

PATTERNS OF RELIGION

In the last lecture I referred to the quest after a universal religion. It had taken several forms. The need for a single religion for fulfilling the aspiration of man to unite himself with the deity or God or the All has been found to be apparent, but rather difficult of accomplishment, because of the many sided nature of man himself. Though the ideal of one comprehensive Religion is an ever-beckoning one, yet an integral realisation of it becomes more and more difficult. Co-existence of several religions seems to have been arrived at in India on the basis of mutual respect and intelligent tolerance of the manifold ways of approach. That tolerance itself should be considered to be a part of religion, and is a definite acceptance of the polytheistic point of view, if not of a pantheistic view, that All is God which includes the view that all gods are God, though differently spoken of to suit the special psychological and other needs of the individuals. In this lecture the aim is broadly to state the several patterns of religion that have emerged during man's growth into higher and wider levels of consciousness.

Religion may be said to be something that takes its rise in humanity when it has developed a sense of worship or need for it. One does not find this greatly developed in those races, which have not begun to feel the need for

communication with that which is beyond one's apprehension. Primitive religions, however, appear to have grown out of the sense of apprehension of spirits of the dead, and of the spirits behind natural forces. This animistic tendency – that is the tendency to attribute life to all things whether they are organic or inorganic – reveals an identification of life with whatever has motion. All movement is analogically referred to life. This is understandable, and I believe that some of us even do, at some moments, tend to attribute life to all movement. Growth is another sign of life, and this is not so much emphasised excepts that we have instances of worship of the life forces for production of food-crops and so on. This, later, takes one to the worship of Natural forces behind rain, water, air and so on.

Evil powers also are propitiated because they seem to be hostile to the interests of man and his life. The theory of social worship becomes an extension of the worship by the individual when the results sought for are of collective good. Group religion is always a growth, or outcome, of common interests, and men get into communion with these animistic or spirit forces to get good for the community. Thus begins group solidarity, custom, tradition and the birth of cultural patterns. The individual is religious in the context of the social pattern of worship, propitiation and so on. Religion is then seen to be that which holds the group together, with the chief

priest or shaman as the leader in matters sacred. It is possible that he may also become a leader in matters secular. However, with people who have been accustomed to look to higher animistic or spirit powers for almost every need in their daily lives, religion and its practices begin to occupy the whole of life, and no wonder the leader of the religious institutions or practices or conductor becomes all important. Thus too we have briefly the evolution of the political leader from out of the religious conductor. Social organisation also follows the same pattern. In this process of full dedication to the needs of man, religion becomes more and more a social concern rather than an individual concern.

Instances, however, are not wanting to show that individual men had somehow come to be imbued with the spirit, or had spiritual experiences or revelations of the higher powers of Nature or behind nature, or had visions of the Dead. These individuals were found to be more religious, or personally religious in a different sense, and they spoke of spiritual needs of the soul rather than the material survival in nature. This shift from the material welfare of the social animistic religion to the spiritual welfare of the individual's inward spiritual vision is of greatest importance in the evolution of the psychological aspect of religion.

Religion became an individual's concern with the Spirit

that had chosen him for a message (or vision) and for an extraordinary function or duty. It was to command him to teach everybody the way of the inward understanding of God, or the way of establishing personal relationship with the one cosmic or supra-cosmic power behind all Nature and all men. Man became, in this development, the special vehicle of the knowledge of the supra-natural world that supported and guided the natural world. The two worlds were under one sovereign, but the way to the higher world was through inner vision and not through outer perceptions. Religion thus became, very early, a matter for inner connection with God.

Putting the distinction in terms of Indian thought, the Natural Religion is the sense of the transcendent power behind all Nature that produces a sense of life all though it, and may be accompanied by wonder and awe; but the Inward is the deeper experience of the Supreme Power behind all Nature to be one's Spiritual Self itself. The former is the adhibhuta concept, the latter is the adhyatma concept of religion. Higher religions are, therefore, individual, personal, and spiritual ways of relating oneself with God or the Ultimate Reality, who can be known and seen and entered into, but only from within, through one's own heart. The kingdom of God in within : God is the Atman within, the soul, and all nature. This is spiritual knowing. It is difficult to socialise this.

The Indian concept of God thus took two forms, the adhibhuta and the adhyatma; the former tended to worship directly the elements, such as earth, rivers, fire, air and the akasa, in all their subsidiary forms. Thus developed also the worship of God in the most beautiful and spectacular Natural forms. Trees were also worshipped if they displayed unusual features. Thus a whole host of natural and animal gods were created to be objects of worship. Even here the higher type of religions began to choose objects which were thought of as symbolising the Transcendent, as symbols or pratika of it. Idolatry, or worship of idols or icons, came into being as objects suitable for social worship, or collective congregational worship. Strewn all over the countryside, in each village, we have these objects of sacred character, which the people in the village worship or propitiate in a number of ways. The reverence and honour done to these objects is very similar to the conventionalised honour that men are habituated, by custom, to show to their secular leaders.

That these objects of worship were also accorded the dues that one is obliged to pay to the ruler is also known by the sacrifices in kind, or offerings in money or foods, that one had to give to the deity in the form of the idol or icon. Thus animal sacrifices had played a great part as feast objects to the visitors to the shrine, or the participators in the worship. There is a great

development in religion which makes much of the adhi-yajna aspect – sacrificial aspect of religion. The more primitive people had an extraordinary display of the sacrificial aspect. The Vedic-yajna cult was of this social-religious nature, and almost all the sacrifices were ordained for the welfare of the community or the clan, of course identifying it with the welfare of all.

The Vedic adhiyajna religion was mainly intended to reveal the fact that sacrifice or offering is integral to religions experience, and is a way of relating oneself to the spiritual reality. Yaga and yajna are shown to be invariable, and absolutely necessary for man to get into touch with the spiritual powers, which are in constant unity with the world and its processes. Though science teaches us the laws of nature, yet is the belief of the religion of sacrifice that super-natural powers govern and regulate natural processes also. The appeasement of these higher spiritual or supernatural processes also. The appeasement of these higher spiritual or supernatural powers seems to be called for whenever great distress prevails on the Earth. Prayers may do; but in earlier times sacrifice, or giving up one's best to God, was considered to be more efficacious. It however led to extra ordinary extents of substitutional victims or vicarious victims and other unsocial "Social" activities which made the yajna itself an affair of loathsome cruelty, so much so Mahavira and Gautama Buddha

unsparingly condemned this. They therefore counselled the inner sacrifice, sacrifice of wealth, possession, marriage, society itself. Whilst the Sakta view maintained the adhibhautika and adhi-yajna views of sacrifice, the Vaisnava, Jaina, and Buddha views encouraged the adhyatma sacrifice. The great Smartas, however, counselled the via media of religion; sacrifice is necessary but not of the animals or of life, except in secular life such as in defence of one's country, protection of honour etc. But adhyatma sacrifice, or offering of all one's desires or objects of desire, possessions and so, is a necessary part of religion. Karma-Yoga which consists in sacrifice, inculcates dana, charity and helpfulness to all in need of succour. Thus the spirit of renunciation or sacrifice of even fruits of all actions was said to be the basic concept of spiritual relationship with God's Universe outside us.

The worship entailed also the utilising of all the sensory and motor functions for the worship of the icon or God-delegate. Thus, every sense organ was utilized to see, hear, smell, touch and taste the object. Similarly the legs and hands and speech were utilised to serve God. Love for service of God was engendered. In all activities one had but one object, and that was God. This led to mental concentration and devotion to the Divine object, chosen as such. Sophistications notwithstanding, it brought out an amount of dedication, which was emotionally

integrated the individual with his social religious tradition.

In the adhyatma sense it meant meditation on the Supreme Being in the heart, from which springs all emotion, and devotion; in one sense all life. Individual's cave of the heart is a concept of personal connection with the divine in silence and in loneliness. Man discovers that he is essentially not a member of the family or clan or caste or community or even religion, but a lonely being whose problems of death and life are so very personal and un-connected with others, that no one except himself must solve them. This loneliness has been the mark of spiritual emancipation from the group-psychology or the social dynamics. It has been condemned by some but nonetheless it persists. Man, though born in a family, develops, at the time of his adolescence, a sense of loneliness, a separateness from all his institutions, and his thought seems to take wings. The crisis of this period was sought to be solved by developing a new approach to the problems of social life, by giving opportunities to experiment with it in his own way. But more than all, religion as an inward way of thought towards the spiritual harmony behind all things seems to have a chance at this period in an individual's life. Brahmacharya, in India, provided this training for the inner way, and at the end of it his harmonious growth as a citizen of spirit in the context of society was rendered

possible. Of course not always was this attended with success, except in certain higher levels of individuals. Modern religious life emphasizes the sadhyatmica, or personal experience of God, as the chief concern of man. It is essential because some of the most important problems arise for an individual when he comes to grips with what may be known as personal relationships, complexities, disturbing his equanimity, tormenting his whole being, torturing his understanding. Men lose their peace of mind.

Mind becomes man's chief concern. Our human society is more a mental one than a physical one, though some are more mental than others. Complexes of all kinds about, and there is perhaps not one individual who is not subject to one or two of these. Egoism and mind bring about all kinds of situations, and they are disturbing. The training of the mind to abolish all thinking had been undertaken by the psychologists, and some yogic schools consider that that is the business of yoga, deriving it from yoking – the bull of the mind is yoked to the cart of social behaviour or integration. This has, unfortunately, only a restraining influence but not a satisfactory one. Society itself might help a lot in solving the problems, provided we have societies, which cultivate the harmonisation of personality. However, not until one can establish a purely spiritual and ethical society for the promotion of the full development of the individuals that

joins it, will social relationship help much. Religions based on mere ethical or political ideals do not go far, for these cannot answer the more peculiar problems of human life, such as the search for immortality, freedom from fear of death and emancipation from sinful-feeling or guilt-complex, perfection and cosmic awareness and so on.

The society by itself may contain all these aspirations, and form different sects within it, but cannot solve it. Those religions, which emphasise sociality, or the Samgha-concept, miss the one fact that counts in spirituality. To be with those who believe alike might give comfort, but not necessarily promote growth of the individuals. It would become an institution, a structure that tends to, lose flexibility, and becomes unhelpful in the long run. Thus, when Buddha enunciated the concept of Samgha or Church as the institution to which loyalty must be given, he was undoubtedly stating the necessity for a good and congenial environment for mutual growth and mutual instruction. He however did not, perhaps, fully foresee that it might lose this aim and become an institution that binds rather than liberates man; that hushes the problems than solves them, and instead of remaining a means become the end itself.

Adhisamgha religions thus do not help much, but we have to recognize that they have been preserving, with whatever success they could, the original ideal of a

society of spiritually emancipated men living for the highest values realisable by man. The religions of the still higher order have been devoting themselves to theology – the science of God, not in relation to the world as such, but of God as He is in Himself. These religions are considered to be remote, for God is not thought of as the creator of Spirit in Nature, nor as the Self of the individuals. The transcendent nature of God is thus beyond man's outer and inner capacities or powers to know. This is really that beyond from which our speech returns, and so too our mind or thought. However our human frame may be limited, man yearns for this experience, and therefore it is that he seeks this again and again baffled though he be.

The adhidaiva xperience of God is a matter for Grace from above, rather than cogitation or mentation from below or from within. The inner, however, is the field for descent of that God-knowledge through grace. The intimations of the Adhidaiva are recorded in the high revelational literature called the Sabda (divinely heard) and divinely seen literature called the Veda. The hearers and seers of the Divine, in His transcendental, aspect, are the Rishis, prophets, the Alvars (divers of the deep) and others of this rank and status. They are kavis (seers of the Transcendent and singers of that). Thus the Hymns have a double role; to reveal the Divine as it is in itself, and also to reveal all in it. But this revelational level is

very difficult to attain, and to understand this mystic literature demands a competency which man rarely possesses. To interpret them is a very difficult undertaking. However, it is to this transcendent mystic literature that one must turn to verify one's own deeper experiences. To interpret our experiences in the light of that literature may profoundly alter our ways of looking at Reality itself. The paramarthika or transcendental way of knowing obviously would differ from the humanistic vyavharika way of understanding, which includes also the physico-biological way of science. It is this adhi-daiva way of knowing that is to be cultivated, if we are to develop further towards universal harmony. A truly universal religion is possible only when each individual can evolve towards the transcendental way of known through dedication to it. Every other lower knowledge has to be at first brought into life with it, if not rejected till a greater light could bring it into it. Mystical discipline of the jnana-yoga and dhyana-yoga help the acceptance of the 'universal transcendental way' which makes man an object of grace of the transcendent. This is the goal of higher religions. Any attempt to limit religion to anything other than the transcendent, however, is spiritually unsatisfying and unsatisfactory. Therefore for our investigation religion comprises of several levels of manifestation and attainment:

The Transcendent or God in Himself or Reality in itself; in the society; in the individual; in the offering or sacrifice; and in Nature. These five or six statuses of the Divine experience have more or less formed the core of the different religions. Though some of the religions have emphasised some and relegated, or neglected to recognise, the others.

In respect of our studies in the fields of Comparative Religion we come across these in a variety of ways distinguished by cultural and environmental differences. An integral view, or all comprehensive view, would show that man needs perhaps all these approaches to the Divine, so as to experience in each the richness, or emancipation, or creativity available therein. While it is true that what is emancipation for one individual may be bondage to another, it is to be realised that religion is mainly the means to liberation from all bondages; physical, vital, mental, egoistic, and Nature itself. The transcendental aspect of the individual ego also has to be finally overcome by Realising the Absolute Godhead. Therefore the Experience of the Para or Absolute, and the Liberation of the individual, appear to be one and the same. The pregnant utterances of the Upanisads All is Brahman, Brahman is All, I am Brahman, Brahman is I, Tat Sat, Sac-cid-ananda, reveal the different levels of the experience of Divine in Nature, in Man, and in Himself.

The Highest of spiritual experience goes, according to some, beyond all religions, which are but means to that highest experience. Religion is not a goal but a means to the Goal. Of course it is one of the experiences in religion that all through the course of religious evolution, the guide of the Absolute Spirit is necessary.

There are other ways of classification of religions according to their theism or otherwise. Religions of God, or of One and only One God, or the Unity of all Gods, or Just polytheism are important formulations. Discussion of a profound nature centre round the fact whether there are many Gods, each one of which is all important in all ways, or important only in one field and not in others. The doctrine of Monotheism denies the other gods, or reduces them to the status of subordinate Gods, or affirms that the One God appears and functions at different levels in different ways. Thus Polytheism is reconciled with Monotheism. It is only when one endeavours to explain the world and man that we ask the question whether the world was created or the souls were created. The fact that there are processes of birth and death give rise to the questions of creation, sustainment and destruction. Religion has to deal with this problem and no wonder the first definition of the nature of God or Brahman is with reference to the Being, which causes these things to arise, to continue to be, and to perish or get withdrawn from existence. These are the

philosophical questions about “whence” and “why” and “who”) the Upanisads have unequivocally stated that this is Brahman. All this is by Brahman. From Him all arise etc. Of course this cannot be proved by arguments taken from experience, though analogically it may have some proofs. But it is revelational knowledge in respect of cosmic facts that must be the proof. Such would have to be accepted as matters of belief, faith, or dogma. But some others thinking not of creation, but of pain and misery which are referred to the threefold sources of nature of self and gods, have sought to explain the whole to arise from desire, whether unconscious, conscious, supra-conscious or sub-conscious. Such a religion, if it could be so called, deals with human misery and its solution, rather than pointing to a Creator of the Universe. Such is Buddhism, which is humanistic and rather unconcerned with, God. It is concerned, if we may say so, with the evil of suffering which, could only be got rid of by abolishing the cause of suffering, is the desires that arise from within for things outside oneself. This is a religion of a different order. Religion is said to be a curative institution hospital for the mentally invalid or deranged people. And mental and other kinds of therapy art suggested in this kind of religious training. The whole world is thus considered to be a vale of misery, and spiritual therapy consists not in supernatural worships and prayers but in the disciplined abnegation of

all kinds of desire, which produce effects that ultimately spell misery. This discipline of renunciation of desire seems to be part of all religions, for one reason or another, for desire is said to be the root of all suffering. A basic conception of religion as a way out of sinfulness of desire seems to have been characteristic of religions which posit that sin is inherent in every living being, especially the human being; but this seems to be only to make man go to a Godhead to redeem or save himself, the sinner. That is why it is inculcated as a belief. This is one of the motives advanced in Christianity. But the cause of suffering or sinfulness is traced to an act of disobedience, rather than to desire, which led to disobedience. But we have religions emphasising the need for God because of an ineradicable sinfulness of the individual.

Though Buddhism seems to get over suffering by reasoning out and finding the causes of suffering and abolishing it, of course with the guidance of the Buddha or bodhisattva, Christianity seeks to cross over sin by the grace of God expressed through Christ, his only begotten son. In other words, Buddha had faith in man to get over his suffering; Christ held that for getting over sin, a transgression of the will of God, God's own grace is necessary. We have therefore religious aspirations for crossing over human sin and suffering, whether it is by God's grace or Spiritual Meditation or Dhyana. The

Sovereignty of human reason, or sublimated reason which has become Vision or divine illumination, has thus been revealed by the Buddha - a way that the religions of Revelation had arrived at independently. One thing seems necessary for any religion, Illumination from Above, from God, or from within. There are religions which emphasise the necessity to believe in God, whilst other religions emphasise the necessity to believe in righteousness, or the System, or Law of the world. The motivation behind these seems to be that obedience to God's will or laws of nature is enough to grant us felicity and peace of mind, whereas disobedience to these leads to punishment and suffering. There is more awareness of religion as being almost identical with social welfare, orderliness, or traditional conformity, rather than as an apprehension of the supra consciousness. Culture, and the cultivation of traditional gentility, seem to be enough provided men are enabled and helped to live together without quarrelling. A peaceful society of course, is difficult to build, but it seems to have been possible in the disciplined ordering of society according to certain basic principles of social organisation in which the community centred round a central institution called the temple or church. Hierarchy develops, but it is contained also by etiquette of spiritual discipline. God is identified with law and the lawgiver. The maintenance of Social dharma becomes the business

of God or His messengers, and the restoration of the order also becomes, inevitably, the purpose of his advent or the necessity for His advent. Thus we find the loka-samgraha or dharma samsthapana becomes God's business, and His will though all-embracing, seems to be insufficient for the purpose of redeeming the souls. However this is said to be not the reason for the Advent at all. God descends to manifest His love to his creation, his concern for the welfare of all his creatures. The impersonal seeks personal relationship in and through the Advent. Therefore the Advent - God or the Avatar is an expression of personal Love, and reveals that the Trans-cendent is not for itself, but offers Itself to one and all who are devoted to His laws, and also to those who do not, so that they may be restored to His Grace. The repeated historical or trans-historical advent of the Divine is accepted fully in Hinduism, but accepted as occurring only once in Christianity, though there is the promise of the coming of the messiah. Advent or Avatar is also not accepted by Islam, but the direct play of God and his lila are accepted in Saivism, the descent as such participating in the world of humanity. That is to say, a humanised descent of the Divine is not accepted by that school.

This brings us to another form of the Godhead, God, in the religion of Zarathustra, is the God of Righteousness or Rta or Dharma; and arrayed against Him are the

forces of Darkness. Man is to choose the right, and service to the right is his religion. To fight against the evil is also his duty. Ahura Mazda and Ahriman are the two forces. These are recognized also in Christianity as God and Satan. Their's is an eternal fight. This is also reflected in the devasura yuddha in Hindu mythology. Religion, therefore, becomes a mythological and allegorical or symbolical struggle between man's higher aspiration and lower cravings. The torture of man's inner conflicts, the inner dharma-yuddha, is to be solved by surrendering everything to God and leaving Him to fight the battle. Religion as the quest for supreme values reveals the struggle between higher and lower values, right versus might. One must, even though alone, fight or resist evil with all one's powers. Bloody wars have scarred the pages of history. The funniest part of this episode in religion is that both sides claim to be the righteous and godly ones. It is not strange that in Zarathustrian myth the devas are said to be forces of unrighteousness whereas the asuras are said to be the righteous ones. Thus it has been left to man to decide upon the ethical concepts of what is right and what is wrong.

The Religion of Love fights the religion of hate, not by creating more hate and fanaticism but by displaying love for the evil-doer himself. The religion of light can hardly afford to remove darkness by producing darkness to

remove it. The analogy is exact, for the spiritual man tries to introduce rationality into the blind emotional believer. The religion of struggle also perhaps signifies that God is appearing to be finite, for he Invites the creatures to participate in His triumph over evil, and thus reveal the inwardness of spiritual courage that can withstand the martyrdom that is the crown of the hero or the vira. Religion includes this as an essential feature - this struggle against the lower nature which, even when renounced, trails the inner life till the ultimate victory, Mara has to be conquered before the bodhi could happen as the Buddha had shown. Thus, avatar of God, or religions of the Avatar, form a unique type, most near to moral and spiritual struggle, and to our own present day ethics of religion. The avatar concept of religion, or avatar-based religion, has to be carefully studied, for there are many who make claims to be avatars but do not fulfill the conditions laid down. Sri Krishna laid down the purpose of His advent and generally of all avatars, and they are (i) the protection of the good (saintly sadhu), (ii) the destruction of the wicked (duskrta) and (iii) the re-establishment of dharma. There is not just one descent for all eternity, as a symbol and perennial inspiration, but a descent again and again whenever dharma declines and adharma raises its head. In a sense the occasionalism of certain western theologians where the Deus ex machine operates would be nearer the

intention of the Divine Descent. We are of course in a world where changing values have registered changes in social morality as well as in political morality. Whenever some great man introduces a moral value into our secular or ordinary world in order to restore the moral tone to it, we recognize that a divine force is working through him. A single devotee or votary of truth or ahimsa could do much, but also provoke such antipathy from all quarters as to invite martyrdom. Such is our modern predicament; But as the moral degeneracy, that produces not even a tinge of conscience for a wrong or, evil done, or tolerated, sets in, the call of the helpless sadhu goes upto God. Our puranas narrate how the Goddess of the Earth petitions to the Creator, seeking redress from the sins and wickedness of her own children, and the creator moves the Transcendent Godhead to save the Earth from her burden. The call of the sadhus, the good men who are devoted only to truth, ahimsa, brahmacarya, aparigraha and asteya, deeming them to be the ultimate values of human life, reaches the Divine and He descends to save mankind and all creatures from the adharma that has reared its head. The question of questions for religion would be, how does evil arise at all in a god-created world ? Or if evil infected this creation from the very beginning so as to be the cause of all creation itself, how is it proposed to explain it? There are various reasons, and one of the primary reasons would be that every evil

has a nucleus of good which is exaggerated or perverted. For example we know that people play up one set of values against another, for instance social justice, against real justice; and what is demanded is a compromise or mutual adjustment of these values. However, one is negated by the other and there results other compromises which defeat the other conditions of moral life. As it was said of power, that “power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely”, **we find certain values have a tendency to try to corrupt truth, ahimsa, asteya, aparigraha and brahmacarya, which fortunately cannot be corrupted**, Even an abstract devotion to them is preferable to casuistry regarding them. This is a truth that the Western ethical and religious thinkers have to learn even today. Wherever casuistry was practised it left the moral subject more helpless than ever. It is perhaps not necessary to enter into the mythological accounts of the lives of the avatars to explain the difficult function of establishment of dharma, which in many cases were forgotten. The historical avatar has attracted more religions because of the hope of being saved, or redeemed and salvaged, and because of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth - the Ramarajya, as it is in heaven or Vaikunta. So much so, a great teacher said that he does not desire to dwell in Vaikunta because he has all things granted to him by God on this Earth itself - in His temples. (Vaikuntha-

vaso'pi na me 'bhilasah). Most historical religions go by the name of Zoroaster, Christ and Mohammedanism (though it is also called Islam) and are centred round the prophet, or Son of God, or Seer of God. The religions also depend upon the continuity of the faithful, the martyrs, and the saints avowing the religion. The historical religions surviving today have fulfilled this test, but again and again the flagging faith had to be renewed by the birth of saints within its fold. Its capacity to convert men of other faiths to it by persuasion or force had indifferent results. By and large, the survival of a religion depends upon its capacity to enlarge the dimensions of civilized behaviour based on the five principles of Hindu ethics, yamas or Sila, or vinaya. A religion that cannot bring about this transformation of personal conduct and social behaviour cannot survive, for it undermines dharma which, as the Upanisad states, is satyayatana. Mahatma Gandhi stated that once he defined God as truth, but later he defined Truth as God. This inversion of the original proposition emphasizes the eternal need. Similarly we can see that God incarnates not for the sake of showing his power and omnipotence, but his love for Truth, sadhu, and dharma; and this love is God. Man should cultivate these loves primarily, and not identify it with other things which takes one away from sila vinaya. However, one basic experience that results from the practice of prayer or adulation and

admiration for God's supreme love for the good and the oppressed, is the experience of the ecstasy of inner meditation or con-templation. The heart of man gets opened up to the Divine experience, and God is seen and heard within, Mahatma Gandhi expressed this by his experience of the Inner Voice, the hearing that meant everything to him. The Yoga of dhyana or meditation, following on prayer, is to experience the descent or birth of God within one's self or heart. This descent of the Divine into the Heart, otherwise called His avatar within the yogis' hearts, is a supreme crown of human endeavour, and is possible. The Alvars have sung about this incoming of God into the heart, and sages of the Veda have experienced this, and their 'hearing' was super sensuous, super conscious, in one word divyajnana. Of such it was spoken as jnani - Jnani mamatmaiva me matam. The jnani deems God as his Self, and God in turn deems the janani to be his self. He Himself becomes jiva-bhuta under such conditions of supreme devotion, or love of God in all His supreme light and glory, and as the Ultimate that has descended into him. But this experience of the Divine Self in the heart is available only to the dedicated. The common man cannot arrive at this experience all by himself. Supreme devotion, total or integral surrender to the Ultimate Godhead who is contemplated upon as Self, alone makes this possible. Lovers of God are indeed

knowers of God, and their love of God, in one sense, excludes the love of everything else. The supreme contemplatives have enriched the world by their realisations much more than all the social work done in the service of the poor, for they roused the inward fire within the heart to yearn for the Divine, and not for the removal of their poverty or their pestilence. But this supreme ekantibhava was not properly understood, and most persons felt that there was an amount of egoism remnant within, that made these great contemplatives to seek their own salvation rather than seek to gain salvation for all. Perhaps wisdom lies in the lone seeker of the supreme destiny, so that his love could be emulated and his achievement be repeated. For such a person discerns all in God and God in all, and loves truly with a different love than what ignorance conceives to be love.

The Divine revelation, or birth in the heart of the Yogi, is the Harda -the heart experience or heart-born, and is supremely personal, transforming the individual into a temple or body of God. The immortal is installed within the mortal, the infinite is born in the finite, and transforms the latter into its vehicle. This is the concept of the Bhagavata or the siddha. True realisation in religion consists in this inward experience of the Godhead as self. Almost all types of yoga finally enter into this condition of union. Though central to personal

devotion, it is also the goal of karma and jnana yogas. However if religion has also to do with the Transcendent and not merely with the embodied condition or indwelling condition, the liberation from the body leads to the ascent into the Transcendent, and this is easily provided by this realisation. In a significant sense, the individual is already free when the Divine incarnates into him, and his bonds fall away from him. Even Time or kala has no more to do with him, and God's infinite universe is open to him. Such is the religious experience glorified by the mystics of all races and times, and more particularly illuminatingly by the Hindu saints and sages in a continuous line of unbroken succession, in all parts of the country. Thus we have sketched the four main types of Religions the religions of the Transcendent, the Religions of Creation, the Religions of Avatars, the Religions of the Heart, or immanence. And lastly we come to the religions of Iconic worship. Hinduism has been usually equated with the worship of idols - which seems to be the most primitive way of objective warship. A poet's praise of the Dawn, or the Ganga, or the Ocean, or of the Sky or Sun might appear to be Just the worship of Nature, The object to be worshipped may be an object of significance within which the individual feels the divine has incarnated. This avatarana, or descent of God into his creation as its inner self, is not an impossible one. God is in everything both

within and without. The Church, it is claimed, is the body of God, even as the individual is the body of God, The community of saints is also said to be the body of God. These are symbolic utterances. The symbols are significant links by which one remembers, or reminds oneself again and again, about the Divine Nature or attributes, which may be physical. Thus the Trisula, the Tridanda, the Cross, the Single digit of the Moon, the Tao, Om, are all symbols. One begins to worship them directly, or through suggested traditional meanings. The totem and taboo objects performed a purpose in the lives of the primitive communities. The same was lifted to the level of spiritual symbolism. Though psychological analyses had yielded very peculiar results, yet these have been sublimated or spiritualised by the higher, consciousness. While people who were not fully spiritual had treated these symbolic objects (lingas so to speak) as reprehensible to their inward and elevated levels of thought, the truly spiritual persons permitted the common man to imbibe the symbol and their transforming, force which helps them to inward realisation. Again and again the critics of the outer representations do not perceive that they themselves are only trying to substitute their own idols in the place of the old ones. They hardly liberate them from all idols, or help them to reach the inward experience which relinquishes the outer, because of its inwardness. Swami

Vivekananda therefore pointed out the supreme necessity for the sage not to disturb the worship of the idolator before one gives him the taste of the inner, and also that there is no contradiction or opposition between both these aspects ultimately. Only idols could be broken or stolen, but not the divine within, who continues to dwell within even when the heart is broken. The objects or idols to be installed are generally of the Supreme Transcendent, the Avatars or merely the Linga (Symbol) of the Divine in His supremest state, so that one is always to contemplate on the Ultimate through the symbol that adequately represents or suggests it. Gross symbols lead to results that could only produce sorrow. Worship of lesser powers also produces fear. Fear is the last thing that one should associate with worship. Just a reference in this connection to those who hold that religion is born out of fear. One is admonished that one may give offence to God if one did not strictly observe the regulations of ritual or of morals. Surely one has to be afraid of punishments for dereliction of duties. But religion would mean that one asks forgiveness of God for such things, and the approach to God is dictated by dual feelings of fear and mercy. This intermixture of feelings may constitute religion for many. But there is another view which holds that God is one who abolishes fear, and those in fear of anything could resort to him for help. Thus religion offers refuge from fear, for God has

undertaken to save all those who seek refuge in Him alone, and not in another. This is surrender in distress to God (apat-nyasa). The temples are places of Divine residence denoted by the establishment or consecration of signs, symbols, representations, or figures of the Divine revealed to man. They are places of physical presence, even like the Asramas of the Sages who are the living residences of God. The Construction of the temples follows the symbology of the universe or the human body, or the prakaras of the Creation. The worship of the objects within the temples sometimes produces inward awakenings or vice versa, and sets up spiritual ascent. In any case the temples were intended to be institutions like the Viharas or the Monasteries for the intensive spiritual advancement of the individual, from beginning to end of his journey. All the yogas of karma (works) and service (kainkarya), jnana and bhakti, including Rajayoga or meditation or dhyana, had a place in this practical environment for integral growth. This is the justification for the fivefold nature of Religion, Hinduism has all the five. Others have two or three or four, but not all the five, nor are they integrated spiritually. Therefore Swami Vivekananda seems to have uttered a profound truth: Hinduism is the Mother of all religions, all others are her children, conforming or rebellious.

