love. All agree accordingly in rejecting the doctrine of Maya.

2. The Bhakti movement had brought the Hindus and the Muslims closer to each other. The equality concept preached by the leaders reduced the rigidity of the caste system to a certain extent. The suppressed people gained a feeling of self-respect. The reformers preached in local languages. It led to the development of Vernacular literature. They composed hymns and songs in the languages spoken by the people. Therefore there was a remarkable growth of literature in all the languages. A new language Urdu, a mixture of Persian and Hindi, was developed. The Bhakti movement freed the common people from the tyranny of the priests. It checked the excesses of polytheism. It encouraged the spirit of toleration. The gap between the Hindus and the Muslims was reduced. They began to live amicably together. It emphasised the value of a pure life of charity and devotion. Finally, it improved the moral and spiritual ways of life of the medieval society. It provided an example for the future generation to live with the spirit of toleration.

UNIT 12: THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

STRUCTURE

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Elimination
- 12.3 Familiar functions
- 12.4 Improper functions
- 12.5 Unique function
- 12.6 Let us sum up
- 12.7 Key Words
- 12.8 Questions for Review
- 12.9 Suggested readings and references
- 12.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit we can able to know:

- To discuss the Elimination of theological discourse.
- To know the Familiar functions
- To discuss the Improper functions
- To know about the Unique function.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Theology is a scary word to many people. It smells of dusty old ideas that are difficult to grasp, counter-rational, useless, abstruse, and even harmful. When I inform someone that I teach systematic theology, the response is usually, “What is that?” I sometimes hear theology ridiculed from the pulpit, along the lines that Christianity or discipleship is not about a set of abstract doctrines but a way of life of service to the poor, of simple praise of God. The doctrines are presumed to get in the way. There is not a big market for theology books these days.

Yet, we simply cannot do without theology, for theology keeps the church tied to God. Its goal is to remind the church and its members that their identity, their decisions, and their undertakings should always be thought about outward from God. In contemporary thinking, we often take things at face value. We see a breathtaking landscape, are moved by an expression of tenderness or compassion, or we experience suffering. We are most likely to attribute these things to some aspect of the things themselves. They provide their own explanation. A theological outlook is different. From a theological perspective, such things and events only find their meaning in relation to what we know of God: beauty, love, goodness, and even judgment. In the case of great suffering, people press their understanding of God to make sense of things that seemingly conflict with what we expect of God. Christianity cannot do without theology. If there is not good theology there will be bad theology, not theology.

The theological task, then, is to make theological sense of the world and of ourselves: those is, from the point of view of what we understand of the being and work of God as best we know it. One may go further. If one's life is to be centered in God, which is the Christian goal, the task of theology is to help the church help people know, love, and enjoy God. The Christian tradition is persuaded that this is the way to a happy, flourishing life. In our culture, this is a tall order. So it has ever been.

Theologians generally put pen to paper when a theological problem arises that needs to be addressed or resolved. This is because, until something comes along to disturb our theological equilibrium, we assume that our understanding of God and the things of God suffice. One type of problem comes from questions about the Christian understanding of God from non-Christians. Early on, Christians started worshipping Jesus! What did that mean? Pagans and Jews were quite horrified at this. So Christian theologians had to answer their questions, for they were good ones. In this case, theologians act as defense attorneys for Christian beliefs and practices. In the process of answering the questions of outsiders, they shaped the tradition in fresh ways, leaving their imprint.

Careful argument and debate on the problem of worshipping Jesus resulted in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Another important type of theological problem comes from Christians themselves. The truth is that Christians have rarely agreed with one another on issues of faith, doctrine, and practice. Christian theological history, then, is an intergenerational conversation across the ages, in which the last generation enters respectful conversation with its elders. For example, in the fifth century St. Augustine pondered the death of Christ because it seemed so odd. That God would demand the death of an innocent man—indeed, of his own Son—to rescue us from the devil’s hold flouts every vision of morality. He needed to defend the faith against a serious objection. He wrote that God could not just release us from the power of the devil over us simply by an act of divine power. The innocent Christ had to die to atone for our sins, because those ways we would see that power and might alone are not the proper way for us to have our way, even to accomplish a good end. In essence, Augustine was saying, the end does not justify the means. Rather, the demands of righteousness must be satisfied by the means themselves. Therefore, Christ had to die so that we would see that power is not an end in itself, but must be used morally; that is, in the service of righteousness. Then he added the decisive factor: “It is to be wished, then, that power may be given, but power over vices, to conquer which men do not wish to be powerful, though they wish to be [powerful] to conquer [other] people.... Let a man desire to be prudent, strong, temperate, just; and that he may be able to have these things truly, let him certainly desire power, and seek to be powerful over himself and (strange though it is) against himself for himself” (De Trinitate XIII: 13:17).

Augustine here is explaining the action of God in Christ’s death as moral teaching that we need. Although God acted in a way that looks to us flagrantly immoral, the great Augustine drew from it a lesson to uplift us as we need to be lifted up from our natural inclinations. We need to attend to the death of Christ with proper understanding. This understanding comes from the teaching of the church. This is theology’s way of helping us know and love God more dearly. For God’s works are

not undertaken out of limits to God's power, or capriciousness that appears cruel. What at first glance looks odd is actually an expression of God's deepest knowledge of and care for us: care to transform us by his actions. Indeed, children are often more influenced by what adults do than by what they say. In this case, we see the Father and the Son working together for our salvation. The teaching is that in the triumph of Christ over the devil, God invites us to cease desiring power over others and turn our attention to self-mastery. Learning comes from watching.

12.2 ELIMINATION

It is the belief of mankind that we shall all live forever. This is not a doctrine of Christianity alone. It belongs to the human race. You may find nations so rude that they live houseless, in caverns of the earth; nations that have no letters, not knowing the use of bows and arrows, fire, or even clothes; but no nation without a belief in immortal life. The form of that belief is often grotesque and absurd; the mode of proof ridiculous; the expectations of what the future* life is to be are often childish and silly. But notwithstanding all that, the fact still remains, the belief that the soul of a man never dies.

How did mankind come by this opinion? "By a miraculous revelation," says one. But according to the common theory of miraculous revelations, the race could not have obtained it in this way, for according to that theory the heathen had no such revelations; yet we find this doctrine the settled belief of the whole heathen world. The Greeks and Romans believed it long before Christ; the Chaldees, with no pretence to miraculous inspiration, taught the idea of immortality; while the Jews, spite of their alleged revelations, rested only in the dim sentiment thereof.

It was not arrived at by reasoning. It requires a good deal of hard thinking to reason out and prove this matter. Yet you find this belief among nations not capable as yet of that art of thinking and to that degree, nations who never tried to prove it, and yet believe it as

confidently as we. The human race did not sit down and think it out; never waited till they could prove it by logic and metaphysics; did not delay their belief till a miraculous revelation came to confirm it. It came to mankind by intuition; by instinctive belief, the belief which comes unavoidably from the nature of man. In this same way came the belief in God; the love of man; the sentiment of justice. Men could see, and knew they could see, before they proved it; before they had theories of vision; without waiting for a miraculous revelation to come and tell them they had eyes, and might see if they would look. Some faculties of the body act spontaneously at first—so others of the spirit.

Immortality is a fact of man's nature, so it is a part of the universe, just as the sun is a fact in the heavens and a part of the universe. Both are writings from God's hand; each therefore a revelation from Him, and of Him; only not miraculous, but natural, regular, normal. Yet each is just as much a revelation from Him as if the great Soul of all had spoken in English speech to one of us and said, "There is a sun there in the heavens, and thou shalt live for ever." Yes, the fact is more certain than such speech would make it, for this fact speaks always — a perpetual revelation and no words can make it more certain.

But there are men who doubt of immortality. They say they are conscious of the want, not of the fact. They need a proof. The exception here proves the rule. You do not doubt your personal and conscious existence now; you ask no proof of that ; you would laugh at me should I try to convince you that you are alive and self-conscious. Yet one of the leaders of modern philosophy wanted a proof of his as a basis for his science, and said,—"I am because I think." But his thought required proof as much as his being; yes, logically more, for being is the ground of thinking, not thinking of being. At this day there are sound men who deny the existence of this outward world, declaring it only a dream-world. This ground they say, and yonder sun have been but in fancy, like the sun and ground you perchance dreamed of last night whose being was only a being-dreamed. These are exceptional men, and help prove the common rule, that man trusts his senses and believes an outward world. Yet such are more common amongst philosophers than men who

doubt of their immortal life. You cannot easily reason those men out of their philosophy and into their senses, nor by your own philosophy perhaps convince them that there is an outward world.

There are a great many things true which no man as yet can prove true; some things so true that nothing can make them plainer, or more plainly true. I think it is so with this doctrine, and therefore, for myself, ask no argument. With my views of man, of God, of the relation between the two, I want no proof, satisfied with my own consciousness of immortality. Yet there are arguments Which are fair, logical, just, which satisfy the mind, and may, perhaps, help persuade some men who doubt, if such men there are amongst you. I think that immortality is a fact of consciousness; a fact given in the constitution of man: therefore a matter of sentiment. But it requires thought to pick it out from amongst the other facts of consciousness. Though at first merely a feeling, a matter of sentiment, on examination it becomes an idea—a matter of thought. It will bear being looked at in the sharpest and driest light of logic. Truth never flinches before reason. It is so with our consciousness of God; that is an ontological fact, a fact given in the nature of man. At first it is a feeling, a matter of sentiment. By thought we abstract this fact from other facts; we find an idea of God. That is a matter of philosophy, and the analyzing mind legitimates the idea, and at length demonstrates the existence of God, which we first learned without analysis, and by intuition. A great deal has been written to prove the existence of God, and that by the ablest men; yet I cannot believe that any one was ever reasoned directly into a belief in God, by all those able men, nor directly out of it by all the sceptics and scoffers. Indirectly such works affect men, change their philosophy and modes of thought, and so help them to one or the other conclusion.

The idea of immortality, like the idea of God, in a certain sense, is born in us, and fast as we come to consciousness of ourselves we come to consciousness of God, and of ourselves as immortal. The higher we advance in wisdom, goodness, piety, the larger place do God and immortality hold in our experience and inward life. I think that is the regular and natural process of a man's development. Doubt of either

seems to me an exception, an irregularity. Causes that remove the doubt must be general more than special.

However, in order to have a basis of thought and reasoning, as well as of intuition and reason, let me mention some of the arguments for everlasting life.

II. The next argument is drawn from the nature of man.

1. All men desire to be immortal: This desire is instinctive, natural, universal. In God's world such a desire implies the satisfaction thereof equally natural and universal. It cannot be that God has given man this universal desire of immortality, this belief in it, and yet made it all a mockery. Man loves truth; tells it; rests only in it; how much more God who is the trueness of truth. Bodily senses imply their objects—the eye light, the ear sound; the touch, the taste, the smell, things relative thereto. Spiritual senses likewise foretell their object,—are silent prophecies of endless life. The love of justice, beauty, truth, of man and God, points to realities unseen as yet. We are ever hungering after noblest things, and what I we feed on makes us hunger more. The senses are satisfied, but the soul never.

2. Then, too, while this composite body unavoidably decays, this simple soul which is my life decays not, Reason, the affections, all the powers that make the man decay not. True, the organs by which they act become impaired. But there is no cause for thinking that love, conscience, reason, will ever become weaker in man; but cause for thinking that all these continually become stronger. Was the mind of Newton gone when his frame, long over-tasked, refused its wonted work?

3. Here on earth, everything in its place and time matures. The acorn and the chestnut, things natural to this climate, ripen every year. A longer season would make them no better nor bigger. It is so with our body—that, under proper conditions, becomes mature. It is so with all the things of earth. But man is not fully grown as the acorn and the chestnut; never gets mature. Take the best man and the greatest—all his faculties are not

developed, fully grown and matured. He is not complete in the qualities of a man; nay, often half his qualities lie all unused. Shall we conclude these are never to obtain I development and do their "work? The analogy of nature tells us that man, the new-born plant, is but removed by death to another soil, where he shall grow complete and become mature.

4. Then, too, each other thing under its proper conditions not only ripens but is perfect also after its kind. Each clover-seed is perfect as a star. Every lion, as a general rule, is a common representation of all lion hood; the ideal of his race made real in him, a thousand years of life would not make him more. But where is the Adamidis man; the type and representative of his race, who makes actual its idea? Even Jesus bids you not call him good no man has all the manhood of mankind. Yes, there are rudiments of greatness in us all, but abortive, incomplete, and stopped in embryo. Now all these elements of manhood point as directly to another state as the unfinished walls of yonder rising church intimate that the work is not complete, that the artist here intends a roof, a window there, here a tower, and over all a heaven-piercing spire. All men are abortions, our failure pointing to the real success. Nay, we are all waiting to be born, our whole nature looking to another world, and dimly presaging what that world shall be. Death, however we misname him, seasonable or out of time, is the birth-angel, that alone.

5. Besides, the presence of injustice, of wrong, points the same way. The fact that one man goes out of this life in childhood, in manhood, at any time before the natural measure of his days is full; the fact that any one is by circumstances made wretched; that he is hindered from his proper growth and has not here his natural due—all intimates to me his future life. I know that God is just.

III. A third argument is drawn from the nature of God. He, as the infinite, the unconditioned, the absolute, is all-powerful, all-wise, all-good. Therefore he must wish the best of all possible things; must know the best of all possible things; must will the best of all possible things, and so bring it to pass. Life is a possible thing; eternal life is possible. Neither implies a contradiction; yes, to me they seem necessary, more than

possible. Now, then, as life, serene. and happy life, is better than non-existence, so immortality is better than perpetual death. God must know that, wish that, will that, and so bring that about. Man, therefore, must be immortal. This argument is brief indeed, but I see not how it can be withstood.

There are many who never attained their true stature here, yet without blameworthiness of theirs ; men cheated of their growth. Many a Milton walks on his silent way, and goes down at last, not singing and unsung. How many a possible Newton or Descartes has dug the sewers of a city, and dies, giving no sign of the wealthy soul he bore!

"Chill penury repressed his noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul."

12.3 FAMILIAR FUNCTIONS

If the inhabitants of this town were to engage a scientific man to come and dwell amongst you, as Superintendent of Agriculture, and teach you practical farming, it is plain what purpose you would set before him, for which he must point out the way and furnish the scientific means. You would say, "Show us how to obtain, continually, the richest crops; of the most valuable quality; in quantity, the greatest; with the least labour, in the shortest time. Show us the means to that end."

It is plain what you would expect of him. He must understand his business thoroughly; farming as a science—the philosophy of the thing—teaching by ideas, and showing the reason of the matter; farming, likewise, as an art—the practice of the thing—the application of his science to your soil—demonstrating by fact the truth of his words, and thus proving the expediency of his thought.

Of course he ought to know the soil and climate of the special place; what crops best suit the particular circumstances. He must become familiar with the prevalent mode of farming in the town and neighbourhood, and know it's good and ill. He should understand the

ancestral prejudices he has to encounter, which oppose his science and his art. It would be well for him to know the history of agriculture—general of the world, and special of this place—understanding what experiments have been already tried with profit, what with failure. He should keep his eye open to the agriculture of mankind; ever on the look-out for new animals, plants, roots, seeds, scions, and better varieties of the old stock; for richer fertilizers of the soil—no islands of guano too remote for him to think upon; for superior modes of tillage; and more effective tools, whereby man could do more human work with less human toil. He would naturally confer with other farmers about him and all round the world, men of science or of practice, analyzing soils, enriching farms, greatening the crops. He would stimulate his townsmen to think about their work, and to create new use and new beauty on their estates. He need not be very anxious that all should think just as their fathers had done, or plough and shovel with instruments of the old pattern.

But what if he was ignorant and knew no more than others about him, and was yet called "the Honourable Agricultural Superintendent," "the Reverend Professor of Farming," and had been "ordained with ancient ceremonies!" It is plain he could not teach what he did not know. If he knew only the theory, not also the practice, he would be only a half teacher.

Man is a spirit, organized in matter. In our being is f one element, which connects us consciously with God, the Cause and Providence of the universe, imminent in all and yet transcending all. It is an essential faculty of human nature, belonging to the ontology of man, and gives indications of its presence in all men above the rank of the idiot; the rudiments appear even in him. It acts in all stages of human history; in the mere wild-man, where it appears in only its instinctive form; in the savage, who I has no conception of a God, only of the Divine in nature, a mighty force, differing in kind from matter and from man; in the barbarian, who makes concrete Deities out of plants, and animals, and elements, and men; and in the most enlightened philosophers who compose the Academies of Science at Paris or Berlin.

History and philosophy alike show that this is the master-element in man—designed for a high place in the administration of his affairs; for as a man is spirit as well as body, immortal not less than meant for time, and has a personal consciousness of his relation to the Cause and Providence of all, so it is obviously needful that this element which deals with eternity and God, should live upon the strongest and deepest root in human nature. The fact is plain; the meaning and the purpose not hard to see: it has only powers proportionate to its work.

But hitherto the religious element has been the tyrant over all the other faculties of man. None has made such great mistakes, run to such excesses, been accompanied with such cruelty, and caused such widespread desolation. All human development is accomplished through the help of experiments which fail. What errors do men make in their agriculture and mechanic arts ; how many unsuccessful attempts before they produce a loom, or an axe, simplest of tools! What mistakes in organizing the family! what errors in forming the state ! And even now how much suffering comes from the false political doctrines men adhere to! Look at the countries which are ruined by the bad governments established therein. Asia Minor was once the world's garden, now it is laid waste : what cities have perished there; what kingdoms gone to the ground; for a thousand years its soil has hardly borne a single great man—conspicuous for art, letters, science, commerce, or aught save cruelty in war, and rapacity in peace! In the land whence the ideas which now make green the world once went so gladly forth, camels and asses seem the only undegenerated production. Yet it once teemed with cities, full of wholesome life. But all these mistakes are slight compared with the wanderings of the religious faculty in its historical progress. Consider the human sacrifices, the mutilations of the body, or the spirit, which have been regarded as the highest acts of homage to God. What is the Russian's subjection to a Czar compared to a Christian's worship of a conception of God who creates millions of millions of men only for the pleasure of squelching them down in bottomless and eternal hell ! In the Crimea, just now, in a single night, the allies burned up a year's provisions for three-and-thirty thousand men—the bread of all

Springfield and Worcester for a twelve-month; in fourteen months a quarter of a million Russian soldiers have perished; Moravia is yet black with the desolations of the 'Thirty Years' war, whose last battle was fought more than two hundred years ago. But what is all the waste of war, the destruction of property, the butchery of men; what are all the abominations of slavery, compared to the eternal torment of a single soul! Yet it is the common belief of Christendom that not one man, but millions of millions of men, are, with unmitigated agony, to be trod forever under the fiery foot of God and the Devil, partners in this Dance of the Second Death which never ends, and treads down a majority of all that are!

The function of a sectarian Priest is to minister to the perversion of this faculty, to perpetuate the error—sometimes he knows it, oftenest he knows it not, but is one of the tools wherewith mankind makes the faulty experiment. But the teacher of a true form of religion is to take this most powerful element, and direct it to its normal work; is to use this force in promoting the general development and elevation of mankind; to husband the periodical inundation of the Amazon, and therewith fertilize whole tropic realms, making the earth bring forth abundantly, not for seven years only, but for seventy times seven, yea, for ever. In that soil which hitherto has borne such flowers as the pyramids, temples, and churches of the world, with peaceful virtues in many a realm, such weeds as Popery and the false doctrines of the popular theology of Christendom, he is to rear the fairest and most useful plants of humanity, health, wisdom, justice, benevolence, piety, whole harvests of welfare for mankind.

It is an amazing spectacle! Modern science has shown that the theological astronomy, geology, and geography are mixed with whims, which overlay their facts; that the theological history is false in its chief particulars, relating to the origin and development of mankind; that its meta-physics are often absurd; its chief premises false; that the whole tree is of gradual growth; and still men have the hardihood to pretend it is all divine, all true, and that every truth in the science and morals of our times, nay, any piety and benevolence in human consciousness, has come

from the miraculous revelation, and this alone I Truly it is a teacher's duty to expose this claim, so groundless, so wicked, so absurd, and refer men to the perpetual revelation from God, in the facts of his world of matter and of man.

So much for the general basis on which the popular theology of Christendom is said to rest, a basis of fancy. Next, a word of some of its erroneous doctrines.

There are five doctrines common to the theology of Christendom, namely—the false idea of God, as imperfect in power, wisdom, justice, benevolence, and holiness; the false idea of man, as fallen, depraved, and by nature lost; the false idea of the relation between God and man—a relation of perpetual antagonism, man naturally hating God, and God hating "fallen" and "depraved" man; the false idea of inspiration, that it comes only by a miracle on God's part, not by normal action on man's; and the false idea of salvation, that it is from the "wrath of God," who is to a consuming fire "breaking out against "poor human nature," by the "atoning blood of Christ," that is, by the death of Jesus of Nazareth, which appeased the "wrath of God;" and on condition of belief in this popular theology, especially of these five false ideas.

This destruction and denial is always a painful work. It is the misfortune of the times that now so much of it must needs be done, but the other part will be full of delight.

2. Of the Positive and constructant work in theology.

In general he has to show that theology is a human science, whereof piety is the primordial sentiment, and morality the act. A religious life is the practice whereof a true theology is the science. Here, as elsewhere, man is master, and learns by his own experiment; no man is as great as mankind, no scheme of theology to be accepted as finality; the past is subject to revision by the present, which must also give an account of itself to the future. A real theology must be made up from facts of

consciousness and observation, and like all science is capable of demonstration.

In special the teacher must set forth the great positive doctrines of a scientific theology, which is founded on these facts. To follow the five-fold division above referred to, he is to teach the philosophic idea of God, of man, of the relation between the two, of inspiration, and of salvation.

Man's immortality must be dwelt upon. This can be shown not by things outside of us, not at all by quoting stories which cannot be true, but by the development of facts given instinctively in the consciousness of all. How easy it is to show that an immortality of blessedness awaits the race and each individual thereof, wherefrom not even the wickedest of men shall ultimately be cut off. Surely the Infinite God must have made man so that humanity contains all the forces needful for the perfect realization of the ideal thereof.

The philosophic idea of man gathered up from common and notorious facts, how different is from the "poor human nature "we read of in theological books, and which so many ministers whine over in sermon and in prayer!

There are no types in human affairs to represent the relation of the Infinite God to man. The words of tenders and most purely affectional human intimacy best convey the idea; so let us call God our Father and our Mother too.

How different is this from the theological idea of the relation between God and man—the imperfect God and the depraved man—the antagonistic relation!

Of the philosophic idea of inspiration. The Infinite God is everywhere in the world of matter; its existence is a sign of Him, for infinite power is the background and condition of these particles of dust. Here is matter—take one step and there is God, it is not possible without him—the

derived depending on the Original. Matter is manifest to the senses, God to the spirit. He acts where He is, not anywhere an idle God. The powers of matter are but modes of God's activity; Nature lives in Him—without His continual active presence therein Nature was not. He

"Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glowes in the stars, and blossoms in the trees;
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent"

" To him no high, no low, no great, no small ;
He fills, He bounds, connects and equals all."

He is equally present in the world of man, the world of spirit: it also depends on Him; He lives in it, and it in Him. He is also active therein. God is nowhere idle. Human life as much depends on Him as the life of Nature. Just so far as any human faculty acts after its normal mode, it is inspired. Truth of thought is the test of intellectual inspiration; justice, of moral ; love, of affections! ; holiness, self reliant integrity, of religions inspiration.

All the world of matter is subject to law—constant modes of operation of the forces thereof, which of necessity are always kept. So there are modes of operation for the human spirit, whereto obedience is partly of free will; for while matter is wholly bound, man is partially free. When we act in obedience to these ideal laws, then God works with them, through them, in them ; we are inspired by him. So inspiration is not a transient fact, exceptional in the history of mankind, and depending on the arbitrary caprice of an imperfect Deity, but constant, instancial, and resulting from the laws which the Infinite God enacts in the constitution of man; its quality ever the same, its degree varying only with the original genius of each person, and the faithful use thereof. We grow and live thereon as the tree grows by the vegetative power residing in itself, and in the earth, the water, the air, and sun. Miraculous inspiration exists only as a dream, or a cheat; a fancy of the self-deceived, or a pretence of the deceivers. Normal inspiration is not limited to theological or religious men, but is the common heritage of all. The housewife in her kitchen, the

smith in his shop, the philosopher, poet, statesman, trader, all may alike communicate with God, and receive liberal supply. Inspiration of this sort belongs to the nature of man's spirit, which depends on Infinite God as the flesh on finite matter; one may have much, another little, and the use and form thereof will be most exceedingly unlike—as vegetation differs in the forest, field, and garden, but all comes from the same elemental air and water, earth and sun. It is not limited to one age, but is diffused to all, its amount continually increasing with the higher forms of human life.

How much this differs from the theological idea of inspiration—miraculous, unnatural, and often "revealing" things absurd and monstrous!

Of the philosophic idea of salvation. To realize the ideal of human nature, that is, salvation ; to develop the body into its natural strength, health, and beauty; to educate the spirit, all its faculties at normal work, harmoniously acting together, all men attaining their natural discipline, development, and delight! Part of it we look for in the next world, and for that rely upon the infinite perfection of God; part of it we toil for here, and shall achieve it here. To do a man's best, to try to do his best, that is to be " acceptable to God," to " make our peace with Him," who is of all preserver and defence. There is no " wrath of God " to be saved from ; no " vicarious atonement " to be saved by; no miracle is wrought by God; He asks only normal service of man, and as He is infinitely perfect, so must He have arranged all things, that all shall work for good at last, mankind be saved, and no son of perdition e'er be lost. Suffering there is—there will be. I, at least, cannot show why it was needful in the world's great plan, nor see the steps by which this suffering will end, nor always see the special purpose that it serves—but with the certainty of such a God, the ultimate salvation of all is itself made sure.

How different is all this from the theological idea of salvation—"hard to be won, and only by a few!"

How much we need a theology like this—a natural theology, scientifically derived from the world of matter and of man, the product of religious feeling and philosophic thought! Such ideas of God, of man, of the relation between the two; of inspiration, of salvation—it is what mankind longs for, as painters long for artistic loveliness, and scholars for scientific truth; yea, as hungry men long for their daily bread. The philosopher wants a theology as comprehensive as his science—a God with wisdom and with power immanent in all the universe, and yet transcending that. The philanthropist wants it not less, a God who loves all men. Yea, men and women all throughout the land desire a theology like this, which shall legitimate the instinctive emotions of reverence, and love, and trust in God, that to their spirits, careful and troubled about many things, shall give the comfort and the hope and peace for which they sigh ! How much doubt there is in all the churches which the minister cannot appease; how much hunger he can never still, because he offers only that old barbaric theology which suited the rudeness of a savage age, and is rejected by the enlightened consciousness of this! How much truth is there outside of all the sects—how much justice and benevolence, and noblest piety, which they cannot bring in, because this popular theology, like a destroying angel armed with a flaming fiery sword, struts evermore before the church's gate, barring men off from beneath the Tree of Life, anxious to hew off the head of lofty men, and gash and frighten all such as be of gentle, holy heart.

So much for the teacher's relation to ideas, the instrument he is to work withal, and waken the religious feelings into life.

II. Of the teacher of religion in his relation to the feelings connected with religion.

With theological ideas of this scientific stamp it is easy to rouse the religious feelings, the great master emotions, and then rear up that whole brood of beautiful affections, whose nest such an idea of God broods over and warms to life. If God be preached to men as endowed with infinite perfection, He at once is felt as the object of desire for every spiritual faculty; to the mind, Infinite Wisdom—the author of all truth

and beauty; to the conscience, Infinite Justice—the Creator of all right; to the affections, Infinite Love—the Father and Mother of all things which are; to the soul, Infinite Holiness—absolute fidelity. So here is presented to men the Infinite God—perfectly powerful, wise, just, loving, and holy, self-subsistent, self-reliant. Is any one an atheist to such a God? No, not one! Who can fail to love Him? the philosopher, who throughout all the world seeks truth, the science of things? the poet and the artist, who hunt the world of things and thoughts all through for shapes and images of beauty? the moralist, who asks for ideal justice and rejoices to find it imperative in Nature and in man? the philanthropist, who would fold to his great heart pirates and murderers, and bless the abandoned harlot of the street, yea, have mercy on the "Christian" stealer of men, in Boston? the sentimentalist of piety, who loves devotion for itself, who would only lie low before the Divine as an anemone beneath the sky, and with no dissembling thought, in joyous prayer would mix and lose his personal being in mystic communion with the Infinite consciousness of God? Surely all these in the Infinite God will find more than the object which elsewhere they vainly seek. And the great mass of men and women, in our cares and sorrows, in our daily joys and not infrequent sins, we all cry out for the infinite perfection of God, and bless the feet of such a bring the idea upon their tongues revealing words peace! Love of God springs up at once, and strongly grows, what tranquillity follows, what youthful play of all the faculties at first, at length, what manly work! What joyous and long-continued delight in God! We long then keep all the commandments He writes in Nature and man. When it is God's voice that speaks, how reverently shall we all listen for each oracle. How shall I respect my own body when I know it is a human Sinai, where more than ten commandments are given—writ on tables which no angry Moses ever breaks, kept eternally in the universe, which is the Ark of God's covenant, holding also the branch that buds for ever, and the memorial-bread of many a finished pilgrimage. From this mountain God never withdraws, no thundering trumpets forbid approach, but the Father's voice therein for ever speaks. Alas! how shall I reverence this spiritual essence which I call myself, where instinct and reflection for ever preach their Sermon on the Mount, full of beatitudes for whoso hears and heeds! How readily will all the generous feelings towards men

spring up when such a Sun of Righteousness shines down from heaven with natural inspiration in her beams; not New England grass grows readier beneath the skies of June. How dutiful becomes instinctive desire; how desirable is conscious duty then! Is the way hard and steep to climb? the difficulty is lessened at the thought of God, and full of noblest aspirations, heartiest trust, the brave man sallies forth, victory perching on his banner.

What consolation will such ideas afford men in their sorrows! Let me know that Infinite Wisdom planned all this world, a causal Providence, and perfect Love inspired the plan ; that it will all turn out triumphant at the last—not a soul lost in the eternal march, no suffering wasted, not a tear-drop without its compensation, not a sin but shall be overruled for good at last; that all has been foreseen and all provided for, and mankind furnished with powers quite adequate to achieve the end, for all, for each what a new motive have I for active toil! yea, what consolation in the worst defeat! I can gird my loins with strength, and go forth to any work; or defeated, wounded, conquered, I can fold my arms in triumph still, looking to the eternal victory.

The teacher of religion is with men in their joy and in their sorrow. Old age and youth pass under his eye; he is the patron saint of the crutch and the cradle, and with such ideas—the grandest weapon of this age—he can excite such pious emotions in the maiden and the youth as shall make all their life a glorious day, full of manly and womanly work, full of human victory; and in the experienced heart of age he can kindle such a flame of hope, and trust, and love, as shall adorn the evening with warm and tranquil glories—saffron and purple, green and gold—all round the peaceful sky, and draw down the sweet influence of heaven into that victorious consciousness, and while his mortal years become like the morning star, paling and waning its ineffectual fire, the immortal shall advance to all the triumphs of eternal day.

Hitherto priests and ministers of all forms of religion—I blame them not—have sought to waken emotions, mostly of fear before the God of their fancy, a dark and dreadful God. With such ideas of Him, they had

no more which they could do. So the popular religion has been starved with fear, and with malignant emotions even worse. It is under this dreadful whip that men have builded up those pyramids, and mosques, and temples, and cathedrals, and formed those great institutions which outlast empires. Such things belong to the beginning of our pilgrimage. When man was a child he thought as a child. Now shall he put childish things away.

So much for the teacher's relation to the feelings connected with religion.

III. Of the teacher of religion in relation to acts of morality. Religion begins in feeling, the emotional germ; it goes on to thought, the intellectual blade, budding, leafing, and flowering forth prophetic ; it becomes an act, a deed, the moral fruit — full of bread of life for to-day, full of seeds of life for the unbounded future. Morality is keeping the natural laws written of God in the constitution of matter and of man. These we first feel by our instinctive emotions, and next know by the calculation of reflective thought, and at last practise by the will, making the ideal of emotion and of thought the actual of practice in daily life. The whole great field of morals belongs to the jurisdiction of the teacher of religion.

1. He must show the practical relation of man to the world of matter, the basis of all our endeavours. Here he must set forth the duty of industry, of thrift, of temperance—the normal use of what Nature affords, or industry and thrift provides. He is to learn the natural rule of conduct by studying the constitution of matter, the constitution of man, and then apply this law of God to human life. He can show what use man should make of his mastery over the material world, the function of property, the product of industry, in the development of the individual and the race, and explain the services which vassal matter may render to imperial man. He is to point out the conditions on which we depend for health, strength, long life, and beauty—all the perfections of the body—the way to live so as to keep a sound spirit in sound flesh—handsome and strong. These things belong to what may be called the material basis of morals.

2. He must also teach the true human morals, the rule of conduct which should govern man in regulating his own personal affairs, and in his dealings with mankind. Here, too, from the constitution of human nature he is to unfold the rule of conduct, the eternal right, and make the application thereof to all the forms of collective and of individual human life.

Here come the great morals which we call politics—the relation of state with state, and of the government with the people. This comes directly under the cognizance of the teacher of religion, especially in this country, where all the people are the government, and where such an intense interest is felt in political affairs, and so many take an active part in the practical business of making and administering the laws. If politicians commonly aim to provide for their own party, or at best only for their own nation, he must consult for the eternal right, which is the joint good of all the people, yea, of mankind also. They derive their rule of conduct from the expediency of to-day, nay, often only from the whim of the moment, he his from the justice of eternity; they consult only about measures, and defer to statutes of the realm, compacts, compromises, and the constitution of the land, he communes with principles, and defers only to the laws of God, the constitution of the universe.

He must preach on politics, not as the representative of a party but of mankind, and report not the mean counsels of a political economy, which consults for one party or one nation, for one day alone, but declare the sublime oracles of political morality, which looks to the welfare of all parties, all nations, and throughout all time. He must know no race but the human, no class but men and women, no ultimate lawgiver but God, whose statute book is the world of matter and the world of men—justice the sole finality.

Then come the morals of society. Here the teacher must look at the dealings of men in their relations of industry and of charity, and set forth the mutual duty of the strong and the weak, the employer and the employed, the educated and the ignorant, the many and the few. Natural religion must be applied to life in all departments of industrial activity;

farming, manufacturing, buying and selling, must all be conducted on the principles of the Christian religion, that is, of natural justice. The religious word must become religious flesh—great, wide, deep, universal religious life. The deceit and fraud of all kinds of business he must rebuke, and show the better way, deriving the rule of conduct from human nature itself.

I know there are men, yea, ministers, who think that "Christianity" has no more to do with "business" than with politics. It must not be applied to the liquor trade, or the money trade, or the slave trade, or to any of the practical dealings of man with man. It is not "works" but "faith" which "save" the soul. So the minister who preaches a "gospel" which has nothing to do with politics, preaches also a gospel which has nothing to do with buying and selling, with honesty and dishonesty, with any actual concern of practical life. Leave them and pass them by, not without blame, but yet with pity too. Look at the social life of man—see what waste of toil and the material it wins; here suffering from unearned excess, there from want not merited; here degradation from idleness, there from long-continued and unremitting drudgery. See the vices, the crimes, which come from the evil conditions in which we are born and bred! These things are not always' to continue. Defects in our social machinery are as much capable of a remedy as in our mills for corn or cotton. It is for the minister to make ready the materials with which better forms of society shall one day be made. If possible, he is to prepare the idea thereof; nay, to organize it if he can. What a service will the man render to humanity who shall improve the mechanism of society, as Fulton and Watt the mechanism of the shops, and organize men into a community, as they matter into mills. Yet it is all possible, and it is something to see the possibility.

Then come the morals of the family. Here are the domestic relations of man and woman—lover and beloved, husband and wife; of parent and child, of relatives, friends, members of the same household. Here, too, the teacher is to learn the rule of conduct from human nature itself and teach a real morality—applying religious emotions and theological ideas to domestic life. The family requires amendment not less than the

community and state. There is an ill-concealed distrust of our present domestic relations, a scepticism much more profound than meets the ear or careless eye. The community is uneasy, yet knows not what to do. See, on the one hand, the great amount of unnatural celibacy, continually increasing; and on the other, the odious vice which so mars soul and body in an earthly hell. The two extremes lie plain before the thoughtful man, both unnatural, and one most wicked and brutal. Besides, the increase of divorces, the alteration of laws so as to facilitate the separation of man and wife, not for one offence alone, but for any which is a breach of wedlock, the fact that women so often seek divorce from their husbands—for drunkenness and other analogous causes—all show that a silent revolution is taking place in the old ideas of the family. Future good will doubtless come of this, but present evil and licentiousness is also to be looked for before we attain the normal state. Many European novels which are characteristic of this age bring to light the steps of this revolution.

The old theology subordinates woman to man. In the tenth commandment she is part of her husband's property, and so, for his sake, must not be "coveted." In the "divine" schedule of property she is put between the house and the man-slave ; not so valuable as the real estate, but first in the inventory of chattels personal. Natural religion will change all this. When woman is regarded as the equal of man, and the family is based on that idea, there will follow a revolution of which no one, as yet, knows the peaceful, blessed consequence not only to the family, but the community and the state.

Most important of all come the morals of the individual. The teacher of religion must seek to make all men noble. He is not to make any one after the likeness of another—in the image of Beecher or Channing, Calvin, Luther, Peter, Paul or Jesus, Moses or Mohammed, but to quicken, to guide, and help each man gain the highest form of human nature that he is capable of attaining to; to help each become a man, feeling, thinking, willing, living on his own account, faithful to his special individuality of soul. I wish men understood this, that their individuality is as sacred before God as that of Jesus or of Moses; and

you are no more to sacrifice your manhood to them than they theirs to you. Respect for your manhood or womanhood, how small soever your gifts may be, is the first of all duties. As I defend my body against all outward attacks, and keep whole my limbs, so must I cherish the integrity of my spirit, take no man's mind or conscience, heart or soul, for my master—the helpful all for helps, for despots none. I am more important to myself than Moses, Jesus, all men, can be to me. Holiness, the fidelity to my own consciousness, is the first of manly and womanly duties; that kept, all others follow sure.

With such feelings of love to God, such ideas of God, of man, of their relation, of inspiration, of salvation—with such actions, it is easy to see what form a free church will take. It will be an assembly of men seeking to help each other in their religious growth and development, wakening feelings of piety, attaining ideas of theology, doing deeds of morality, living a great, manly, religious life; attempting, also, to help the religious development of mankind. There must be no fetter on the free spirit of man. Let all men be welcome here — the believer and the unbeliever, the Calvinist with his absurd trinity of imperfect Godheads, the atheist with his absurdity of denial; diverse in creed, we are all brothers in humanity. Of course you will have such sacraments of help as shall prove helpful. To me, the ordinances of religion are piety and morality; others ask bread, and wine, and water; yet others, a hundred other things. Let each walk the human road, and take what crutch of support, what staff of ornament he will.

In these three departments the teacher of religion is to show the ideal of human conduct, derived from the constitution of man, by the help of the past and the present; and then point out the means which lead to such an end, persuading men to keep their nature's law, and to achieve its purpose. Nay, he must go before them with his life, and demonstrate by his character, his fact of life, what he sets forth as theory thereof; he cannot teach what he does not know. He only leads who goes before. A good farm is the best argument for good farming. A mean man can teach nobleness only as the frost makes fire. A low man in a pulpit—ignoble, lazy, bigoted, selfish, vulgar—what a curse he is to any town; an

incubus, a nightmare, pressing the slumberous church! A lofty man, large minded, well trained, with a great conscience, a wide, rich heart, and above all things a great pious soul, who instinctively loves God with all his might—what a blessing to any town is a manly and womanly minister like that! Let him preach the absolute religion, the service of God by the normal use, discipline, development, and delight of every limb of the body, every faculty of the spirit, and all the powers we possess over matter and man ; let him set forth the five great ideas of a scientific theology, and what an affluence of good will rain down from him!

What a field is before the religious teacher, what work to be done, what opportunities to do it all I Here is a false theology to be destroyed; but so destroyed that even every good brick or nail shall be kept safe; nay, the old rubbish is to be shot into the deep to make firm land whereon to erect anew; out of the good of the past and present a scientific theology, with many a blessed institution, is to be builded up. Great vices are to be corrected—war between state and state; oppression of the government over the people; there is the slave to be set free—bound not less in the chain of "Christian theology" than with the constitution and the law. The American church is the great blood-hound which watches the plantations of the South, baying against freedom with most terrific howl. "Christian theology" never breaks a fetter, while Christian religion will set all men free ! Woman is to be treated as the equivalent of man, with the same natural, essential, equal, and unalienable rights; here is a reform which at once affects one half the human race, and then the other half. Here is drunkenness to be abolished; it is to the Free States what slavery is to the South. Poverty must be got rid of, and ignorance overcome; covetousness, fraud, violence, all the manifold forms of crime, vices of passion, the worser vices of calculation, these are the foes which he must face, rout, overcome. What noble institutions shall he help humanity build up!

The great obstacle in the way of true religion is the false ideas of the popular theology. It has oversloughed human life, has checked and drowned to death full many handsome excellence, and gendered the most noisome weeds. So have I seen a little dainty meadow, full of fair, sweet

grass, where New England's water-nymph, the Arethusa, came in June—fresh as the morning star, itself the day-star of a summer on high—yea, many a blessed little flower bloomed out. But a butcher and a leather-dresser built beside the stream which fed the nymph, dis gorging therein a flood of pestilence, and soon in place of Arethusa and her fair-faced sister flowers, huge weeds came up from the rank slime, and flaunted their vulgar, ugly dresses all the summer long, and went to seed peopling the spot with worse than barrenness!

Check your Progress 1

Note: Use the space given bellow

1. Discuss the Elimination of theological discourse.

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2. How do you know about the Familiar functions?

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12.4 IMPROPER FUNCTIONS

No man has so admirable an opportunity as the minister to communicate his best thoughts to the public. The politician has his place in the Senate, and speaks twice or thrice in a session, on the external interests of men, chiefly busying himself about measures of political economy, and seldom thinking it decorous or "statesmanlike" to appeal to principles of right, or address any faculty deeper than the understanding, or appeal to aught nobler than selfishness. The reformer, the philanthropist, finds it difficult to gather an audience; they come reluctantly, at rare intervals of

business or pleasure. But every Sunday custom tolls the bell of time. In the ruts of ancient usage men ride to the meeting-house, seat them in venerable pews, while the holiest associations of time and place calm and pacify their spirit, else often careful and troubled about man things, and all are ready for the teacher of religion to address their deepest and their highest powers. Before him lies the Bible—an Old Testament, full of prophets and rich in psalm and history; a New Testament, crowded with apostles and martyrs, and in the midst thereof stands that great Hebrew peasant, lifting up such a magnificent and manly face. The very hymn the people sing is old and rich with holy memories; the pious breath of father, mother, sister, or perhaps some one more tenderly beloved, is immanent therein; and the tune itself comes like the soft wind of summer which hangs over a pond full of lilies, and then wafts their fragrance to all the little town. Once every week, nay, twice a Sunday, his self-gathered audience come to listen and to learn, expecting to be made ashamed of every meanness, vanity, and sin; asking for rebuke, and coveting to be lifted up towards the measure of a perfect man. It is of the loftiest themes he is to treat. Beside all this, the most tender confidence is reposed in him—the secrets of business, the joy of moral worth, the grief of wickedness, the privacy of man's and woman's love, and the heart's bitterness which else may no man know, often are made known to him. He joins the hands of maidens and lovers, teaching them how to marry each other; he watches over the little children, and in sickness and in sorrow is asked "to soothe, and heal, and bless." Prophets and apostles sought such avenues to men, for him they are already made. Surely if a man, in such a place, speaking Sunday by Sunday, year out, year in, makes no mark, he must be a fool!

There was never such an opportunity for a great man to do a great constructive work in religion as here and now. How rich the people are!—in all needed things, I mean—and so not forced to starve their soul that life may flutter round the flesh: how intelligent they are! no nation comes near us in this. The ablest mind finds whole audiences tall enough to reach up and take his greatest, fairest thought. There is unbounded freedom in the North; no law forbids thought, or speech, or normal religious life. How well educated the women are! A man, with all the

advantages of these times—rapidity of motion from place to place, means of publishing his thought in print and swiftly spreading it by newspapers throughout the land, freedom to speak and act, the development of the people, their quick intelligence to appreciate and apply a truth—has far more power to bless the world religiously than the Gospels ascribe to Jesus of Nazareth with all his miracles! What was walking on the water compared to riding in a railroad car; what "speaking with tongues" to printing your thought in a wide-spread newspaper; and what all other feigned miracles to the swift contact of mind with thoughtful mind!

Close behind us are Puritans and Pilgrims, who founded New England, fathers of all the North. They died so little while ago that, lay down your ear to the ground, you may almost fancy that you hear their parting prayer, "Oh, Father, bless the seed we planted with our tears and blood. And be the people thine!" Still in our bosom burns the fathers' fire. Through all our cities sweeps on the great river of religious emotion; thereof little streams also run among the hills, fed from the same heaven of piety; yea, into all our souls descends the sweet influence of nature, and instinctively we love and trust. All these invite the scientific mind and the mechanic hand of the minister to organize this vast and wasted force into institutions which shall secure the welfare of the world. Shall we use the waters of New England hills, and not also the religious instincts of New England men? What if a new Jesus were to appear in some American Nazareth, in some Massachusetts Galilee of the Gentiles, and bear the same relation to the consciousness of this age as the other Jesus to his times, what greater opportunities with no miracle would he now possess than if invested with that fabled power to restore the wanting limb, or to bring back the dead to life!

The good word of a live minister will probably be welcomed first by some choice maiden or matron, the evening star of that Heaven which is soon to blaze with masculine glory all night long. What individuals he may raise up! What schools he may establish, and educate therein a generation of holy ones! If noble, how he may stamp his feeling and his ideas on the action of the age, and long after death will reappear—a

glorious resurrection this—in the intelligence, the literature, the philanthropy; in the temperance, and purity, and piety of the place! How many towns in America thus keep the soul of some good minister, some farmer or mechanic, lawyer or doctor—oftenest of all, of some good religious woman, long after her tomb has become undistinguishable in the common soil of graves? And how do we honour such?

"Past days, past men—but present still;
Men who could meet the hours,
And so bore fruit for every age,
And amaranthine flowers;—
Who proved that noble deeds are faith,
And living words are deeds,
And left us dreams beyond their dreams,
And higher hopes and needs."

All things betoken better times to come. There was never so grand an age as this—how swiftly moves mankind! But how much better we can do! Religious emotion once flowed into the gothic architecture of Europe, the fairest flower of human art—little blossoms of painting and sculpture, philosophy, eloquence, and poetry, all hidden, and yet kept within this great compound posy of man's history. The Catholic Church has her great composers in stone, artists in speech, and actors in marble; the Protestant its great composers in philosophy and literature, with their melody of thought, their harmony of ideas. One day there must be a church of mankind, whose composers of humanity shall think men and women into life, and build with living stones ; their painting, their sculpture, their architecture, the manhood of the individual, the virtue of the family and community; their philosophy, their eloquence and song, the happiness of the nation, the peace and good will of all the world.

It is amazing how much a single man may do for good. The transient touch of genius fertilizes the recipient soul. So in early autumn, the farmer goes forth afield, followed by his beast, bearing a few sacks of corn, and dragging an inverted harrow down the lane. All day long the farmer, the genius of the soil, scatters therein the seed, his horse

harrowing the valleys after him; at night, he looks over the acres newly sown, the corn all smoothly covered in, puts up the bars behind him, speaks kindly words to his half-conscious fellow-labourer, "A good day's work well done, old friend!" and together they go home again, the beast with ears erect and quickened pace, as mindful of his well-deserved rack. For months the farmer sees it not again; but all the autumn long the seed is putting down its roots, and putting up its happy blade. All winter through it holds its own beneath the fostering snow. How green it is in spring! and while that genius of the soil has gone to other fields and pastures new, how the winds come and toss the growing wheat, and play at wave and billow in the green and fertile field! In the harvest time what a sea of golden grain has flowed from out that spring of seed he opened and let loose! So in the Christian mythology, Gabriel's transient salutation, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured amongst women," was in full time followed by a multitude of the heavenly host; singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will to men!"

12.5 UNIQUE FUNCTION

Man has made great mistakes in his religious history. Worse than in aught beside. The enforced singleness of monk and nun, the polygamous conjunction of a master and his purchased beasts of luxury at Constantinople or Jerusalem, or at New Orleans, or at Washington; the brutish vice of ancient cities, which swallows down woman quick, into an actual pit worse than that fabled which took in the Hebrew heretics and their strange fire; the political tyranny of Asia Minor and Siberia; the drunken intemperance which reels in' Boston and New York, companion of the wealth which loves the spectacle; all this is not a worse departure from the mutual love which should conjoin one woman and one man, from natural justice, from wholesome food and drink, than the theological idea of God is a departure from the actual God, whom you meet in Nature as the Cause and Providence of all the universe, and feel in your own heart as the Father and Mother of the soul! Let not this amaze you. The strongest boy goes most astray—furthest if not oftenest. It is little things man first learns how to use—a chip of stone before an

axe of steel ; how long he rides on asses oefore he learns to yoke fire and water, and command the lightning to convey his thought!

How much this religious faculty has run to waste—rending its banks, pouring otev the dam, or turning the priest's loud clattering mill of vanity, not grinding corn for the toilsome, hungry world. Man sits on the bank, in mortars pounding his poor bread with many a groan, mourning over political oppression, the lies of great and the vanity of little men, over war and want, slavery, drunkenness, and many a vice, while the priest turns to private account this river of God, which is full of water! Will it always be so?

Once the streams of New England crept along their oozy beds, where only the water-lily lay in maiden loveliness, or leaped down rocks in wild majestic play. None looked thereon but the woods, which, shagged with moss, bent down and dipped therein the venerable beard; or the moose, who came with pliant lip to woo the lilies when sunrise wakened those snow-clad daughters of the idle stream; or the bear, slaking her thirst in the clean water, or swimming with her young across; or the red man, who speared a salmon there and gave the river a poetic name. Look now: the woods have withdrawn, and only frame the handsome fields; the moose and the bear have given place to herds and flocks; the river is a mechanic—sawing, planing, boring, spinning, weaving, forging, iron—more skilful than Tyrian Hiram, or Bezaleel and Aholiab, once called inspired, and clothes the people in more loveliness than Solomon, in all his glory, e'er put on; the red man, as idle as the stream which fed him, he is now three million civil-suited sons of New England, all nestled in their thousand towns, furnished with shop, and ship, and house, and church, and rich with works of thought.

Check your Progress 2

Note: Use the space given bellow

3. Discuss the Improper functions.

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4. Describe the Unique function.

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12.6 LET US SUM UP

It is the little streams we utilize at first. New England inherited the culture which a thousand generations slowly won; but it took her two hundred years to catch and tame the Merrimac, still serving its apprenticeship. It is chiefly the small selfishness of man we organize as yet, not the great overmastering powers; these wait for more experienced years. But the great river of religious emotion—the Danube, the Nile, the Ganges, the Mississippi, the Amazon of each human continent, which, fed from tallest heaven-touching hills, has so often torn up the yielding soil, and in its torrent dashed the ruins of one country on the next, in a deluge of persecution, crusade, war—one day, a peaceful stream, will flow by the farm and garden which it gently feeds, turn the mills of science, art, literature, trade, politics, law, morals; will pass by the cottage, the hamlet, the village, and the city, all full of peaceful men and women, industrious and wealthy, intelligent, moral, serving the Infinite God by keeping all His law. What an age will that be when the soul is minister not despot, and the church is of self-conscious humanity!

12.7 KEY WORDS

Disclosure: the action of making new or secret information known.
Religion: Religion is a social-cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements.

12.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

5. Discuss the Elimination of theological discourse.
6. How do you know about the Familiar functions?
7. Discuss the Improper functions.
8. Describe the Unique function.

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12.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress 1

1. See Section 12.2
2. See Section 12.3

Check your progress 2

1. See Section 12.4
2. See Section 12.5

UNIT 13: RELIGIOUS TRENDS OF POSTMODERNISM

STRUCTURE

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Modern and Postmodern
- 13.3 Shifting Religious Trend and Postmodernism
- 13.4 Multiple Implication of Spirituality
- 13.5 Postmodernism and Religion
- 13.6 Postmodernism and the Decline and Fall of Reason
- 13.7 Ways of Being Religious in the Postmodern World
- 13.8 Postmodern Religion
- 13.9 Let us sum up
- 13.10 Key Words
- 13.11 Questions for Review
- 13.12 Suggested readings and references
- 13.13 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.0 OBJECTIVES

Postmodernism is commonly understood to have emerged from a politics of the left. But when the concept was first used, postmodernism had a traditionalist meaning. It was a reaction to political, cultural and artistic movements whose perceived extremes were understood to be symptomatic of the cultural decline of the West. The first reference to postmodernism can be found in the year 1926 in the work of Bernard Iddings Bell entitled *Postmodernism and Other Essays*. Bell's postmodernism embodied ideas he believed to be superior to those associated with the modern era, such as the modern faith in the power of reason to free the human spirit from bondage arising out of ignorance and prejudice. Postmodern ideas would supersede modern ones.

And they characterized the era that would follow on from the modern age; they defined the post-modern age. When Bell spoke of

postmodernism, he referred to something that was both ideological and historical. It was a body of ideas and a new epoch. Bell considered postmodernism to be an intelligent alternative to the two rival ideologies that dominated Western Societies in the 1920's; ideologies that, regardless of their fundamental differences, shared values that he believed made them quintessentially modern. The main objective of this Unit is to give a feel of postmodern religious trends without going to its intricacies. In this unit we shall try to understand contemporary religious trends from a postmodern point of view. Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of postmodern religion
- to differentiate it from traditional understanding
- to relate it with contemporary times
- to understand the postmodern concept of God

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Down through the centuries, there have been different ways of looking at the socio-politicoreligious realities of the world. What is imperative is to engage in conversations and discourses that attempt to bring out some sort of a perspective about the contemporary world. On a higher level, these might be discourses, which synthesize sciences as a whole. In the contemporary world, one of the dominant 'buzzwords' in operation is 'postmodernism'. The term 'postmodernism' has been used for a wide range of economic, educational, social, political, communicational and cultural phenomena and there have been different perspectives to the same. Postmodern is of great interest to a wide range of people because it directs the attention to the major transformations taking place in the contemporary society and culture. The term postmodernism is at once fashionable and elusive. Philosophically, postmodern thought may be seen to demonstrate a suspicion to all-embracing systems of thought as Jean-François Lyotard called 'Les gran récit' or plainly addressed as

meta-narratives or grand-narratives or masternarratives of Western thought. Postmodernism as viewed by Lyotard also stresses on the heterogeneity and fragmented character of socio-political and religious-cultural realities. Postmodernism refers to a paradigm shift in the way of thinking in the contemporary time. Postmodernism is now a much debated topic, though one with rather fuzzy edges. Associated with so many different cultural phenomena, this fashionable subject seems to lack clear definition to establish precisely what it is. Perhaps it is part of the open-ended, reflexive and deeply doubting nature of the postmodern predicament itself that exact boundaries are difficult, if not impossible, to determine. In Jean François Lyotard's influential work, *The Postmodern Condition*, originally published in French in 1979, postmodernism represents a radical break with the recent past, a condition which calls in particular the nature of modern knowledge and its effects on contemporary culture and consciousness into question. Lyotard views postmodernity as an incredulity towards metanarratives or grandnarratives, meaning that in the era of postmodern background, people have rejected the impressive theories such as universal stories and narratives, paradigms such as religion, conservative philosophy, political ideologies etc. The changing status of scientific knowledge, the exponential growth of information, the new means of communication have all led to the dissolution of long-established certainties and thus created a crisis of legitimating and representation.

13.2 MODERN AND POSTMODERN

At one level one can argue that postmodern simply means something that is no longer modern but comes after it. It is not all that long ago that sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers focused much of their work on defining the characteristics of modernity in contrast to traditional with its premodern features of society and consciousness. The word modern is said to derive from the Latin word *modo*, meaning 'just now'. Thus, modern signifies belonging to the present or to recent times. It also implies the progressive economic and administrative rationalization and the differentiation of the social world. It emphasized experimentation and the aim of finding an inner truth behind surface

appearance. The sociologist Peter Berger has been much concerned with understanding modernity and its challenge for religion, which he has described as the necessity, the imperative, to choose. He has said “in premodern situations there is a world of religious certainty, occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast, the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation...modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative”.

Philosophically speaking, postmodernism denotes the limits of reason, especially of instrumental reason so sure of itself in modern science and technology. As a movement of ideas, the postmodern critique is bound up with the decline of the belief in progress and the rejection of scientism as a narrow, one-sided over-rating of the benefits of science to the exclusion of other human experiences. Thus the modern emphasis on subjectivity and rationality is profoundly questioned, and so is the perception and representation of ‘the other’ and of other cultures and traditions. Postmodernism is the name for a movement in an advanced consumerist culture. There is a sense in which if one sees modernism as the culture of modernity, postmodernism is the culture of postmodernity.

13.3 SHIFTING RELIGIOUS TREND AND POSTMODERNISM

The term postmodernism has been in widespread use for three decades, but the story of its spread through culture is fairly complex. Whatever it may be, postmodernism invites critical reflection and sustained debate. It is probably a specifically Western, rather than a universal global phenomenon, but its effects can be felt around the whole world. Postmodernism has been described as a process involving the fragmentation of modern Western culture. A highly ingenious collage, it is a celebration of a particular, a condition that calls everything into question, a radical challenge that has to be met. However, most writers on postmodernism are primarily concerned with the dominant feature or contemporary culture and public life without considering the relationship of postmodernism to religion. But if postmodernism is such a pervasive

condition, what can possibly be its meaning of the faith traditions of the world? And what is the place of faith of large human communities and innumerable individuals related to practical concerns in a world marketed by division, doubt and ever greater uncertainty? What is the role of religion and faith in contemporary pluralistic society? Does religion or faith make a difference in politics and economics? Does it affect attitudes to the environment? Does everybody need a religion to live by? What difference is there between a human faith, a religious faith, a critical faith, and a deeply spiritual faith? How far does religious faith still provide an important focus for national, ethnic and cultural identities? And is faith different for women and men, is linked to specific sexual identities? Can faith heal and make us whole, strengthen our resolve and responsibility, and help us build a human community of greater peace and justice? Have the different religions the resources for the development of a postmodern ethic for both personal and public life, so much needed today?

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is your understanding of postmodernism?

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2) How is modern different from postmodern?

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13.4 MULTIPLE IMPLICATION OF SPIRITUALITY

In our contemporary time, spirituality has become a fashionable word used in widely different contexts, but it is often unclear what is meant by this term. The concept is used in both religious and secular contexts, in debates about religious education in schools, in debates among theologians outside the Western world, in discussions among feminists, ecologists and peace workers, among people of different faiths and of none. Reflecting on ‘the extraordinary popularity of the idea of spirituality and the proliferation of its use in courses, conferences, discussions, journals and books’, a British scholar of religious studies commented on ‘the widespread and radical differences that exist over the use of the term, its possible meanings and significance. For some it represents the move of phenomenological studies of religion into a new key, stressing subjectivities and experience as over against dispassionate objectivity, the soul rather than the form of religion.

- To others it signifies an escape from the unnecessary confines of religion into the more inclusive realm of our common humanity, rendering any necessary reference to the transcendent obsolete.
- To yet others its obscurities and ambiguities render it an empty and misleading slogan’. Many feel indeed uneasy with references to spirituality or the spiritual, because they interpret it in a dualistic way where the spiritual is conceived of in contrast to the material, the physical, the body and the world.

Yet the concept of the spiritual is not always shunned; sometimes it is preferred to the concept of the religious, because it is less clearly linked to specific religious institutions and thus possesses a more diffuse meaning. From yet another perspective, the spiritual is not so much seen as diffuse than as more centered, as the very heart and depth dimension of religion, especially realized through religious and mystical experience. The widespread interest in religious conviction today is linked to the

modern emphasis placed on the subject, on the discovery of the self and a more differentiated understanding of human psychology. Although many religions do not possess a precise word for ‘spirituality’, this term is now applied across different religious traditions; inside and outside particular religions as well as in many interfaith and secular contexts. In contemporary secular society spirituality – whatever it’s meaning – is being rediscovered as a lost or at least concealed dimension in a largely materialistic world. In the postmodern culture our approach to human beings is primarily pragmatic. But such an approach denies the need for self-transcendence, for a deeper, more reflective and contemplative awareness, for the discovery and exploration of a revered dimension which a perspective of faith sees as integral to all human beings.

- How far are our whole cultural ethos and our education able to make us into true human beings?
- How far are we not under-humanized or de-humanized in modern society rather than encouraged to develop our human potential to the fullest?

A question which the French scientist and mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin asked with great poignancy. In the earlier age when Western religious ideals still informed the entire culture of the West, the human being was primarily understood in relation to the divine, to God. The naturalistic scientific approach of modernity tends to relate the human being primarily to the animal and life worlds of the biosphere. These different approaches – to the world of our natural environment, to the depth dimension within us, to the fullness of the Spirit, to the life of God – need to be combined and linked with each other in a way that is new and culturally transformative and creative. How can we develop a wholesome, truly world-affirming and culture-transforming spirituality? Perhaps it is the very questions and problems raised by modernity, and the new possibilities opening up with new, postmodern perspectives, that will also provide us with the opportunities to develop a truly holistic and transformative religion. Today, when we speak about the postmodern religious trends contemporary spirituality is at the crossroads.

The knowledge and presence of eastern religions in the West, the rise of new religious movements, the development of atheistic and agnostic humanisms have all contributed to the questioning of traditional spiritualities in their specifically religious contexts. To achieve a new religious breakthrough, a genuine transformation of both consciousness and society, it is no longer enough to return to the past and revive ancient spiritual ideals and instructions. The increasing process of globalization affects the interchange of virtuous ideals as much as anything else and makes us conscious that humanity possesses a religious and spiritual heritage whose riches are indispensable for the creation of a much needed global virtuous consciousness. Will the rise of such a consciousness lead to a new flowering of creed in an age of postmodernity? This is a difficult question to answer but one can speculate about it. There are numerous current signs of a growing interest in spirituality, not only at the level of practice, in the growth of retreat houses, the increasing number of spiritual counsellors and spiritual writings, but also at the theoretical level of critical debate and new understanding. That the topic of spirituality attracts so much attention is part of the postmodern configuration where the previous trust in certainty, rationality and objectivity has broken down and the modern dominance of the rationalist-mechanistic thought patterns governing a positivistic science and technology has come under heavy criticism. The frequently mentioned paradigm shifts which are so characteristic of postmodern thinking are also important in spirituality, for in contemporary society spirituality is reflected upon the practiced in a new context.

13.5 POSTMODERNISM AND RELIGION

Writers on religion, ethics, theology and spirituality have come rather late to a serious consideration of the postmodern predicament and its effects on our world. But even a cursory search soon reveals that, since the early and mid-1990s, publications, conferences and journals have been increasingly concerned with the discussion of postmodernism. While the advent of postmodernism has created much fluidity and

decentredness, and also highlighted the disponibility of all culturally created ideas and things, its influence on religion must not be judged only in a negative light, for postmodernism can also be seen positively as a challenging task, an opportunity, even a gift for religion in the modern world. The postmodern view of the self raises fundamental questions about the nature of personal identity and throws light on the process of ‘the decreation of the self’, that is something so important in the human approach to the Divine. The modern and postmodern world seems haunted by the absence of God, and yet in some curious way this absence can at the same time become transparent for a new kind of presence. In criticizing the individualism and dualism of modernity, postmodernism makes room for a more holistic and organic understanding of human existence with its personal, communal and ecological dimensions linked to the inviolability of life. The creative postmodern approach to language also opens up new possibilities in interpreting the ambiguities of our relational language about God, and in articulating different styles of spirituality. Contrary to the modern assumption of the pervasiveness of nihilism, recent studies illuminate ‘the striking affinity between the most innovative aspects of postmodern thought and religious or mystical discourse’, and thereby open up new religious possibilities. Postmodern religion rejects modernity’s pushing God to a transcendent position outside of our world in a manner that has led to the ultimate atheistic denunciation of God’s very existence. Postmodern God is the presence of the divine in the world and with human beings.

13.6 POSTMODERNISM AND THE DECLINE AND FALL OF REASON

Do we live in a postmodern age? Such an age has been characterized by Lyotard as one in which there are no grand metanarratives, no total explanations, no overall structures of meaning, no universal foundations of knowledge. As a matter of fact, this age is virtually the first in history in 9 which there is something like a universal foundations of knowledge and metanarratives which covers the whole of the universe. The narrative is the evolutionary history of the universe from the Big Bang to the catastrophic crunch, and the total explanation is the theory of everything,

the grand unified theory, which may be just round the corner. In contrast, it has become much harder to believe in God and in revelation; a narrative which never succeeded in its aim of conquering the world, and has now settled uneasily into partial dominance in a number of more or less clearly demarcated geographical areas. This is for a number of reasons – the growth of critical history and of scientific knowledge about the universe, the relative lack of overwhelming arguments for the existence of a particular God, and a distrust of claims to exclusive and inerrant revelation. There has certainly been a religious fragmentation, as old structures of authority have broken down, and people have become aware of a bewildering number of alternative views on religious matters. Religious faith has to a large extent been privatized and pluralized. That is, in modern developed and developing countries a person's religious beliefs are very much their own private affair, and they may well be a mixture from a number of oddly assorted traditions, Eastern and Western. Very few would maintain that there is a defensible and widely accepted coherent set of religious doctrines, worthy of acceptance by all rational persons. We are well aware of how flimsy many of our own beliefs on religious topics are, and how disputed all of them seem to be. Even those who do think they possess a coherent and plausible narrative occasionally realize that they are in a tiny minority, which seems a bit strange, if they are right. But all this is just the obverse side of the development of the grandnarrative of evolutionary science, which seems to have undetermined classical religion bit by bit over the last three centuries. We might well say that the hypothetico-deductive method of natural science has been triumphantly vindicated as the sure road of knowledge, and as for ancient dreams of liberation, we are on the threshold of taking charge of human nature itself, through genetic control, and directing it towards a more hopeful future, free from disease and suffering. Science does not have its mysteries and puzzles. Perhaps many scientists are now less selfconfident about being able to provide an answer to every problem than they were some years 10 ago. But it would, be quite mistaken to think that the scientific narrative is at a closing stage. If science is modernity, then modernity is still very much in cultural control. But a problem has arisen. It is very difficult for the narrative to include an acceptable account of such late arrivals on the

evolutionary scene as consciousness, freedom, truth, moral obligation and religious belief. The tough line to take is that these arrivals are illusory appearances, which can be dispelled by a cold hard scientific stare. Consciousness is a set of brain-states; freedom is lack of constraint by external causes; truth is a matter of the survival value of beliefs that have enabled organism to adapt to their environment; obligation is programmed social behavior which has also passed the test of evolutionary fitness; and religion is a projection founded on psychological needs and insecurities. Human reason itself, on such a scientific account, turns out to be the outcome of change mutations which have had some survival value, but its workings are wholly subject to impersonal and non-purposive laws of nature. Science remains committed to reason, and its exponents often show a quasi-moral commitment to the rigor of its methods and the heroic acceptance of its less palatable truths. But the conclusions of science have undermined the authority of reason, by showing it to be a pragmatically useful aid to survival in the unending struggle for life in an arena of scarce resources. A central fault line appears in the scientific narrative. It presents itself as the only rational basis of knowledge and values, the revealer of the truth about the cosmos and the way to human wellbeing. Yet what it reveals is that there is no purpose, that human life, like everything else, is driven by blind selection pressures and impersonal natural processes. What we call reason and truth are the appearances of brain processes which are as fragile and contingent, as accidental and transient, as all other complex organic events. It is tempting to say that, once we see through the illusion, we are free to vary the conditions of rationality and truth as we will - that is the postmodern option. There are only belief systems, forms of life, without foundation or justification beyond themselves. Even this, however, is a legitimacy claim. There is no escaping from truth, and there is no living it either. That is the unhappy consciousness of the hard scientific narrative.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is postmodern spirituality?

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2) How can metanarratives be explained in postmodernism?

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13.7 WAYS OF BEING RELIGIOUS IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

The purpose of our study is to discuss the impact of the postmodern trends on religion. The arguments of postmodern scholars are difficult to categorize. In general, they question every all-encompassing paradigm and frame of reference. They reject the primacy given by modernity to reason and human progress. For postmodern thinkers this project has failed. This is very evident when Jean François Lyotard very emphatically stated in his famous work *The Postmodern Condition* that “I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences”. For him, metanarratives meant the established systems of thought, and established religions. Consequently, they question the globalization caused by modern science that has produced domination, marginalization and a culture of consumerism. This has objectified or commodified human life and relationships. Life is now felt almost like simulated cinematic images and symbols where human identity is defined by exterior appearances and make-up; pretensions are viewed as the norm-ality.

Postmodernity proposes a new way of life more adequate for today's society: an inclusive style that appreciated pluralism, differences and multilateralism. Many snub postmodernism seeing it as 'a mood' that does not deserve scholarly attention. Postmodernism helps us to acquire a different spirit that moves away from the style modernity gave to humanity. It provides a new godliness bringing fresh air into the religious world of today. In fact, the postmodern project retrieves values of the spiritual/religious life that modernity caused us to lose. What we reasoned here is the trajectory of human progress from early modernity to postmodernity. Modernity displaced faith and replaced it with rationality. Not by belief, but by reason and technology, modernist claimed, we shall achieve progress and development. Postmodernists say: this was a failure. The project of modernity has failed and we need to enter into postmodernity. They assert that neither pre-modern belief nor modern reasons are able to achieve the type of progress they propose. Postmodernists, most of them French intellectuals, rebelled against the Enlightenment project that promised universal human emancipation through the application of reason powered by technology, science and democracy. The grand narratives of progress suggested by Marxism, the Enlightenment and established religions remain, in the view of postmodernists, sheer verbosity. They suggest a world view in which there are no foundational values that are objective and universal. Nobody can represent anybody else, since representation is a form of domination. Instead, we need to see the context and respect the differences: everything must have a space for its way of life; everybody's view must be respected.

13.8 POSTMODERN RELIGION

Postmodernism sees religion as an experience which cannot be explained by proposition. It has to be lived in spirit and truth. It is love of God: loving God in spirit and truth. It is not knowledge, not cognitive and epistemic information, but truth that is shared in narratives. Religious truth lies in the question of how it does, not what it is. It is praxis, not an idea. In the postmodern view there is constant change in reality. Every society is in a state of constant flux and no one can claim absolute

values: only relative ones. And there are no absolute truths. This privileges the individual religious impulses, but weakens the strength of 'religions' which claim to deal with truths that are presented from 'outside', and given us objective realities, that is 'from above'. In the postmodern world view, there can be no universal religious or ethical laws. Cultural contexts, the particular time, place and community shape everything, not any universal laws. In a postmodern world, individuals weave their life by their religious impulses, selecting various spiritualities that vibrate with them. They construct for themselves their own internal spiritual world. The priest is unemployed and his place of worship is empty.

The fact is that religion is an entirely human-made phenomenon. Postmodernists reject religion as an institution for moral policing. In a world where there is no objectively existing God "out there" and where the elaborate sociological and psychological theories of religion do not seem to ring true, the idea of religion as the totality of religious experiences has some appeal. Religion in this theory is not given but created, altered, renewed in formal interactions between human beings. Images and ideas of God are manufactured in human activity, and used to give specialness to particular relationships or policies which are valued by a particular group. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' religion – no sanctifying agency. There are as many as there are groups and interaction, and they merge and join, divide and separate over and over again. Some are grouped together under the brand names of major faiths, and they cohere with varying degrees of consistency. Others, although clearly religious in their particular way, reject any such label. In a postmodern world, religions should function as systems of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. Postmodernists let everyone follow his/her own religion; they do not need an agent from outside. Religion, in postmodern sense, is a personal experience in the processes of human life. It is love of God, not love of religion. There is no one true Religion, but rather true religions. Different people in their

cultures experience the impossible and share that experience with others. They are 'unique and irreducible repositories of their distinctive ethical practices and religious narratives, representing so many different ways to love God, but without laying claim to an exclusive possession of 'The Truth'. For the postmoderns religion is love of the impossible. Despite the advancement achieved by the use of reason and technology, human beings realize time and time again that they are finite, fragile and unfinished. This causes a deep longing for the unlimited within every human being.

This longing is temporarily satisfied by the people they love, the positions of power they hold, and the scientific inventions they make. Yet they face limitedness in the form of death and natural disasters. There is a gap between what we are and what we aspire to be. What we are is that we are limited and fragile beings. But we aspire to overcome this by inventing machines and innovation in science and technology. But at the end we fail to overcome. Then we are left with the choice: either to fight for the impossible and unlimited; or to submit to it. The people who fight against the fragile of humanity end up in frustration. The people who surrender to it develop an interior modification that enables them to lead their fragile existence meaningfully. The interior modification is 'spirituality'. For the postmoderns this is the core of religion. The faith of a postmodern is love of supernatural being. But when we 'love God' what we really love is the Impossible in us.

A passion for love is a fundamental experience that every normal human being goes through. For postmoderns this passion for love is equal to passion for God. The pre-modern approach to this basic experience of love was theological and dogmatic. Modernists look at it with secularizing reason and limit the discussion within reason alone. Both looked for knowledge, for the Final Word. But postmoderns looked at the experience of love as a condition of human existence. And they remove the capital letter in knowledge. They see it as truth without Knowledge or Reason. They know that they do not have any firm foundation or absolute knowledge. They have the conviction that we are not able to gain anything absolute. They see the love of God as love of

truth, goodness, and beauty that are fundamentals of life. For as human beings we do not comprehend ourselves fully. Simply, 'we do not know'. Despite our innovations and inventions we do not know when we die and how we die. There are many mysteries that we face every day. In such unpredictable reality we need conviction and optimism. We can never discover the really Real. We should look for the hyper-real, beyond reality: love for truth (= 'God'). The postmoderns do not see any reason why we should have a definite object for the passions of/for love. That idea belongs to the moderns who seek to totalize and universalize experience. The postmoderns' mission is to evolve a new 'shape of living', a way of facing the fragility and limitedness of humanity. The status of postmodernity is a spiritual status, not philosophical, "in which belief and behaviour come together in the shape of an embodied spirit". In it there is no pride in human reason and human progress, as modernity had. That pride made them view others who did not fall within their frame of reference as weak, aliens or untouchables. Postmoderns bring them into the fold with an ethical concern that everyone is unique and precious. Therefore, for postmoderns God is a 'how', not a 'what'. God is the passion of life, the passion of my life, the passion of my unknowing my passion for the impossible. God is served in spirit and in truth. For postmoderns God is not a thought, but a deed.

Love of God is not shown in solemn ceremonies, in fantastic theological arguments or in rites and rituals, but in love that does justice. Those who love and serve justice love and serve God. By the help of postmoderns we develop openness to the future, realizing the fact that we can never master anything and frame absolute truth. Modernity developed a habit of mastering anything through human manipulation. It put science above love, but ended up longing for love. By relying on reason and science the modern mind commodified life and relegated God ('love') to the margin. The postmoderns retrieve the marginalized. They help to turn to the repressed. Religion is not to be repressed inside the 'totalizing' system of modernity. Religion, for postmoderns, is a movement of love that provides the shape of life.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Explain the religious trends in postmodernism

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2) What is the objective of postmodern religion?

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13.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to give a rough idea about the religious trends in postmodernism. Though postmodernism is an emerging trend in philosophy, in our contemporary time we cannot do away with postmodernism. It is incredulity towards all established systems of thought, ideologies and religions but at the same time they do not rule out the possibility of having a new trend, a new religion. That too in the course of time turns to become another metanarrative. Postmoderns are trying to create a new religion where human beings occupy a predominant place rather than any celestial beings that used to be. Religion, for postmoderns, is a movement of love that provides the shape of life. And for them God is not a person but a presence.

13.10 KEY WORDS

Postmodernism: Postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. Whereas modernism was often associated with identity, unity, authority, and certainty, postmodernism is often associated with difference, separation, textuality, and skepticism.

Metanarrative: A metanarrative is a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. It is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.

13.11 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) What is your understanding of postmodernism?
- 2) How is modern different from postmodern?
- 3) What is postmodern spirituality?
- 4) How can metanarratives be explained in postmodernism?
- 5) Explain the religious trends in postmodernism
- 6) What is the objective of postmodern religion?

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13.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. The term 'postmodernism' has been used for a wide range of economic, educational, social, political, communicational and cultural phenomena and there have been different perspectives to the same. Postmodern is of great interest to a wide range of people because it directs the attention to the major transformations taking place in the contemporary society and culture. The term postmodernism is at once fashionable and elusive. Philosophically, postmodern thought may be seen to demonstrate a suspicion to 18 all-embracing systems of thought postmodernity as an incredulity towards metanarratives or grandnarratives, meaning that in the era of postmodern background, people have rejected the impressive theories such as universal stories and narratives, paradigms such as religion, conservative philosophy, political ideologies etc.

2. The word modern is said to derive from the Latin word modo, meaning 'just now'. Thus, modern signifies belonging to the present or to recent times. It also implies the progressive economic and administrative rationalization and the differentiation of the social world. Modern gives emphasis to experimentation and the aim of finding an inner truth behind exterior appearance. Postmodernism denotes the limits of reason, especially of instrumental reason so sure of itself in modern science and technology. It is a movement of ideas. And as a movement of ideas, the postmodern appraisal is bound up with the decline of the belief in progress and the negation of scientism as a narrow, onesided over-rating of the benefits of science to the exclusion of other human experiences. Thus the modern emphasis on subjectivity and rationality is profoundly questioned, and so is the perception and representation of 'the other' and of other cultures and traditions. Postmodernism is the name for a movement in an advanced consumerist culture.

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. For some postmodern spirituality represents the move of phenomenological studies of religion into a new key, stressing subjectivities and experience as over against dispassionate objectivity, the soul rather than the form of religion. A genuine transformation of both individual consciousness and society that is the need of the hour. Postmodern spirituality focuses on the betterment of the person in his totality rather than any religion. To others it signifies an escape from the unnecessary confines of religion into the more inclusive realm of our common humanity, rendering any necessary reference to the transcendent obsolete.

2. Jean Francois Lyotard was the first one who used the word 'metanarrative' in his work *The Postmodern Condition*. Any theory claiming to provide universal explanation is a metanarrative. Most religions offer a similarly all-embracing explanation of human history to fit their particular schemes. Lyotard states that in our contemporary time we have lost credibility in the metanarrative. Therefore all the meatnarratives have to be rejected. The established ideologies, religions,

cultures etc. all failed to give meaning that it has promised. Therefore they claim that we live in an age in which there are no grand metanarratives, no total explanations, no overall structures of meaning, and no universal foundations of knowledge only petty narratives.

Answers to Check Your Progress 3

1. Postmodernity proposes a new way of life more adequate for today's society: an inclusive style that appreciates pluralism, differences and multilateralism. It helps us to acquire a different spirit that moves away from the style modernity gave to humanity. It provides a new godliness bringing fresh air into the religious world of today. In fact, the postmodern project retrieves values of the spiritual/religious life that modernity caused us to lose. What we reasoned here is the trajectory of human progress from early modernity to postmodernity. Modernity displaced faith and replaced it with rationality. Not by belief, but by reason and technology, modernist claimed, we shall achieve progress and development. Postmodernists say: this was a failure. The project of modernity has failed and we need to enter into postmodernity. They suggest a world view in which there are no foundational values that are objective and universal. Nobody can represent anybody else, since representation is a form of domination. Instead, we need to see the context and respect the differences: everything must have a space for its way of life; everybody's view must be respected.

2. In a postmodern world, individuals weave their life by their religious impulses, selecting various spiritualities that vibrate with them. They construct for themselves their own internal spiritual world. Postmodernists reject religion as an institution for moral policing. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' religion. In a postmodern world, religions should function as systems of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. Postmodernist let everyone follow his/her own religion; they do not need an agent from outside. Religion, in

postmodern sense, is a personal experience in the processes of human life. It is love of God, not love of religion.

There is no one true Religion, but rather true religions. The postmoderns' mission is to evolve a new 'shape of living', a way of facing the fragility and limitedness of humanity. For postmoderns God is a 'how', not a 'what'. God is the passion of life, the passion of my life, the passion of my unknowing my passion for the impossible. God is served in spirit and in truth. For postmoderns God is not a thought, but a deed. Love of God is not shown in solemn ceremonies, in fantastic theological arguments or in rites and rituals, but in love that does justice. Those who love and serve justice love and serve God. Religion, for postmoderns, is a movement of love that provides the shape of life. And God is not a person but a presence.

UNIT 14: COMPARATIVE RELIGION

STRUCTURE

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Conditions that Promote or Hinder Religious Pluralism
- 14.3 Philosophical Responses to Religious Pluralism
- 14.4 Practical Responses to Religious Pluralism
- 14.5 The Concept of Plurality as a Way of Life
- 14.6 The Idea of Dialogue
- 14.7 The Dawn of Religions
- 14.8 The Imperative of Dialogue
- 14.9 How Does Dialogue Happen?
- 14.10 Let us sum up
- 14.11 Key Words
- 14.12 Questions for Review
- 14.13 Suggested readings and references
- 14.14 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVES

Diversity or Pluralism is everywhere with the understanding of Comparative religion. It shows in the way different people live, dress, communicate, celebrate events in life, worship, etc. Sometimes these differences are so sharp that they lead to war and tension. The Middle East (Israel and the Arabs) has been on the verge of a major conflagration for half a century and an all-out war is a perennial possibility. The so called "clash of civilizations"(Islam and the Western world) between two cultures that even have a common origin (Christians, Muslims and Jews hold Abraham as their prophet), is the other biggest danger of erupting in a worldwide conflict. The objective of this study to is understand that even in the midst of deep differences that affect the way we live and communicate with each other, there is always a way to solve the differences. War and clashes is the only alternative. There is another alternative, the alternative of Dialogue. People to worship, dress

and live differently can sit down and discuss together the issues that separate them and find a solution. This is called Dialogue. This is particularly important about religious differences. Religion has been one of major reason why people have fought and killed each other for several centuries.

Sometimes such tensions take different shapes and affect even areas where religion is the issue at all. This unit helps throw light of the existence of Dialogue as way of settling problems among people but more than that shows the way Dialogue is perhaps the best way for religions to live together without suspicion and hatred. By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Know that Plurality and comparative religion is part of human nature, and diversity is desirable, because it part of nature.
- That Dialogue as a common human objective is desired by all men and women of good will.
- That religions although having their own respective characteristics, can live and co-exist with each other only if they talk to each other in a spirit of Dialogue.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Some people make a distinction between religious plurality and religious pluralism, and define the former as the fact of religious diversity and the latter as a simple acknowledgement and acceptance of that fact. This definition, though valid, does not exhaust the meaning of the expression “religious pluralism,” which is used in a number of related ways. Some consider religious pluralism as a worldview which acknowledges that one’s religion is not the sole and exclusive source of truth, and admits that there are at least some truths and true value in other religions. Another definition of religious pluralism involves accepting the beliefs taught by other religions as true though they differ from the ones taught by one’s own religion. This involves an acceptance of the concept that all

religions are valid though their beliefs appear to be conflicting. A broader definition of religious pluralism includes in its primary meaning not only the acknowledgement of the fact of plurality and an acceptance of the validity of all religions, but also an active engagement with plurality in the form of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. Thus, according to Diana Eck, “Pluralism is not the sheer fact of this plurality alone, but is active engagement with plurality. Pluralism and plurality are sometimes used as if they were synonymous. But plurality is just diversity, plain and simple—splendid, colorful, maybe even threatening. Such diversity does not, however, have to affect me. I can observe diversity. I can even celebrate diversity, as the cliché goes. But I have to participate in pluralism....Pluralism requires the cultivation of public space where we all encounter one another.” Thus, in the broader sense, religious pluralism involves not only the acceptance of the validity of other religions, but also dialogue among religions, where individuals of different religions discuss religious beliefs and learn from and work with each other without attempting to convince each other of the correctness of their individual set of beliefs.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Differentiate between plurality of religion and religious pluralism.

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2) What are the ways in which the expression “religious pluralism” is used?

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14.2 CONDITIONS THAT PROMOTE OR HINDER RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Conditions for the Existence of Religious Plurality

One of the necessary conditions for the existence of religious pluralism is the existence of freedom of religion. Religious diversity can exist only if there is freedom of religion. To have freedom of religion it is not necessary that an individual religion accepts that other religions are legitimate or that freedom of religion and religious plurality in general are good things. What is necessary is that religions accept to coexist, acting within a commonly accepted law of a particular region. Freedom of religion exists when different religions of a particular region possess the same rights of worship and public expression. Some argue that religious freedom alone is not enough for religious pluralism to flourish. For religious pluralism to flourish there has to be mutual respect between different religious traditions. The required respect can be promoted by societal and theological change aimed to overcome religious differences between religions and denominations within the same religion. Such a change can be introduced by a non-literal view of one's religious traditions and by emphasizing fundamental principles rather than more marginal issues. It is basically an attitude which rejects focus on immaterial differences, and instead gives respect to those beliefs held in 4 common. It is clear that in such an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation religious pluralism can flourish.

Conditions That Hinder Religious Pluralism

If religious freedom and respect for other religions promote religious pluralism, absence of religious freedom shuts out religious pluralism. In

atheist countries there can be no religious pluralism, since in such countries there can be no religion at all. Another factor that hinders religious pluralism is exclusivism. Exclusivist religions teach that theirs is the only way to truth and salvation; some of them would even argue that it is the duty of a true believer to wage jihad against the falsehoods taught by other religions. Some fundamentalist groups like the Taliban argue fiercely against other religions and teach that religious practices of liberal Muslims and of other religions are pernicious. This attitude led to the destruction of the Alexandrian library by Caliph Omar and of the ancient Buddha statues of Bamyán as well as to the Crusades and witch hunt of the Early Modern Period. Exclusivism cannot see any good in other religions or tolerate them. It is easy to see that where such an attitude prevails, there can be no religious pluralism. This situation obtains in certain Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia where no religion other than Islam is permitted. A lesser form of exclusivism consists in giving one religion or denomination special rights that are denied to others. This situation obtains in certain Islamic countries where Shariat law is promulgated. Though less deplorable than exclusivism, this sort of preferential treatment is detrimental to religious pluralism.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What are the conditions that make the existence of religious diversity possible?

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2) What are the conditions that hinder religious pluralism?

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14.3 PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSES TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Analysis of Religious Concepts

One of the early responses to religious pluralism was to show a desire to study the religious concepts of religions other than one's own. This gave rise to the branch of philosophy called comparative religion. Comparative religion is a field of religious study that analyzes the similarities and differences of themes, myths, rituals and concepts among the world's religions. In the field of comparative religion, the main world-religions are generally classified as Abrahamic, Indian or Taoic, and attempts are made to analyze the similarities and differences among the various ideational aspects of these religions. Thus attempts have been made to analyse Eastern descriptions of unitive mysticism; Hindu and Buddhist notions of reincarnation, centering on the question of personal identity from life to life; such Buddhist ideas as anatta ("no self"), sunyanta ("emptiness"); and a number of other important concepts. But much remains to be done and many other major concepts await attention, both individually and comparatively. Indeed this area of philosophical inquiry has almost unlimited scope for development.

Reflecting on the Relationship among Religions

Another response to religious pluralism was to initiate a reflection on the relationship among various religions. This is one of the important philosophical questions in the area of religious pluralism, though naturalism, which views religion in all its forms as a delusory projection upon the universe of human hopes, fears, and ideals, dismisses it as a pseudo problem. Those who take the question seriously propose two different models of relationship which can be broadly classified into two groups: exclusivism and pluralism.

14.4 PRACTICAL RESPONSES TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Irrespective of the way we view it, religious plurality is a statistical fact that we are called to live with. Therefore, the practical question is, how are we to interact with people of religious beliefs and practices other than our own? In this context, three practical steps are suggested: religious toleration, appreciating diversity, and religious dialogue.

i. Religious Toleration

Toleration in general is the enduring of something disagreeable. Thus it is different from indifference toward things that do not matter and also from broad-minded celebration of differences. It involves a decision to forgo using power or coercion to change the things we dislike; so it is not merely resignation at the inevitability of the disagreeable. Toleration involves having power to change the disagreeable, but not using it. Tolerating other's views and actions is quite compatible with trying to change another's mind, as long as one relies on rational persuasion—or, perhaps, emotional appeals—rather than blunt threats or subtle brainwashing. Religious toleration is an aspect of toleration in general; it is enduring disagreeable religious differences which are either expressed or acted upon. It is not to be confused with secularization or erosion of religious devotion. It is also distinct from the sort of pluralistic ecumenicism that seeks consensus on central religious matters or views other religious beliefs as simply different routes to similar goals. We can believe that we are clearly right and others are egregiously wrong on a matter of huge and holy significance, and still decide not to use force or coercion to bring change in their beliefs and practices.

ii. Appreciating and Encouraging Diversity

The arguments for religious toleration mentioned above must be distinguished from another consideration that Mill introduced, namely, the positive appreciation and promotion of diversity. Locke was not one to celebrate plurality; he merely argued the irrationality of not enduring

it. One could go further and argue for actually appreciating and even promoting disagreeable practices. Thus an employer might set up work schedules that accommodate an employee's disagreeable religious practices, and a society may empower minorities to broadcast disagreeable viewpoints. Mill and others have argued that it is prudent for individuals and societies to promote the airing of what contradicts them, because that is how we correct our mistakes and arrive at better reasons and more truth. Democratic governments not only tolerate criticism, but set up structures like opposition parties and free media to air alternative, and often critical, views. Theists also can take a leaf out of their book and set up structures that would protect and promote the airing of alternative views. The motivation for this can come from a view that human comprehension of God's will is inherently limited and fallible. This view would yield a theologically based, epistemological humility that not only tolerates but also enables the expression of what seems to be heresy, since the latter might give new insights into what one already believes. It must be specially noted that for promoting such cooperation one need not necessarily accept that the other is right at least in some way; such openness to accommodate those who differ from us is consistent with viewing the other as being wrong in a disagreeable way.

iii. Interreligious or Interfaith Dialogue

Another practical way of responding to religious diversity is to engage in interfaith or interreligious dialogue. The term interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional level with the aim of deriving understanding and cooperation and if possible a common ground in belief. This can be achieved through a concentration on similarities between faiths, understanding of values, and commitment to the world. It is distinct from syncretism, in that dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions to increase acceptance of others, whereas to syncretism seeks to synthesize new beliefs fusing differing systems of belief. In dialogue no attempt is made to fuse differing systems of belief; what is sought is positive interaction between people of different

traditions and beliefs, aimed to promote mutual understanding and cooperation. The major argument in favor of dialogue is that besides bringing deeper understanding among religions, it would help to resolve conflicts fueled by religion and promote cooperation among them to construct a better world. The resolve for dialogue can be further buttressed by the assumption that all spiritual and religious traditions are a source of values that ensure dignified life for all, so that if we want to live our faith with integrity, these traditions need to be jointly explored.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Explain the meaning of religious toleration.

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2. Explain the meaning and importance of religious dialogue.

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14.5 THE CONCEPT OF PLURALITY AS A WAY OF LIFE

In order to be able to look beyond our immediate concerns, communities, cultures and religious beliefs and towards a wider world, we must disengage ourselves from blind attachment to any particular culture or religion, situating ourselves at a viewing point from where we can see clearly diversity of cultures and religions in a global perspective. In

doing so, we will be like someone placed at the top of the mountain who is able to look at the world around him without the constraint of the boundaries of his position. The astronauts who traveled into outer space and looked back on the earth were overwhelmed by what they saw! For the first time in history, humans actually saw the earth as a whole. They saw the earth's clouds, oceans, and continents, but not as distinct from the blue planet. The blue planet they saw, was a borderless planet with the clouds, its oceans as one new reality. It was an entirely different one from what we can see on the horizon with its limited vision. What they saw was an interrelated, organic whole--a single globe of remarkable beauty and unity. It is striking that at the very moment in history when culture is becoming globalized, we have obtained our first time impression of the earth as a single globe. This image of the beautiful blue globe, shining against the black background of the universe, moving in its orbit in space can concretely symbolize the emergence of global consciousness on the eve of the twenty-first century. History has left a pattern of philosophies and religious movements from vastly distant and different areas of the world that responded to the world's needs almost in a similar fashion. If we look at our world, during the first millennium B.C.E.(Before the Christian Era), we observe a remarkable phenomenon. From the period between 800-200 B.C.E., peaking about 500 B.C.E., a striking transformation of consciousness occurred around the earth in three geographic regions, apparently without the influence of one on the other. In China, we see two great teachers, Laotze and Confucius, from whose wisdom emerged the schools of Chinese philosophy. In India the cosmic, ritualistic Hinduism of the Vedas was being transformed by the Upanishads, while the Buddha and Mahavira ushered in two new religious traditions. Farther west, we discover a similar development in the Middle Eastern region. In Israel the Jewish prophets--Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah call for a new moral awareness from their people. In Greece where Western philosophy was born, Socrates rouses the moral consciousness of the Athenians and Plato and Aristotle make the first metaphysical forays of the western world, leading into a perspective that is universal against the particular and empirical. Half a century ago, Karl Jaspers, the German philosopher, made a significant point in his book *The Origin and Goal of History*.

Referring to this period from 800-200 B.C.E. he stated "it gave birth to everything which, since then, man has been able to be." It is here in this period "that we meet with the most deep cut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short, we may style this the Axial Period." Jaspers' perspective of history seems to materialize in the fact that humankind underwent a radical change in the way it saw itself and in the way it (mankind) understood its role in the world. This radical perspective of itself, that mankind steadily developed affected every culture of the world, be it China, India, Europe and the Americas. Almost simultaneously we see the rise of great empires in Egypt, China, Mesopotamia, etc. who adopt more refined cultural forms, although largely similar. Prior to this important period of 800 – 200 B.C, most cultures and religious movements can be easily identified with belief forms that are tribal, ritualistic, and mythic and of cosmic nature. All early religious movements were built around visible objects and symbols, and were heavily dependent on rituals (things are done as part of religious practices, including sacrifices, fasts, poojas, etc.). Another aspect of early religions and still prevailing among tribals is the myths (beliefs that are based on assumptions, and legends created around that legend, hence called Mythic). This is the characteristic to all primitive communities. From the subsequent development of these tribal, ritualistic, mythic and cosmic nature (making the natural phenomena like sun, moon, earth, seasons, etc. part of worship and cult), it becomes clear that the consciousness of these primitive communities had a clearly underlying undercurrent of creative harmony of the world of nature that was celebrated through myths and rituals. Just as they considered themselves part of nature, so also they experienced themselves as part of the tribe. This web of inter-relatedness sustained them psychologically and energized their lives. To be separated from the tribe threatened them with death, not only physical but psychological as well. However, their relation to the collectivity often did not extend beyond their own tribe, for they often looked upon other tribes as hostile. Yet within their tribe they felt organically related to their group as a whole, to the life cycles of birth and death and to nature and the cosmos.

14.6 THE IDEA OF DIALOGUE

The Period of 800-200 B.C. which Jaspers names, the Axial Period ushered in a radically new form of consciousness. There is a clear and definite shift from tribal, collective consciousness to an individualistic perspective of life. The Greek philosophers and thinkers speak of reflection, "know thyself", the Upanishads teach of the "Atman" reflecting the transcendent within. Gautama Buddha preaches individual enlightenment and the Jewish prophet's call for an individual moral responsibility. This period is marked by its complete departure from the tribal and the nature linkage to individual identity as distinct both from the tribe and the nature. From this flow other characteristics: consciousness that is self-reflective, analytic, which can be applied to nature in the form of scientific theories, to society in the form of social critique, to knowledge in the form of philosophy, to religion in the form of mapping an individual's spiritual journey. This self-reflective, analytic, critical consciousness stood in sharp contrast to primal mythic and ritualistic consciousness. The self-reflective "logos" (word, reason) replaced the "mythos" (myth). It cannot however be denied that mythic and ritualistic forms of consciousness still survive today, but they are often considered as sub-altern. The paradigm shift from the primal to the Axial period severed the harmony between nature and the tribe, and it empowered the individual with his identity although without organic harmony with nature and the community. This delinking from nature and life enabled him to question the social structures, and launch himself into the discovery of the abstract laws of nature and their manipulation, as well venture into the beyond through metaphysics. This new way of life was decisive for the emergence of the traditional major religions and their departure from their tribal predecessors. The great religions of the world as we know them today are the product of the Axial Period. Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Judaism took shape in their classical form during this period; and Judaism provided the base for the later emergence of Christianity and Islam.

14.7 THE DAWN OF RELIGIONS

The inwards look by the followers of major religions, in face of this new consciousness released enormous spiritual energy. Meditation and contemplative practices thrived making the inner way and the new found subjectivity an avenue to reach the transcendent. It opened the way for the inner self to sort out the difference between the illusion of the phenomenal world and the authentic vision of reality. On the ethical level it allowed individual moral conscience to take a critical stand against the collectivity. And it made possible to establish a link between the moral and the spiritual aspects of the self, so that a path could be charted through virtues toward the ultimate goal of the spiritual quest. The rise of monasticism is a major product of this new awareness. Although begun first in Hinduism, it saw its definite growth in Buddhism and Jainism, later developed in Christianity.

Whereas in the period 800-200 B.C.E, in the known world we see the unity of perception already mentioned earlier, 20 centuries later at the dawn of 21st. century, we find a similar phenomenon which appears to be as significant as the first one. In the last 50 years almost simultaneously around the world, there has been a steadily growing confluence towards unity: Perestroika, China-U.S, European Union, China-Japan, Pan-African Unity, the call for Ecology preservation, coupled with technology that has brought humankind close to each other, making it to be called a global village are significant signs of returning to primordial unity. Developing and developed countries are seeking to work together, and no longer is this being done, as a matter of appeasement but as a necessity to create harmony that all so dearly desire. None has been more radically affected by this movement than the major religions of the world Teilhard de Chardin, the great paleontologist, thinker and philosopher concludes that in the last 100 years, due to a process called "planetization" (a movement towards bringing together everything on the planet to a kind of organic unity), and a shift has taken place in the cosmos that is oriented towards convergence rather than divergence.

According to him, when human beings first appeared on this planet, they clustered together in family and tribal units, forming their own group

identity and separating themselves from other tribes. In this way humans diverged, creating separate nations and a rich variety of cultures. However, the spherical shape of the earth prevented unlimited divergence. With the increase in population and the rapid development of communication, groups could no longer remain apart. After dominating the process for millennia, the forces of divergence have been superseded by those of convergence. This shift to convergence is drawing various cultures into a single planetized community. Although we have been conditioned by thousands of years of divergence, we now have no other course open to us but to cooperate creatively with the forces of convergence as these are drawing us toward global consciousness. According to Teilhard in spite of this global consciousness towards convergence, there will be divergent movements that will seek to cluster among themselves, which he calls creative unions. The specificity of these creative unions will be, that they will admit plurality within their unions. His concept of diversified unity is beautifully articulated through what he calls the law of "complexity-consciousness" and "union differentiates." The humankind's consciousness according to Teilhard has become more and more aware of its unity in spite of and amidst its complexity, with the result that it creates a new paradigm of pluralities within unity. At this point of history, because of the shift from divergence to convergence, the forces of planetization are bringing about an unprecedented complexification of consciousness through the convergence of cultures and religions.

14.8 THE IMPERATIVE OF DIALOGUE

In the first Axial Period (800-200 B.C.) the world religions began on differentiated lines in several geographical areas and were driven by the forces of divergence and as a result developed their consciousness on differentiated lines, from where they began. This produced a remarkable richness of spiritual wisdom, of spiritual energies and of religious-cultural forms to express, to preserve, and transmit this heritage. Now that the forces of divergence have shifted to convergence, the religions must meet each other in center to center unions, discovering what is most authentic in each other, releasing creative energy toward a more complex

form of religious consciousness. The dawn of the 21st. century is characterized by a new consciousness that drives towards unity. Inter-religious dialogue is such a creative encounter, that has been called the "dialogic dialogue"(a conversation to bring about understanding, unity) to distinguish it from the dialectic dialogue (a conversation to prove one's point to other or even to refute the claims of the other). This dialogic dialogue has three phases:

- (1) The partners meet each other in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, ready to change misconceptions about each other and eager to appreciate the values of the other.
- (2) The partners are mutually enriched, by passing over into the consciousness of the other so that each can experience the other's values from within the other's perspective. This can be enormously enriching, for often the partners discover in another tradition values which are submerged or only inchoate in their own. It is important at this point to respect the autonomy of the other's tradition: in Teilhard's terms, to achieve union in which differences are valued as a basis of creativity.
- (3) If such a creative union is achieved, then the religions will have moved into the complexities form of consciousness that will be characteristic of the twenty-first century. This will be a complexities global consciousness, not a mere universal, undifferentiated, abstract consciousness. It will be global through the global convergence of cultures and religions and complexities by the dynamics of dialogic dialogue.

The forces of convergence are not limited to religious and cultural understanding but are conditioned by the challenge to existence that the earth is passing through. Humankind's consciousness is reconnecting itself to its roots in the earth, as the original human populations did. The tools of industrialization, progress and tapping of resources that led to the convergence of humankind are undercutting the biological support system that sustains life on our planet and the

future of mankind is shrouded in a cloud of uncertainty by the pollution of our environment, the depletion of natural resources, the unjust distribution of wealth, the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. Unless the human community reverses these destructive forces, we may not be able to continue life here for much longer. The human race as a whole, all the diverse cultures and the religions must face these problems squarely. There is an imperative to rediscover the dimensions of the consciousness of the collective and cosmic spirituality of the primal peoples rooted in the earth and the life cycles. Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue must recapture the unity of humankind by seeking humankind as a unity with its diverse cultural and religious perspectives. This means that the consciousness of the twenty-first century will be global from two perspectives:

- (1) from a horizontal perspective, cultures and religions must meet each other on the surface of the globe, entering into creative encounters that will produce a complexities collective consciousness;
- (2) from a vertical perspective, they must plunge their roots deep into the earth in order to provide a stable and secure base for future development. This new global consciousness must be organically ecological, supported by structures that will ensure justice and peace. The voices of the oppressed must be heard and heeded: the poor, women, racial and ethnic minorities. The emergence of this twofold global consciousness is not only a creative possibility to enhance the twenty-first century; it is an absolute necessity if we are to survive.

14.9 HOW DOES DIALOGUE HAPPEN?

What does this mean for religions of the twenty-first century? It means that they have a double task: to enter creatively into the dialogue of religions and to channel their energies into solving the common human problems that threaten our future on the earth. It means that they must strip away negative and limiting attitudes towards other religions. They

must avoid both a narrow fundamentalism and a bland universalism. They must be true to their spiritual heritage, for this is the source of their power and their gift to the world. They must make every effort to ground themselves in their own traditions and at the same time to open themselves to other traditions. In concert with the other religions they should commit themselves to creating the new complexified global consciousness mankind is experiencing. Just to meet, even creatively, on the spiritual level is not enough. They must channel their spiritual resources toward the solution of global problems. For the most part, this calls for a transformation of the religions. The religions must rediscover the material dimension of existence and its spiritual significance. In this they can learn from the secular world : that justice and peace are human values that must be cherished and pragmatically cultivated. But they must not adopt an exclusively secular attitude, for their unique contribution is to tap their reservoirs of spiritual energy and channel this into developing secular enterprises that are genuinely human. The dialogue's initial stumbling block will often be the existence of stereotypes about the "other" that each community has, because any individual's or community's life experiences are much wider and more complex than issues of religious identity. It is necessary that dialogue aims at dissolving the fundamental objective lying at the core of the human mind about the "other" being what he is, and one being what "one" is. Somehow dialogue has to reach the level where two individuals or communities do not interact with each other as 'One" and the "Other", but on a common identity and platform of human beings who are searching for solutions that are mutually needed and indispensable for living. Dialogue begins with the willingness to question, and to be questioned, while realizing that mutual understanding and working together toward common goals requires accepting differences. In part, dialogue is an effort to comprehend the inherent value of difference and commonality, for the sake of learning and living together--as well as for the sake of increased productivity and peace in a viable and sustainable human society. Interreligious dialogue provides us with insights into each other and a successful methodology can be found in the experience of thousands of years of our human existence. There are also structural differences between various religious cultures because of divergent aims

and points of view. Therefore dialogue will have to be first conducted within each community, because not seldom there are disputes about the form and aim of intercultural dialogue and often even resistance to the very idea of a dialogue. Therefore, an intrareligious/class/ethnic/gender etc. dialogue has to be initiated, taking into account that religious comments/expressions are not always a sign of strong religiosity but instead point to a strong rooting in a culture in various contexts which we may name "inculturalisation." Hence, all dialogue begins with practical and functional agreements. Dialogue needs pragmatics rather than dogmatics. Dialogue should focus on specific topics and have specific aims (even sensitive topics such as democracy, human rights, education, globalisation, ecology and religious tolerance, rights of 13 women, commitment to cultural diversity); dialogue cannot remain an exchange of superficialities. Differences should be discussed as well as similarities and commonalities - the aim of dialogue is not necessarily to adopt what the "other" believes or follows, and dilute what one believes, (which could be understood as syncretism or amalgamation), but rather develop a respect for the difference. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and or between Hindus and Muslims or Buddhists, is not without pain and serious difficulties, since discussion on various issues that differentiate one from the other often defy clarification and resolution. The factors that divide are more than what the terms express, as they touch the core of human hearts and minds. Therefore any process of dialogue between cultures and religions should not be restricted to "culturalisation"(tendency to reduce everything that is being discussed to culture) and " confessionalisation" (tendency to reduce everything that is being discussed to religion). What is needed therefore is to understand the 'other' by broadening and extending the dialogue beyond the realm of religious beliefs and practices: Dialogue efforts have to happen simultaneously at all levels, between communities and groups representing several areas of human activity, in diverse lived social and cultural situations. Similarly, 'Dialogue is not a random conversation, but aims at persuasion, at discovering the truth.

Check your Progress 4

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What are the primary requisites for religions to enter and sustain genuine inter-religious dialogue? What attitudes are essential?

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2) What do you understand by "culturisation" and "confessionalisation". Why should dialogue go beyond these two?

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14.10 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, in our globalized and rapidly shrinking world, religious pluralism is obviously a major issue within the philosophy of religion. Besides the question of defining religious pluralism, discussion on the topic centers most frequently on two issues: the relation among the religions and the most appropriate response—both philosophical and practical—to the obvious fact of plurality. These issues present so obvious a challenge to philosophical speculation that it seems inevitable that they will be increasingly widely discussed in the coming decades.

When we talk about religious pluralism and comparative religion, we are talking about a new encounter; an encounter with a "difference" or "otherness" in whatever religious form it may take. It may appear to be a cliché, but an inter-religious encounter is much more a meeting with two people with different ideas likes and dislikes. It often is a meeting with

someone who treasures something that I find preposterous, unacceptable, stupid or despicable. Raimundo Pannikar, who has done a great deal of work on inter-religious dialogue, says that "What to do with the barbarian?" is the central question for religion in the time of pluralism. We all have some notion of "barbarian" in our minds: for all of us, there is some presence, some person, or some tradition that is barbarian to us. In practicing religious pluralism, let us ask how it is that we make a relationship with that which is other or different from ourselves. "Pluralism respects the differences that reside in the variety of religious traditions, without reconciling or integrating those differences into a single path. Pluralism is willing to rest in the ambiguity of religious difference. From this point of view, pluralism is a very courageous practice, an engagement with the fact of diversity in our world. And this practice is appropriate and important for contemplative communities. In fact, I'm not sure if it is possible to be truly contemplative without engaging in pluralism." Although the principles of inter-religious dialogue appear to be philosophically clear, the task of real dialogue is extremely different. To commence and sustain dialogue between different religions and cultures, it is absolutely indispensable for us to adopt new methodologies of understanding the "other", which is different from any other existing model of communication.

When we know we have a limited perception of a reality, which is outside us, it is possible to discuss this perception with others, since the perception of others about the reality is also limited. We can use commonly accepted categories and symbols that can help us communicate in the same level. In interreligious dialogue the process is far more difficult, because the perception of the "other" is original and perfect. Who I am in dialogue with, does not have the same perception of the reality that I have about what I believe, in the similar manner.

I do not have the slightest understanding about what the other believes, and yet we communicate. Dialogue seeks truth by trusting the other, just as dialectics pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. Dialectics is the optimism of reason; dialogue is the optimism of the heart. Dialectics believes it can approach

truth by relying on the objective consistency of ideas. Dialogue believes it can advance along the way to truth by relying on the subjective consistency of the dialogical partners. There are certain ground rules or indispensable prerequisites for dialogical dialogue. These include a deep human honesty, intellectual openness and a willingness to forego prejudice in the search for truth while maintaining "profound loyalty towards one's own tradition." In fact, the starting point for dialogical dialogue is the internal or intra-personal dialogue by which one consciously and critically appropriates one's own tradition. Without this deep understanding of and commitment to one's own tradition, there are simply no grounds for the dialogical dialogue to proceed. Second, one needs a deep commitment and desire to understand another tradition which means being open to a new experience of truth since "one cannot really understand the views of another if one does not share them

This is not to assume an uncritical approach to the other tradition so much as a willingness to set aside premature judgments which arise from prejudice and ignorance, the twin enemies of truth and understanding. Although our cultural and religious traditions have been conditioned by thousands of years of divergence, animosity, and violence, we can still envision a world human society in which all men and women experience a peaceful, healthy and safe environment. A world where all citizens have access to quality education, health care, and housing. An ecologically balanced, global society wherein the opportunities created by a just and equitable order are truly accessible to all. In order to release our full potential, the advent of global consciousness should allow for the total elimination of the social problems that inhibit the equality of humankind. Although the friction and the resulting clashes and bloodshed existed in our society for centuries, human kind always yearned for something better, something that is part of our consciousness, or we may even call it global consciousness. There is no doubt that humankind has yet to actualize its full potential, and even our best efforts at creating a better world have fallen far short of the mark. As the twenty-first century transits, there is clear evidence of an emerging social awareness that over time, problems such as these can and must be solved on a global scale. There is a crying need for a global ethos (good way of living).

14.11 KEY WORDS

Religious pluralism: an acceptance of the fact of religious diversity and of the concept that all religions are valid, though they differ from one's own. **Religious exclusivism:** the view that dismisses as false all religions other than one's own.

Naturalism: The view that denies spiritual realities beyond nature and accepts nature as the ultimate reality. It views all religious claims as false, arising from delusory projection upon the universe of human hopes, fears, and ideals.

Religious toleration: It is enduring disagreeable religious differences which are either expressed or acted upon. **Secularization:** Dismissing religion from public life, and in extreme cases total erosion of religious devotion.

Ecumenisms: A search for consensus on central religious matters, or a view that other religious beliefs are simply different routes to similar goals.

Interfaith dialogue: Cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional level with the aim of deriving understanding and cooperation and if possible a common ground in belief.

14.12 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) Differentiate between plurality of religion and religious pluralism.
- 2) What are the ways in which the expression "religious pluralism" is used?
- 3) What are the conditions that make the existence of religious diversity possible?
- 4) What are the conditions that hinder religious pluralism?
- 5) Explain the meaning of religious toleration.
- 6) Explain the meaning and importance of religious dialogue.

14.13 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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14.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. Some people make a distinction between religious plurality and religious pluralism, and define the former as the fact of religious diversity and the latter as a simple acknowledgement and acceptance of that fact.

2. The expression religious pluralism is used in a number of related ways. Some consider religious pluralism as a worldview which acknowledges that one's religion is not the sole and exclusive source of truth, and admits that there are at least some truths and true value in other religions. Another definition of religious pluralism involves accepting the beliefs taught by other religions as true though they differ from the

ones taught by one's own religion. This involves an acceptance of the concept that all religions are valid though their beliefs appear to be conflicting. A broader definition of religious pluralism goes beyond the acknowledgement of the fact of plurality and an acceptance of the validity of all religions and includes an active engagement with plurality in the form of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. One of the necessary conditions for the existence of religious pluralism is the existence of freedom of religion. To have freedom of religion, religions must accept to coexist, acting within a commonly accepted law of a particular region. Freedom of religion exists when different religions of a particular region possess the same rights of worship and public expression. Secondly, for religious pluralism to flourish there has to be mutual respect between different religious traditions. It is only in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation that religious pluralism can flourish.
2. Just as religious freedom promotes religious pluralism, its absence shuts out religious pluralism. In atheist countries there can be no religious pluralism, since in such countries there can be no religion at all. Another factor that hinders religious pluralism is exclusivism. Exclusivist religions teach that theirs is the only way to truth and salvation; they cannot see any good in other religions or 19 tolerate them. Some of them would even argue that it is the duty of a true believer to wage jihad against the falsehoods taught by other religions. This situation obtains in certain. It is easy to see that where such an attitude prevails, there can be no religious pluralism. A lesser form of exclusivism consists in giving one religion or denomination special rights that are denied to others. This situation obtains in certain Islamic countries where Shariat law is promulgated. Though less

deplorable than exclusivism, this sort of preferential treatment is detrimental to religious pluralism.

Answers to Check Your Progress 3

1. One practical way of responding to religious diversity is to practice religious toleration. Toleration in general is the enduring of something disagreeable. It involves a decision to forgo using power or coercion to change the things we dislike; so it is not merely resignation at the inevitability of the disagreeable. Toleration involves having power to change the disagreeable, but not using it. Religious toleration is an aspect of toleration in general; it is enduring disagreeable religious differences which are either expressed or acted upon. We can believe that we are clearly right and others are egregiously wrong on a matter of huge and holy significance, and still decide not to use force or coercion to bring change in their beliefs and practices.

2. Another practical way of responding to religious diversity is to engage in interfaith or interreligious dialogue. The term interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional level with the aim of deriving understanding and cooperation and if possible a common ground in belief. This can be achieved through a concentration on similarities between faiths, understanding of values, and commitment to the world. The major argument in favor of dialogue is that besides bringing deeper understanding among religions, it would help to resolve conflicts fueled by religion and promote cooperation among them to construct a better world. The resolve for dialogue can be further buttressed by the assumption that all spiritual and religious traditions are a source of values that ensure dignified life for all, so that if we want to live our faith with integrity, these traditions need to be jointly explored.

Answers to Check Your Progress 4

1. In order to be able to dialogue one must first of all understand his own religion and draw strength from one's own beliefs. It is there that he will be aware of his own limitation and the need to find it. Dialogue begins with the willingness to question, and to be questioned, while realizing that mutual understanding and working together toward common goals requires accepting differences. In part, dialogue is an effort to comprehend the inherent value of difference and commonality, for the sake of learning and living together--as well as for the sake of increased productivity and peace in a viable and sustainable human society. Interreligious dialogue provides us with insights into each other and a successful methodology can be found in the experience of thousands of years of our human existence.
2. Culturisation is an attitude that tends to place everything that is part of our human life under the banner of culture, and discuss it as such, while confessionalisation is the tendency to reduce everything to religion. It is important to understand here that human groups and communities have diverse ways of looking at life and living it which takes the sum total of human action much beyond culture and religion. Many gestures and customs are a result of many other factors that identify a group and form part of its belief system. Dialogue therefore is a conversation of taking to each other without labelling each other's action under a particular label.