

**International Islamic University, Islamabad**

**Faculty of *Usuluddin* (Islamic Studies)**

**Department of Comparative Religion**



**Religious Encounters and Religious Pluralism in the Nineteenth  
Century Bengal: A Contextualized Study of Swami Vivekananda's  
Neo-Vedanta**

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**IN THE NAME OF  
ALLAH  
THE MOST BENEFICENT  
AND  
THE MOST MERCIFUL**

## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to:

**Mr. and Mrs. Zaheer Ahmed**

**My Dear Parents**

and

**My Daughter Irma**

Whose prayers, support, encouragement, and love served as the impetus for me in pursuing this noble task of learning.

## FORWARDING SHEET

The thesis entitled “**Religious Encounters and Religious Pluralism in the Nineteenth Century Bengal: A Contextualized Study of Swami Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedanta.**”

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## Abstract

This doctoral dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters and conclusion. The introduction is designed to focus on Vivekananda's biographical details by relying on available literature. An account of his life further enables researcher to highlight the contribution of his predecessor's *neo-Vedantins* in shaping his practical Vedanta. Among these *neo-Vedantins* the role and nature of Ram Mohan Roy's and Ramakrishna's neo-Vedanta is briefly discussed in the context of nineteenth century pluralistic Bengali society. A few pages are also written on *neo-Vedanta* of Vivekananda that made its appearance in the second half of the nineteenth century in Bengal due to the amalgamation of Ram Mohan's western influenced neo-Vedanta and Ramakrishna's mystical neo-Vedanta. The investigation of the distinct nature of his neo-Vedanta, his doctrine of religious pluralism and Universalism and contextualized study of his neo-Vedanta research frame is developed. That constitutes the theory of pluralism and Karl Mannheim approach of sociology of knowledge.

The first chapter deals with the background of religious reform movements in the nineteenth century Bengal that are restricted to *Farā'qī* movement and *neo-Vedantic* movements (of Ram Mohan Roy and Ramakrishna). These reform movements emerged to inculcate religious consciousness for reforming and revitalizing their respective religions; Hinduism and Islam. *Farā'qī*, Muslim reform movement, considered revitalization of Islam in taking refuge in the golden period of Prophet Muḥammad while *neo-Vedant*, Hindu reform movement, believed in the revival of Hinduism by reinterpreting Hinduism in rational and western philosophical framework to neutralize Christian criticism.

Hājī Sharī'atullah (1787-1840), as a Muslim reformer expressed his core objective in underlining the Islamic five basic obligations to establish a Muslim society on the footsteps of Prophet Muḥammad by eradicating all types of *shirk* (polytheism) and innovations. While, in Hinduism Ram Mohan Roy's apologetic approach gave birth to neo-Vedanta. Ram Mohan tried to equate his neo-Vedanta with *Advaita* Vedanta when he claimed that he had approved *Advaita* Vedanta, the only creed of his *Brahmo Samaj*, but the reality reflects another side of the picture. Because in Ram Mohan neo-Vedanta metaphysical spirituality of *Advaita* Vedanta's was substituted by western intellectuality and reasoning to reject the authority of Vedas, Idol worship, caste system, widow burning and caste discrimination.

Ramakrishna's neo-Vedanta succeeded in maintaining the link with Indian mystical elements firstly, due to his *bhagti* for mother *Kali* and secondly, he never experienced direct contact with western secular education. On the contrary, to Ram Mohan's neo-Vedanta, he supported Idol worshiping, rejected the caste system while he was silent on *sati*. He criticized the Ram Mohan's apologetic attitude towards Hinduism because he considered Hinduism beyond any corruption and ignorance. He rather emphasized on the infiniteness of Hinduism, which, according to him, had the ability to accommodate all ranges of worship, from polytheism to monotheism. His neo-Vedanta appears to be *tantra Advaita* Vedanta due to his preference of *bhagti* over *jnan* that made him to equate his *Kali* to metaphysical impersonal *Brahman* and in his tantric context, the world became *lila* of his mother *Kali*. His experiential neo-Vedanta in non-Hindu religious experiences gave him syncretic vision, which considered all religions as different paths leading to one goal; realization of one God. But his every religious experience of other non-Hindu religions attained its climax in his *nirguna* and *saguna Brahman*.

In the nineteenth century Bengali society the catalyst behind this religious Renaissance was the late eighteenth century Orientalists generally, and nineteenth century Christian missionaries particularly. Though the methodologies these two adopted were opposite in nature. The Orientalists produced the feeling of pride in Hindus is regarding their religion, while the Missionaries targeted those Hindu beliefs and practices through which they could sow the seed of inferiority complexes among the Hindus.

The above mentioned brief historical background of the nineteenth century reform movements generally and *neo-Vedantins* particular, provides the foundation for the second chapter of this dissertation; Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta. This chapter mainly discusses the practical implementation of neo-Vedanta in the context of caste system, liberation of Hindu women from unjust socio-religious practices and missionary Hinduism. The key through which Vivekananda tried to interpret these issues was his new scheme of metaphysics (neo-Vedanta) that he developed by bringing Impersonal metaphysical *Brahman* of Shankaracharya to the *mayic* world. This penetration not only facilitated him to postulate the concept of a deified world where the *jiva* becomes Shiva and worship of God becomes parallel with service of humanity. In this deified Vivekananda's world, men and women of all castes become equal due to equal sharing of divinity and it leaves no space for caste and gender discrimination. Beside these issues in this

chapter, Vivekananda's concept of missionary Hinduism is also discussed. He satisfied his missionary zeal by merging Buddhism with Hinduism because according to him Buddhism is nothing else but spiritual Hinduism. His intentions behind this melting of Buddhist boundary in Hinduism was on the one hand to regain those Hindus into Hinduism who converted to other religions and to check the mass conversion of Hindus to Christianity. On the other hand, his missionary axiom of absorption of good from other religions and to keep intact once religious identity provided him the impetus to formulate his neo-Vedanta in the pluralistic and universalistic realm.

Therefore the third chapter with the title, *The Journey of Vivekananda from Revival and Reform to Pluralism and Universalism* aims at focusing on how Vivekananda perceived Hinduism among other world religions, as well as how he defines the term religion, types of religion and purpose of religion! Vivekananda's writing is missing one single definition of religion; he rather defines religion differently in different sections of his work. His every definition, however, in one way or another, is pointing towards Hinduism generally and Vedanta particularly. His categorizations of world religions are also based on the realization of God in the soul (Vedanta) that enables him categorize religion in semantic religion and Vedanta. While as a pluralist his position at some place appears as an inclusivist, and on other occasions as an exclusivist. His inclusivism becomes evident when on the one hand; he accommodates Islam and Christianity in *Dvaita* Vedanta, and symbolic Christ as living Vedantins. While his religious exclusivism can be noticed in placing Vedanta as a universal religion, because it can fulfill the spiritual thirst of a variety of people due to *bhagti*, *Jnana* and *karma margas*.

Vivekananda's adjustment of non-Hindu religion in Vedantic frame demands exploration of his knowledge regarding other non-Hindu religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam). Hence Chapter four, *Vivekananda's Views about other Religions* is divided into three subsections; each describes his treatment of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam regarding their religious doctrines, founders or prophets and as a civilization. It is interesting to note that his whole appreciation, criticism or rejection of the religious doctrines and religious practices of these religions was done within Vedantic frame. Or in other words Vedanta was a standard set of Vivekananda for the acceptance or rejection of other non-Hindu religions. Among these non-Hindu religions his fondness and preference for Hinduism becomes more evident in evaluating Islam as a religion



when it is compared with other religions. This is because he tried to reject Islamic tenets not only through Vedanta, but also through depending on prevalent Muslim practices. He writes that Islam claims to be a monotheistic religion, but polytheism is widely spread in Islamic practices, like Muslims' prostration to the *Kabah*, their kissing of the black stone and reverence to a Pīr's grave.

These four chapters of the thesis lead the researcher to the last chapter that attempted a contextual study of Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta. The fifth chapter entitled *Contextualized Interpretation of the Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta* is intended to understand the effects and the relationship of the Orientalists, Christian missionaries and his *neo-Vedantin* predecessors in shaping his practical Vedanta in the nineteenth century Bengal. Among these Orientalists and Missionaries, the trio of William Edward, Colebrook, Serampore and Alexander Duff are worth mentioning. While among his predecessors, the earlier efforts of Ram Mohan Roy, Debendra Nath Tagore, Keshab Chandra and Ramakrishna have been addressed.

The conclusion pertains to the results of the study.

## **Preface**

All praises and thanks to Almighty Allah; the ultimate source of all knowledge to mankind and for His endless blessings for humanity.

This dissertation revolves around the neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda; a metaphysical framework that he designed to revive Hinduism and to harmonized religious phenomena. My attention was drawn towards this topic by Dr. Muhammad Akram for my doctoral research. I am obliged to Dr. Muhammad Akram for his guidance regarding books during documentation of my synopsis. I also have deep hearted gratitude for him being my supervisor and mentor during my whole research process for his valuable suggestions to improve my academic writing and methods of reference through endnotes.

I am very grateful to all my Departmental teachers, especially Madam Amatur Rafi for translating my synopsis from English to Arabic language.

In the course of developing my synopsis I was aware of the dearth of relevant books on my research topic, because I could not find even a single book on Vivekananda in the libraries of International Islamic University Islamabad, NAMAL and Quaid-e-Azam University. Luckily, I downloaded few books and dissertations on Vivekananda from the internet. I obtained the remaining books from oversea booksellers.

I am indebted to my whole family, especially my late father, my brothers (Muhammad Kamran and Muhammad Adnan) and my daughter, for their love, support and prayers. I am also obliged to all my friends, especially Bushra, Sadia and Sania for their love and moral support during my Ph.D.

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## Introduction

Narendra Nath Datta, the future Swami Vivekananda was born in the Datta family, famous for its affluence, philanthropy, scholarship, and independent spirit. It was on January 12, 1863 before sunrise that Vivekananda was born in the house of Wiswanath and Bhuvaneshwari Devi. The father, Wiswanath was an Attorney-at-law of the High Court of Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> He was versed in Sanskrit, Bengali, Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and Hindi languages. He was both a liberal and an intellectual, whose unbiased nature made him the true admirer and appreciator of the truth, even from non-Hindu sources, like the poetry of Hāfīz Shirāzī and the Bible. He had incorporated many Muslims and English influences in his lifestyle regarding dress, food and etiquettes.<sup>2</sup> Wiswanath as a lover of art and literature was skeptical about religious practices. On the other hand, Narendra's mother, Bhuvaneshwari Devi, was a pious, kind-hearted lady, devoted to the Hindu traditions.<sup>3</sup> She was noted for her unusual memory and knew by heart long passages from the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which she read daily.<sup>4</sup>

Narendra's soul in his childhood was nurtured and irrigated in traditional Hinduism by his mother. He also received his early education from her, who taught him not only Bengali alphabets and his first English lessons, but also stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. His remarkable intelligence could be noticed from his biographical records that described his memorization of almost the whole of *Mugdhabodha*, a Sanskrit grammar, as well as passages of the great length from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata at the age of seven.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Swami Nikhilananda, *Swami Vivekananda - a Biography* (London: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, 1986), 3. This book is available on <http://www.vivekananda.net/PDFBooks/BiographybyNikhilananda.pdf> and other official sites of Vivekananda. The above mentioned page numbers are according to pdf file format.

<sup>2</sup>Chattopadhyay Rajagopal, *Swami Vivekananda in India: A Corrective Biography*, 1st ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1999), 11.

<sup>3</sup>Swami Prabhananda, "Profile of Famous Educators Swami Vivekananda 1863-1902," *Prospects* XXXIII(2003): 231.

<sup>4</sup>Swami Tejasananda, *A Short Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), 8.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-15.

These stories stirred in him the devotion for Ram, Sita, Shiva and wandering monks in his early childhood.<sup>1</sup> Narendra's spiritual thirst in his childhood was quenched by his mother, while his father contributed a lot in decorating his intellectual, rational thinking with religious liberalism and tolerance by providing him the environment of plural religious friendly interaction with his friends, belonging to different religions. His father discussed different topics with Narendra to generate in his deep and sound thinking. He gave his son the free intellectual rein to make him one who will not accept the truth as superimposed ideas rather evaluate the knowledge with rational inquiry.<sup>2</sup> And the output of this training could be seen when "even at that early age, he questioned why one human being should be considered superior to another."<sup>3</sup>

Narendra's informal education could be traced to his mother's teaching of him, which was not limited to the religious sphere rather it also comprised learning of Bengali and English alphabets. As time rolled on his father's concern regarding his proper education in English school increased and finally he secured admission for his son in the Metropolitan Institute<sup>4</sup> in 1870 at the age of seven. At the Institute, he got the chance to study many works in English, Bengali literature and Indian History. Narendra passed the Entrance examination from the Metropolitan Institution and FA and BA examinations from the General Assembly's Institution<sup>5</sup> (now, Scottish Church College).<sup>6</sup>

During the first two years of his college life, he learnt some important works of Western logic, and in his third and fourth year classes he set himself to acquire knowledge regarding Western philosophy, as well as ancient and modern history of the different nations of Europe.<sup>7</sup> Philosophy was his first preference, and as a student of philosophy his mind was all the time preoccupied with the question regarding God. "Was there a God? If there was a God, what was He like? What

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<sup>1</sup>P. R. Bhuyan, ed. *Swami Vivekananda: Messiah of Resurgent India* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2003), 5.

<sup>2</sup>Nikhilananda, *Swami Vivekananda - a Biography* 8.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>4</sup>An institution founded by Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

<sup>5</sup>The name of the institution founded by the Scottish Missionary Board.

<sup>6</sup>Swami Lokeswarananda, *Swami Vivekananda the Friend of All (Compilation of the Memorable Events in the Life of Swami Vivekananda and His Sayings)* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1991), 2.

<sup>7</sup>Tejasananda, *A Short Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 17.

were man's relations with Him? Did He create this world which was so full of anomalies?” He discussed these questions with many people to find someone who says that he has seen God for the satisfaction of his inquisitive spirit but he found none.<sup>1</sup> Later on, the hope of receiving the answer of his questions brought him under the influence of the *Brahmo Samaj*.<sup>2</sup> It was a socio-religious movement against certain forms, tenets and social practices of the traditional Hinduism like polytheism, idol worship, caste discrimination and *sati* (widow burning).<sup>3</sup> *Brahmo Samaj* at that time was ruled by the Keshab Chandra Sen and Debendra Nath Tagore. He attended the meetings of *Brahmo Samaj* regularly and participated actively, and during his interaction with Debendra Nath Tagore, he asked him, his famous question “Have you seen God” and got no reply. The remark which Debendra Nath made was the gist of his intellect; he told him, “My boy you have *yogis* eyes”. This spellbinding question of Narendra remained unanswered till he got historical reply to his question from Ramakrishna, “Yes, I see Him as I see you, only in an infinitely more intense sense.” This famous answer of equally famous question gave unidirectional Vivekananda the direction of the path, which Vivekananda had to explore and pass.<sup>4</sup> Vivekananda had received his desired answer, but yet he was not fully convinced because his rational mind (groomed under western influence) demanded scientific justification for this answer. He believed that if a religion is destroyed by scientific investigation, it was all the time useless, unworthy superstition. Then its destruction would be the best thing that could happen.<sup>5</sup> The staunch western intellectuality and skepticism demanded him to cross-examine every assertion of Ramakrishna, who never told him to take his words for granted rather he appreciated him to test him searchingly. At last, it was thus the burning renunciation of Ramakrishna that melted the ice of his cold and stubborn rationality. By and by Vivekananda developed the love of

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<sup>1</sup>Lokeswarananda, *Swami Vivekananda the Friend of All (Compilation of the Memorable Events in the Life of Swami Vivekananda and His Sayings)*, 2.

<sup>2</sup>Gopal Shrinivas Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributor, 1989), 8.

<sup>3</sup>Kalpana Mohapatra, *Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Northern Book Center, 1996), 17.

<sup>4</sup>Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 8-9.

<sup>5</sup>Mohapatra, *Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* 16-17.

his master Ramakrishna that tore the veil of skepticism and added his faith in Ramakrishna<sup>1</sup> to that level, that his master became the highest ideal of spirituality for him. This was the stage when Vivekananda validated faith over rationality by realizing the shallowness of academic learning. This was the stage when his master made him realize what a spark of the Absolute means to a man. This was the first step towards his destination; the neo-Vedanta<sup>2</sup> (Practical Vedanta). The blood and flesh of neo-Vedanta was derived from Ramakrishna's teachings of the significance of Vedanta<sup>3</sup> philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

The event that marked the seedling of the dormant neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda was the discussion of Ramakrishna with his disciples on the *Vaishnava* religion. He told them that religion commands its followers three things: to feel delighted and contented with the name of God, love and devotion for all His creation and services and support for *Vaishnavas*, the devotees of God. As he uttered these words, he went in to *Samadhi* (meditative consciousness) and in that state he uttered the word, Love and devotion for creatures! Love and devotion for creatures! You fool! An insignificant crawling worm is even showing compassion to the other. Then to whom do you show your compassion? It is not for another rather service to man, the veritable manifestation of God. These words of Ramakrishna illuminated the philosophy of Vivekananda by the reconciliation of the dualist *bhagti* (devotion) with the knowledge of non-dualist Vedanta. He further grasped practical implementation of the *Advaita Vedanta* of the ascetics to let the people understand and realize that God is both immanent and transcendent. He is manifested in the creatures, and at the same time beyond all these. This gave all creation the object of love by eliminating the feelings of egotism, jealousy and pity regarding these creations. The service of man attains equation to service of God that purifies heart of man from the

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<sup>1</sup>Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 9-11.

<sup>2</sup>The neo-Vedanta emerged as an ideological movement under the intellectual leadership of Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal. The neo-Vedanta's main concern was to improve the lots of the Indian population through the implementation of social reforms and the propagation of ethical ideals. In its form and contents it is much closer to Western or modern culture.

<sup>3</sup>Vedanta is the philosophical portion of the Vedas (sacred books of Hinduism) that explain the relationship between the Creator and creation (universe and man) by emphasizing that Brahma is atman and atman is Brahma. Thus the essence of Vedanta is the non-duality of the Creator and creation, and oneness of all beings.

<sup>4</sup>Mohapatra, *Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*  
18-19.



ignorance that hindered him from realizing his *atman* being part and parcel of the *Brahman*.<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna remained the source of guidance and spirituality to Vivekananda only for five years due to Ramakrishna's death in 1886, but the love and respect of Vivekananda for his teacher kept the teacher-student bond intact during his life.<sup>2</sup> During Ramakrishna's illness, a group of his young disciples gathered around him, who, while nursing him received spiritual training from him, because he wanted them to take the monastic life as their mission of life. Vivekananda was appointed as their leader on Ramakrishna's wish. To fulfill the wish of their master they founded a monastery at Baranagar, where they lived together and wandered about like other monks.<sup>3</sup> During this period in a monastery, Vivekananda utilized his maximum time in reading, discussion, meditation, taking exercise and doing household work. In 1888 he made up his mind to travel through India (his worshipped motherland) to learn through experience.<sup>4</sup>

Vivekananda traveled extensively through India<sup>5</sup> and discovered the diverse colors of India.<sup>6</sup> This diversity shocked him, because the condition of the rural Indian life was marked by ignorance, superstition, starvation and the victimization of caste-tyranny. On the other hand, the educated upper class and the city intelligentsia, which comprised doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists and Government officers, were busy in blind persuasion of the West and Western thinkers. He appealed to the influential people to provide the opportunity of education to the ignorant rural classes and to mobilize them for this purpose. He believed that few educated men and women could not change the destiny of the nation rather it could be done by education of the masses. He made appeals to many influential persons, but his appeals remained fruitless except in Mysore, where free primary education became possible with the efforts of the ruler of Mysore, who provided his subjects with free primary education, while the other Princes and the intelligentsia paid no heed to his appeals, in spite of having a great regard for him. This attitude

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<sup>1</sup>Tejasananda, *A Short Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 31-32.

<sup>2</sup>Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 17.

<sup>3</sup>Lokeswarananda, *Swami Vivekananda the Friend of All (Compilation of the Memorable Events in the Life of Swami Vivekananda and His Sayings)*, 4.

<sup>4</sup>Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 18-19.

<sup>5</sup>Lokeswarananda, *Swami Vivekananda the Friend of All (Compilation of the Memorable Events in the Life of Swami Vivekananda and His Sayings)*, 4.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 31-32.

made Vivekananda to guess the reason why the so called leaders of the society ignored him? The only reason that he set out was that for peoples, he was one among many wandering monks.<sup>1</sup>

The discovery of India by Vivekananda became his own rediscovery.<sup>2</sup> This was the phase, when he realized the need of socio-practical implementation and experimentation of his *Vedantic* lessons which he had learnt from Ramakrishna. He thought that the socio-practical implementation of Vedanta would give a distinct shape and name to this philosophy. Therefore, Vedanta for him did not remain confined to the liberation of the individual from reincarnation. Rather, it acquired a new meaning that liberation of the people of India from their sorrows, miseries, and degradation would in turn bring the lost prestige of India and Hinduism in the West.<sup>3</sup>

With these ideas and goals he reached Madras, where young followers and his admirers requested him to go to USA in the Parliament of Religion. Vivekananda was hesitant but latter accepted it because he believed that if he would succeed in making his audiences realize that Vedanta is the precious central jewel in the crown of all world religions, then it would help him not only in ameliorating the sufferings in the east, but the West as well. And he would have respectable hearing in his country. The things appeared exactly as he was expecting. He made a noticeable impression first in the USA and then in England. He received high tributes from the press that ultimately gave him the designation of a national hero in India. He was one of those Indians who made the Western scholars revisit their opinions about their own civilization on the one hand, and to appreciate the Indian philosophical heritage on the other. At the same time the Indians who used to feel sorry for their selves now for the first time, awoke to appreciate the richness of their heritage in art, philosophy and spirituality.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>2</sup>Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 22.

<sup>3</sup>Mohapatra, *Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*  
27.

<sup>4</sup>Lokeswarananda, *Swami Vivekananda the Friend of All (Compilation of the Memorable Events in the Life of Swami Vivekananda and His Sayings)*, 6-7.

In 1897, Vivekananda returned to India and was seen as one who brought new life of admiration and prestige for the motherland with his neo-Vedanta (Practical Vedanta). Vivekananda devoted himself to the service of the suffering humanity in spite of his failing health. He preached neo-Vedanta (Practical Vedanta) according to which workers should devote themselves to an active life of service to the masses. He also established a monastic order, which turned out to be a potential instrument for social regeneration of the Indian society. Till his last breath in 1902, he was busy in making India a dynamic and respectful country in the world through spirituality.<sup>1</sup>

The biography and social milieu of Vivekananda depicted that he tried to utilize neo-Vedanta as a key to unlock the door of prosperity and enlightenment for his nation. He believes that social implementation of neo-Vedanta will be helpful for him in eliminating poverty, illiteracy of the masses, class discrimination and the emancipation of women.<sup>2</sup> Before examining and explaining the neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda (that is also termed as Practical Vedanta) the necessity of explaining the concepts: Vedanta and neo-Vedanta is felt. Here the concept of neo-Vedanta will be specific with Ram Mohan Roy and Ramakrishna, who are the forerunners of Vivekananda.

The term Vedanta means the end of the Vedas. Vedanta contains doctrines set forth in the closing chapters of the Vedas. These closing chapters are also called the Upanishads and are considered by some as the essence of the Vedas. It is further divided into three schools *Dvaita*, *Vishishta* and *Advaita*. These three schools explain the relationship of man with *Brahman*. Madhva (1199-1278) who established the *Dvaita* School believes that man is the servant of God and wants to serve God as a servant. Ramanuja (1017–1137) established his *Vishishta* School and his *VishishtAdvaita* philosophy revolves around the basic tenet that Man is a ray or spark of God. And *Vishishtadvaitin* wants to become his servant, but does not wish to merge or become identical with the Lord. While Shankaracharya (788-820) the establisher of the *Advaita* School says that man is identical with *Brahman* and the *Advaitin* wants to become identical with *Brahman*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mohapatra, *Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*  
28.

<sup>2</sup>Ruma Nath Choudhury & U S Nath, "Metaphysical Foundation of Swami Vivekananda's Social Ethics," *Barnolipi-An Interdisciplinary Journal* Volume - I., no. IV (2011): 46-47.

<sup>3</sup>Sri Swami Sivananda, *All About Hinduism* (India: The Divine life Society, 1999), 128-32.

This Vedanta attained the name of the neo-Vedanta by Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) who amalgamated the classic Vedanta with rationality and Western outlook. The purpose of this whole amalgamation was to revive Hinduism with the teachings of neo-Vedanta by accepting the monotheistic concept of God. This unity of God made him to emphasize the equality of humanity and dismissal of idol worship, caste exclusivity and sectarian strife.<sup>1</sup> Another important theme in Ram Mohan thought was Universalism,<sup>2</sup> and in 1829 Ram Mohan published his work *The Universal religion: Religious Instructions founded on Sacred Sources*. Ram Mohan attempts to find the basis of this Universalism from Vedanta and commentaries of Shankaracharya. In the same work he introduces his idea that Hindu religion is far superior to all others due to its ability to subdue foreign religions.<sup>3</sup> These basic tenets of Ram Mohan Roy's neo-Vedanta was nurtured and nourished by his successor's intellectual contribution. The neo-Vedanta was drawn upon to mystical insight by Ramakrishna. He emphasizes on the love of God, renunciation of the world and believes in the unity of all religions by spiritual experience.<sup>4</sup> Hence Swami Vivekananda was indebted to these predecessors in devising his neo-Vedanta as Practical Vedanta and universal Vedanta.

His neo-Vedanta bears different meanings when viewed in two different frames: within Hinduism and without Hinduism. The neo-Vedanta within Hinduism attains the form of Practical Vedanta by bringing Vedanta from the forest to Hindu social ethics. These social ethics have their foundation in the Hindu metaphysics, that further lay down the principles regarding what ought to be done and what not. He utilizes his neo-Vedanta (Practical Vedanta) to eliminate the poverty and illiteracy of the masses and for freedom from the bondage, emancipation of women, religious toleration, uplift of the unprivileged classes and castes and so on.<sup>5</sup> His Practical Vedanta does not emphasize on the liberation of the individual rather the liberation of the masses.

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<sup>1</sup>Robin Rinehart, *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture and Practice* (USA: Library of Congress, 1964).

<sup>2</sup>It is philosophical doctrine of the final salvation of whole humanity.

<sup>3</sup>[http://kelamuni.blogspot.com/2006/09/neo-Vedanta-of-swami-vivekananda-part\\_11.html](http://kelamuni.blogspot.com/2006/09/neo-Vedanta-of-swami-vivekananda-part_11.html)

<sup>4</sup>, in *Religion and American Cultures: An Encyclopedia of Traditions, Diversity and Expressions*, ed. Luis D. León Gary Laderman (United States of America: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publishing Data, 2003), 120.

<sup>5</sup>Nath, "Metaphysical Foundation of Swami Vivekananda's Social Ethics," 46-47.

His Practical Vedanta in the broader frame of religious encounters appears as a universalistic religion of human brotherhood<sup>1</sup> as he claims that all religious systems have their seeds in Vedanta.<sup>2</sup> He also orates that Practical Vedanta is readiness to accept diversity “to assimilate<sup>3</sup> the spirit of other religions while preserving<sup>4</sup> its own uniqueness and individuality.”<sup>5</sup> But it is worthy to note how these two apparently opposite terms “assimilating” and “preserve” fit and work together in Vivekananda’s formula of universal brotherhood. The phenomena of preservation and assimilation stand poles apart as the presence of one phenomenon totally negates the presence of the other. In other words, an unconscious presence of the exclusive approach can be detected within the Practical Vedanta of Vivekananda, which contradicts his rejection of exclusivism. Similarly, his contention that Vedanta is the culmination of universal spirituality seems to be a dogmatic claim.

In fact, the comprehension of Vivekananda’s neo-Vedanta remains partial without discussing the factors that makes him to bring Vedanta of the ancient *rishis* (wisdom seers) into the modern social life. Similarly, the issue of emphasis on Vedanta as a culmination of spirituality and religion needs to be understood in its historical context. In fact, similar tendencies were emerging in the nineteenth century Bengal even before Vivekananda. During those times, Bengal was adorned with diverse socio-religious cultures due to the religious diversity of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. This religious diversity was enriched and strengthened by the foreign religions that invaded this region in different periods. That resulted in religious encounters ranging from syncretistic, inclusivist to exclusivist encounters.

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<sup>1</sup>Pillachira Mathew Thomas, "Swami Vivekananda, His. Reconstruction of Hinduism as a Universal Religion" (McMaster University, 1969), 36.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>3</sup>Here the term assimilating according to Vivekananda's viewpoint means that the follower of one religion could absorb all goods from other religions. And then that follower felt no reluctance in incorporating that foreign religions good in his religious life.

<sup>4</sup>The term preserve with reference to Vivekananda means that man should keep his religious ideology intact from being corrupted by amalgamation of other religious ideologies.

<sup>5</sup>Bithika Mukerji K. R. Sundararajan, ed. *Hindu Spirituality: Postclassical and Modern* (Delhi: CrossRoad Publishing Co., USA,2003), 135.

Islam as a foreign religion arrived here with the Delhi Sultanate (1206-87), during which Persian, Turkish, and Afghan Muslims started settling in this region. The wave of conversion to Islam in Bengal reached its peak under the reign of Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605).<sup>1</sup> The differences in the indigenous and foreign religions regarding their beliefs and socio-psychological outlook resulted in multidimensional pressure on these religious communities. The reaction of this stress was expressed differently not even in inter-religious communities rather in intra-religious community. Some felt the need of preservation of the individual identity, while others were more inclined towards amalgamating religious beliefs and cults. These assimilating beliefs gave birth to syncretic Bengali literature and cults like *Satya Pīr* and *Panch Pīr*, venerated by both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

The Second, religious influx occurred with the empowerment of the East India Company (1757-1857), when they got military control and formed new Government.<sup>3</sup> Initially, the English rulers remained impartial towards the religious beliefs and tried to avoid any disturbance in the pervading religious customs and practices until these became a hurdle in their Governance. Though the government was compelled to take several initiatives in the domain of religious affairs for administrative reasons but these initiatives had little religious motives behind them. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the English rulers changed their policy and started patronizing the work of Orientalists and Christian missionaries. This change of policy allowed the Orientalists and Christian missionaries to work for their religious motives, such as innovations in the missionary activities, engage in polemics and the new rituals of conversion.<sup>4</sup>

These activities of the Orientalists and Christian missionaries electrified the fears of the different religious communities and made them alert with regard to the preservation of their religious and cultural identities. This concern of various religious communities to preserve and revive their threatened religious identities marked the nineteenth century as the century of religious revival and reform movements in Bengal. If one were to divide the nineteenth century into two halves,

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<sup>1</sup>Juan Eduardo Campo, in *Encyclopedia of Islam (muslims empor in bengal)* (New York: Juan E. Campo, 2009), 87.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, vol. 3 (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 1.

one would find that each half of this century had a distinct nature of reform movements in Bengal. In the first half, one finds the reformers like Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), Debendra Nath (1861-1841) and revivalists like Ramakrishna and Hājī Shari‘atullah (1787-1840), while in the second half, the developments of the neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda and his contemporaries seem more important. These developments in the nineteenth century Bengal need some explanation.

The first half of the nineteenth century in Bengal marked the emergence of several Hindu and Muslim reform movements, but a clear-cut demarcation can be drawn on the basis of their viewpoints regarding religious revival and reform. The first and the foremost reform movement was launched by Hājī Shari‘atullah (1787-1840) in Bengal as the *Farā‘idī* movement. The purpose of this movement was to revive the pristine teachings of Holy Prophet (pbuh) by purifying Islam from innovations on the one hand, and to regain the lost dominion of the Muslim political powers on the other.<sup>1</sup> The movement essentially emphasizes the performance of five basic obligations prescribed in Islam.<sup>2</sup> The “concepts, symbols and intellectual framework for this movement came from Indian Islamic thought as centered on Delhi and from Saudi Arabian cities of Makah and Medina.”<sup>3</sup>

While on the other hand, the pioneer of Hindu reformation in Bengal was Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) who was the founder of an intellectually inspired movement *Brahmo Samaj*. He criticizes some popular Hindu beliefs and social practices by utilizing the Vedanta concepts and symbols in an intellectual framework. This framework was constituted of “rationality, Western education, fervent and diverse intellectual inquiry.”<sup>4</sup> This amalgamation of classical Vedanta philosophy with rationality and Western outlook resulted in new appareling of ancient Vedanta

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<sup>1</sup>Muhammad Ahsanullah Faisal, *Haji Shariatullah's Faraizi Movement History-Da'wah and Political Ideology* (Dhaka: Shariatia Library, 2010), viii.

<sup>2</sup>Sufia M. Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic Nation* (USA: University of North carolin Press, 2006), 54.

<sup>3</sup>Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, 18.

<sup>4</sup>Soumyajit Samanta, "The Bengal Renaissance : A Critique," in *20th European Conference of Modern South Asian Studies* (Manchester (UK)8th – 11th July 2008), 2.

philosophy to neo-Vedanta. And Ram Mohan became the father of this neo-Vedanta. He tried to revive Hinduism with the teachings of neo-Vedanta by accepting the monotheistic concept of God and rejecting the perceived *Brahminical* innovations such as Idol worship, the cruel practice of *sati*, and gender discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

The journey of the neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy got acceleration of the intellectual efforts of Ram Mohan's successors, but in the meantime the appearance of the experiential neo-Vedanta of a monk, Ramakrishna (1836-1886) switched the rational track of neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan to spirituality. His neo-Vedanta was characterized by spiritual experience and realization of One God who has different names such as *Brahman*, *Bhagvana*, *Paramatman* and *Kali* (primordial power of creating, preserving and destroying). His spiritual neo-Vedanta set a hierarchy of the Creator and creation relationship, the base of which is constituted with a relationship when creation finds the God in heaven, and then the next stage is when creation finds God in all beings as life and consciousness, and the uppermost stage is when creation finds nothing but God.<sup>2</sup>

Ramakrishna's spirituality remained unquenched by following one path within Hindu spirituality and realization of God. This insatiability of realizing God was fulfilled when he first, experienced different paths in Hinduism like *yogic* and the *tantric* and secondly, in different religions like Islam (Muslim *sufi* path) and Christianity. All these religious experiences made Ramakrishna inclined towards the ideal of harmony between all religions.<sup>3</sup> He believes that differences in these different paths were apparent, not real. In his view, different religions are various paths that lead the spiritual traveler ultimately to the common destination of realizing one Divine Being.

The focus on rationality and spirituality respectively placed the neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy and that of Ramakrishna on two opposite poles. Against this background, the neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda in the second half of the nineteenth century appears to be an attempt at bridging the

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<sup>1</sup>Rinehart, *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture and Practice* 188-200.

<sup>2</sup>Glyn Richards, ed. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism* (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 53-62.

<sup>3</sup>Swami Bhajanananda, "Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda," in *Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture* (Kolkata: Swami Sarvabhananda, 2007), 11.



gap between these two distinct approaches by combining their essential elements. Thus, Swami Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta seems to be indebted to the rationality of Ram Mohan Roy and the spirituality of Ramakrishna. In other words, it appears that the assimilation of the individual approaches of his predecessors made it easy for Vivekananda to devise a formula of his practical and universal neo-Vedanta.

The briefest examination of the whole course of neo-Vedanta from Ram Mohan Roy to Swami Vivekananda in the specific context of nineteenth century Bengal indicates that in this transitory period not only the economic and political processes of Bengal were affected but also the socio-religious outlook was changed. The responsibility of this transition very often seems to fall on intellectual awakening of the Bengalis by British Government, Orientalists and Christian missionaries. It is worth asking here that why did the European influences remain fruitless in bringing such awakening during 1500 CE to 1800 CE? Why the intellectual awakening did appear and was accelerated in the particular period of the nineteenth century?

Thus, this research work is to explore the historical emergence of neo-Vedanta as a product of socio-religious interaction of pluralistic Bengali society in the nineteenth century. This exploration will be done in a comprehensive framework constituted of sociology of knowledge and pluralism.

The evaluation of the central theme of the research questions regarding the contextualized interpretation of Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta is framed along the lines of sociology of knowledge approach of Hungarian born German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893-1947). He postulated the society as the constructor and creator of particular styles of knowledge in an endless series of responses to certain typical situations,<sup>1</sup> the adequate comprehension of which could not be possible as long as its social origins remained obscured. Therefore the generation of knowledge is dependent on the society as "it is not men in general who think, or not even an isolated individual who do the thinking"<sup>2</sup> rather society fashions the genetic makeup of man's thinking when he inherits a set pattern of thoughts in that specific situation. He will then attempt

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce Gold, "Karl Mannheim's Program for a Sociology of Knowledge: Selected Responses from Sociologists in America" (Partially Fullfilm, University of Victoria, 1994), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia an Introduction to Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., Inc., 1954), 2.

to elaborate these inherited modes or try to substitute these with others in order to deal more adequately with the new challenges which have arisen out of the shifts and changes in his situation.<sup>1</sup>

That knowledge is from the very beginning characterized by a cooperative joint process of group life in which everyone contributes his different fragment of share in knowledge. These contributions arranged themselves in a framework fabricated by fabrics of a common destiny, a common activity and to get rid of common difficulties in discovering the irrational basis of rational knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This results in the generation of four intellectual groups in society. The first group constitutes a radical group, while the second group comprises whose utopia was abandoned that made them skeptic. They find intellectual integrity the only way to proceed to destroy the ideological elements in science. The third group took refuge in the past and tries to find there a period or society in which reality and spirituality dominate the world. But that Reality and spirituality became extinct in this period and this group seeks to reconstruct and revive religion, spirituality, idealism, symbolism and myths for the present situation. The fourth group consisted of those who rejected the world and consciously deserted direct participation in the historical process<sup>3</sup>like the mystics and monks.

But what produces these intellectual groups and why? Karl Mannheim replied these questions in term of social mobility. Complete comprehension of social mobility could not be attained without understanding its opposite counterpart, the socially static society. A socially static society is one in which isolated non-communicative strata are present and it witnesses the monopoly of the priestly caste or ecclesiastical interpretation. On the other hand, social mobility is marked with the destruction of the early illusion that all things could experience change except knowledge. This further leads to a stage of historical development in which the previously isolated strata begin to communicate to one another and an apex of this social communication could be seen when the previously independent thought and experience enter into one and the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 233.

same consciousness, that is eager to discover irreconcilability of conflicting conception of the world by replacing the organized stratum of intellectuals with free intelligentsia.<sup>1</sup>

This research work intends to utilize the above mentioned sociology of knowledge approach as a theory of empirical research<sup>2</sup> “to investigate through description and structural analysis of the ways in which social relationships, in fact,”<sup>3</sup> affected the thought of the religious communities of the nineteenth century Bengal to engender Muslim and Hindu reform and revival movements. This structural analysis is helpful in searching out the questions as to why, how, and what social conditions made the Muslims fall in the third intellectual category of the Karl Mannheim of taking refuge in the past to revive religion on the basis of spirituality? While in the case of Hinduism the research is focusing on the question that why Hindu reform movements adopted the Vedanta philosophy (one among the six philosophical Hindu schools) as the true representative of Hinduism and what social factors compelled them to reform and revive Hinduism in term of Vedanta? Why the Vedantic teachings of the Hindu reformers are called neo-Vedanta?

The structural analysis of the neo-Vedanta of the Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is going to evaluate the distinct socio-religious and political circumstances that constructed the unique fabrication of their neo-Vedanta by raising different questions. As what social factors contributed the rationality and western garbing of Ram Mohan Roy’s neo-Vedanta? Or why was Ramakrishna’s neo-Vedanta more spiritual? Or how can the impact of the Practical and universal Vedanta of Vivekananda on Bengali society be estimated? Or why was the neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy more foreign in nature when compared to Ramakrishna’s spiritual neo-Vedanta? And what made Vivekananda transforms the spiritual neo-Vedanta of Ramakrishna to Practical, missionary and Universal Vedanta?

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 6-8.

<sup>2</sup>Gold, "Karl Mannheim's Program for a Sociology of Knowledge: Selected Responses from Sociologists in America". sociology of knowledge\Sociology of Knowledge.mht

<sup>3</sup>Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia an Introduction to Sociology of Knowledge*, 239.

The social, intellectual awakening that gave birth to the above mentioned neo-Vedanta is going to evaluate in terms of the vertical<sup>1</sup> and horizontal mobility<sup>2</sup> of Bengali society. This research will, therefore, focus on the role of the British government, Orientalists, Western education and Christian missionaries, as the key factors of this mobility that on one hand destroyed the intellectual priestly *Brahmin* stratum of Hinduism and succeeded in generating the free intelligentsia on the other.

In the course of the study, the present writer also discusses how far the neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda plainly follows, improves upon or diverts from the classical *Advaita* Vedanta of Shankaracharya. Critical questions that need to be addressed in this context are regarding issues like idol worship, caste discrimination, *sati* and on the concept of missionary Hinduism. More specifically, what made Vivekananda focus on these issues and not others, and how far his interpretations are plausible within the framework of classical Vedanta Philosophy?

The study will also aim to contextualize the whole development of the neo-Vedanta as a socially constructed knowledge in general, and more specifically the emergence of the ideas of Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta with reference to the socio-political situation of the nineteenth century Bengal. In other words, the study is envisaged to reinterpret the reform and revival movement of Vivekananda in terms of mutual influences and interactions between different cultural and religious forces in the Bengali society of the nineteenth century.

Lastly, Vivekananda's contention that there are numerous ways that lead towards the truth would be critically analyzed. On the one hand, Vivekananda is claiming equality of all religions; however, on the other hand, he seems to be trying to submerge the other religions in his *neo-Vedantic* approach. Apparently, the tension between these two positions makes his standing as a proponent of the theory of religious pluralism suspicious. In other words, Vivekananda's popular image of a pioneer of religious pluralism needs to be checked by studying his knowledge of the beliefs, rituals and practices of other religions, as well as, his practical interactions with the followers of different religions during his life.

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<sup>1</sup>The term vertical mobility is used to denote that rapid movement between the strata. Here strata represent the four castes in Hinduism.

<sup>2</sup>The term horizontal mobility denotes the socio-religious encountering of diverse religions in Bengal in multiple styles that embrace the exclusivist, inclusivist and universalist trends.

The most prominent exponent of pluralism is John Hick (1922-2012). In his book, *God and the Universe of Faith*, he pointed out the need of switching from Christian centered approach to God centered approach. He claims that all religions lead to the same God, universally available to all religious traditions.<sup>1</sup> The situation is not as simple as it appears from the definition of John Hick rather; it attains very complicated form when the claimed pluralistic and universally harmonized neo-Vedanta seems to contain inclusivity by Vivekananda's statement that "every religion is the seed of Vedanta."<sup>2</sup> This apparent contradiction then leads to a question, how did he define his universal religion? How can it achieve the objectives of harmony and toleration? What are its theoretical or theological foundations, and how were the circumstances of the nineteenth century Bengal influential in bringing such view of religion? All needs to be carefully studied and analyzed, because John Hick's pluralistic and Universalist hypothesis does not seem to intend merging of all religions into one. John Hick's hypothesis does not appear to feel comfortable with the idea of new global religion that contains the notion that we are all the same. On the other hand, his hypothesis was the meta-theory, that is, an explanation of religious pluralism that allows people to be different.<sup>3</sup> Hick affirms the difference in religion and his pluralist perspective was due to the adoption of experiential approach. Hick further elaborated his pluralistic and universalistic model in the ethical realm,<sup>4</sup> while Vivekananda's pluralism and Universalism appeared to be metaphysical. Hick's identification of a religion as the true religion relates to a scale that measure how much a religion is extending facilities and good fruits to its adherents in bringing salvation, enlightenment and liberation. Hick focused on the practical usage of religion for the betterment of humanity, rather than on metaphysical beliefs. The adherents of every religion are pervaded by virtue and vices, so Hick rejected superiority or inferiority of any

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<sup>1</sup>Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (USA: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2013), 267.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas, "Swami Vivekananda, His. Reconstruction of Hinduism as a Universal Religion", 26.

<sup>3</sup>David Cheetham, *John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 132.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

religion.<sup>1</sup> Vivekananda's whole work is an indication towards the superiority of Hindu religion over the rest.

Hence the word "truth" seems in Hick's theory is characterized with ethics, while in Vivekananda's model it is metaphysical. Hick believed that commonalities do exist in all religions, but these commonalities are not sameness, while Vivekananda fabricated his whole theory in equating commonalities with sameness. So these are the issues that demand careful analysis of Vivekananda's pluralistic and universal religion.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 135-38.



## **Chapter 1: Historical Background of the Nineteenth Century Religious Movements in Bengal**

The name 'Bengal' or 'Bangla' that represented a single geographical entity with distinct political, cultural and religious ideologies lack unanimous consent of scholars regarding its historical origination and derivation. According to some this territorial area consisted of many independent states like Gaura, Varendra, Pandora, Samatata, Radha, Samoa, Vanga, Harikela, Karnasuvarne.<sup>1</sup> And among these, the two kingdoms of Vanga or Banga appear to spring the name Bengal or Bangala.<sup>2</sup> Some credited the coinage of the term Bengal to Marco Polo (1298 CE) while others traced the political tract term with the Muslim ruler Mughithud dīn Tughril (1268 CE). This lateral opinion has been mentioned in the work of Dia-ud-dīn Bārānī. Britishers latter on also used the term Bengal for this area that appeared to support the argument that Britishers might inherit this term Bengal from Muslims.<sup>3</sup> It is however clear that whatever course the present day Bengal took to acquire its name, it seems to be a result of a quite long historical process, which started from the different independent states and reached the final phase of a unified identity of Bengal in the history. This cultivating land of Bengal appeared distinct in its fertility for multi-religious and multicultural society.

### **1.1-Religious Diversity and Religious Encounters in the pre-Colonial Bengal**

The understanding of religious diversity and religious encounters in Bengal remains superficial without becoming aware of appearance and interaction of different religions (Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism) in this area. These encounters took multidimensional tracks; the first track emerged as the result of melting of individual religious identities into a syncretic form of religion. This first track was substituted by next track of reawakening of individual religious

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<sup>1</sup>Pradyot Kumar Maity, *Human Fertility Cults and Rituals of Bengal: A Comparative Study* (New Delhi: Shakti Malik, 1989), 7.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Lyon, in *Conflict Between India and Pakistan: An Encyclopedia* (California: Library of Conference cataloging-in-Publishing Data, 1934), 32.

<sup>3</sup>Maity, *Human Fertility Cults and Rituals of Bengal: A Comparative Study*, 9.



identities that culminated in the nineteenth century Bengal in the form of socio-religious reform movements. Before addressing the core issue of reform movements in the nineteenth century Bengal, a brief account of appearance and arrival of different religions in this area is required.

Little is known about the history of Bengal before it became a part of the Muarya Empire during the reign of King Ashoka in the 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE.<sup>1</sup> Though Ashoka had converted to Buddhism, but Buddhism attained the status of the official religion of Bengal during the Pala dynasty (8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) established by Gopala, a *Khashtriya* tribal chief of Varendra.<sup>2</sup> The socio-religious makeup of the Pala dynasty witnessed the diverse religious composition. That varied from the Vedic religious practices to the reformed *Brahminical* religion of *Shiva*, *Vaishnavas*, *Shakta* cults to Puranic cult and even orthodox Jainism was not out of its domain. This diversity was the friendly and harmonious encountering, devoid of envy and jealousy.<sup>3</sup> As Pala rulers were quite respectful towards the people of other faiths.<sup>4</sup> Their patronization and generousities to other religions melted the barrier of prejudice and opened the door to syncretism.<sup>5</sup> In the eleventh Century, the Pala (earlier enthusiastic Buddhist) started favoring the cults of two gods: *Vishnu* and *Shiva*.<sup>6</sup> This syncretism and the emergence of the *tantric* cults profoundly transformed Buddhist religious ideas. The same *tantric* ideas also pervaded different *Brahminical* sects and radically changed their views and practices. But Jainism succeeded in maintaining its orthodox identity against such impulsive waves. This period of inter-religious harmony was followed by the conservative and orthodox Sena kings (South eastern kings) who were the stakeholders of *Brahmanical* system. They started to partition the Bengali society by raising artificial barriers of

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<sup>1</sup>Lyon, 32.

<sup>2</sup>Stuart Butler, *Bangladesh. Ediz. Inglese* (UK: Lonely Planet, 2008), 19.

<sup>3</sup>Jhunu Bagchi, *The History and Culture of the Pālas of Bengal and Bihar, Cir. 750 A.D.-Cir 1200a.D.* (New Delhi: Shakti Malik, 1993), 94-102.

<sup>4</sup>Kazi Nurul Islam, "Historical Overview of Religious Pluralism in Bengal," *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* 8(2011): 26.

<sup>5</sup>Bagchi, *The History and Culture of the Pālas of Bengal and Bihar, Cir. 750 A.D.-Cir 1200a.D.*, 94-102.

<sup>6</sup>Richard Maxwell Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760 (Introduction and Faraidi Movement)* (London: California Press, 1993), 10.

high and low caste not only within Hindu society but also promoted such outlook for other religious communities.<sup>1</sup>

The most powerful and prominent king of the Sena was Vallala Sen (1158-1178), a zealous proponent of *Brahmanism*. He introduced the practice of *kulinism*<sup>2</sup> within Hinduism and religious intolerance towards Buddhism. His supporters converted Buddhist temples into the alter house of Hindu temples. These temples were made the seats of Hindu sacrifices where they intentionally performed their religious sacrifices to scare away the Buddhist monks. But this persecution of the Buddhists for the delight and amusement of the *Brahmins*<sup>3</sup> continued till the appearance of Islam in Bengal through a Muslim conqueror Ikhtayār-ud-dīn Muḥammad Khiljī.<sup>4</sup> He belonged to a Turkish Khiljī Tribe who defeated the King Lakh Sen in 1204.<sup>5</sup> Thus the political Islam made its arrival with the period of the Delhi Sultanate (1206-87), during which Persian, Turk, and Afghan Muslims started settling in this region. The wave of Islamization of Bengal reached its peak under the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605).<sup>6</sup> As discussed above, before the arrival of Islam Bengal was not a land devoid of religions. However, in contrast to the previously existing religions in the region, Islam was taken sometimes as a foreign religion, or the religion of the invaders.

The socio-cultural behavior of this “foreign” religion was distinct and unique, fabricated with the Islamic religious doctrines. These Islamic doctrines appeared as the antithesis of the prevailing regional Hinduism. The centripetal force of the Muslim society resides in the simple belief of equality of human beings, all of them considered to be Allah’s creation. They neither recognize priesthood nor acknowledge caste based differentiations regarding food, drink, dress, marriage

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<sup>1</sup>Muhammad Ghulam Rasul, "Bengal Society before the Advent of Islam," *Society and Culture in Islam* (1986): 1.

<sup>2</sup>Kullinism was a trend to legalize polygamy in Hinduism. In this practice a Brahmin could marry more than one women. Brahmin was even allowed to marry low class women to enhance the status of her father. Upadhyay Poonam in his book *Social Political Economic and Educational Idea of Raja Ram Mohan Roy* on page number 42 has mentioned that Kullin Brahmin were notice to have wivies from one hundred and twenty to six hundred and fifty two.

<sup>3</sup>S. N. Sadasivan, *A Social History of India* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2000), 207.

<sup>4</sup>Islam, "Historical Overview of Religious Pluralism in Bengal," 26.

<sup>5</sup>Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, "Advent of Islam in Bengal: An Epigraphic Approach," *IPEDR* 48.6(2012): 26.

<sup>6</sup>Campo, 87.

and other social and religious rituals.<sup>1</sup>The Hindu society was divided into four classes, the *Brahmins* are the most privileged and upper strata, while the *Shudras* were considered to be impure or unclean and therefore made up the deprived lowest class. Many *Shudras* found in Islam a refuge against the system of socio-religious discrimination against them created and maintained by *Brahmins*, as Islam teaches equality and brotherhood of mankind. The mass conversion took place against the *Brahmins*' authority on the one hand, and served as the beginning of the indigenization<sup>2</sup> of Islam on the other hand.<sup>3</sup> It later on paved the way to syncretic<sup>4</sup> developments.<sup>5</sup> The intentions of these masses converts were multifarious. To some this conversion was a "desire to seize a strategic opportunity to move upwards within the existing social hierarchy."<sup>6</sup> To others, it was an escape from tax, some found in it the worldly gains from Muslim rulers and according to some others it was simply a matter of spiritual preferences. Moreover, *Sufi* saints were considered responsible for the mass conversion because for these *Sufis* the conversion of the non-Muslims to Islam was their primary spiritual objectives in Islam. They migrated to these areas to fulfill the command that they received in their dreams to preach Islam to the heathens.<sup>7</sup> In fact, all of the above mentioned factors had probably contributed in the conversion of Hindus to Islam and then in the eventual localization of Islam. This localized Bengali Islam embraced some non-Islamic religious beliefs and practices as it adopted some local ceremonial and societal practices.

But it seems unjust if localized Bengali religion is considered the only reason of innovations in Islam, because many Muslim immigrants imported many superstitions and innovations within

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<sup>1</sup>Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 a Quest for Identity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 7.

<sup>2</sup>Here it represents that historical process in which the elements of the foreign religions find local and native characteristic in Islamic expression but these foreign elements were not contradictory to Islamic religious beliefs.

<sup>3</sup>Siddiq, "Advent of Islam in Bengal: An Epigraphic Approach," 7.

<sup>4</sup>The retention of many unIslamic beliefs and practices in Islam that are termed as innovations.

<sup>5</sup>Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, 1st ed., IB vols., vol. Survey of Administration, Society and Culture (Riyadh Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa'UD Islamic University, 1985), 799.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas R. Metcalf Barbara D. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 3 ed. (New York: Cambridge university Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>7</sup>Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (USA: Lerner Publishings Company, 2003), 158.

themselves. Among these innovations *Sufism* could be placed at the top in its far reaching influence and effect.<sup>1</sup> One thing is clear; however, that the precise demarcation could be drawn between the early *Sufism* and later heterodox mysticism. The early *Sufism* in Bengal was the complete reflection of Islamic teachings, without divorcing a single injunction of *Sharī‘ah*. Their Knowledge regarding Qur‘ān and ḥadīth ranked them in the ‘*ulamā*’ of the first order, who devoted their lives to preaching and inculcating Islamic knowledge from mosques. From the sixteenth century onwards, the originality and purity of *Sufism* were contaminated by the influences of Hindu *yogism* and *tantrikism* that resulted in the heterodox mysticism, having an offshoot called *pīrism*.<sup>2</sup>

Etymologically, the word *pīr* means old, but in Bengali Islam it generally denoted the spiritual instructor (*Sufi*) who is believed to have acquired super-human powers. He was considered to have power of being present at several places at a time, relieving the poor, curing the patient and giving life to the dead, as well as predicting the future. These *pīrs* used to live in a religious institution called *Khānqah*<sup>3</sup> and after the death of a *pīr*, he was usually buried in his *Khānqah*. Later on, these *Khānqahs* and tombs of the dead *pīrs* became the places of pilgrimage, where pilgrims made offerings to living *pīrs* or to the souls of the dead ones. But this concept was not Bengali in origin rather it came to Bengal from west through North India with the immigrants. These foreign ideas got firm roots in Bengal due to the prevalence of similar indigenous worshiping practices like *Chaityas* (*Stupas*) in Buddhism and identical ideas of *avatarism* in Hinduism.<sup>4</sup> These overlapping ideas soften the land for introducing the new mystical cults like *Dharma* cult and *Satya Pīr* cult. *Dharma* cult made its appearance in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by discarding the caste system. This cult emphasizes the equality of man and advocated the worship of *Dharama Thahura* that represents an all-embracing existence and eternal soul having no

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<sup>1</sup>Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, 800.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 802.

<sup>3</sup>It is a persian word that denotes a building especially designed for the gathering of Sufi brotherhood and spiritual training of their students.

<sup>4</sup>Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslim in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)* (Dacca: The Asiatic society of Pakistan, 1959), 162-65.

visible form or figure. These not only hold Friday sacred, but also showed some respect to West direction that Muslims also revered as *Qiblah*.<sup>1</sup>

In 18<sup>th</sup> century CE, a huge literature grew up in Bengal on *Satya* cult. The central figure of *Satya* cult was referred by Muslim writers as *Satya pīr* while Hindus called him *Satya Narayana*. The apparent difference remained only in the usage of the term *pīr* by Muslim devotees and *Narayana* by Hindu devotees. *Satya* cult is one of the examples of Muslim and Hindu syncretic practices in Bengal.<sup>2</sup>

The above mentioned new religious practices of *pīrism* took the road of extension by inclusion of the innovations like reverence of the footprints of Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and reverence for *Panch Pīr* (the five Pīrs). These *pīrs* also adopted some practices of Hindu asceticism. Besides these above mentioned developments, the growth of a particular priestly class in Bengali Muslim society is worth mentioning. Usually this class is given the epithet of *Mullahs*. It could be noticed from the contemporary Bengali literature that *Mullahism* was an offshoot of *pīrism*. The term *Mullah* was used to denote someone who was fairly well-versed in religious principles and daily practices of Islam. Due to supposed access to Islamic knowledge, a *Mullah* used to be consulted by villagers in Muslim society and he was paid for his services. The principle of equality with regard to religious authority in Islamic societies was influenced by the Hindu system of *Brahmin* priesthood. Just like *Brahmins* in Hinduism, *Mullahs* acquired the status of a priestly caste in the Muslim society.<sup>3</sup>

The situation of Bengali Muslim society became worst when Muslims not only got divided on the basis of their lineage, but also started to adopt Hindu inter caste marriages rules to preserve their identities. This resulted in the dichotomy of *ashrāf* and *atrāf* on the basis of ethnic origin. The former claimed to come from central Asia, Afghanistan, Persia, Arabia, and North India while the latter were indigenous converts. The immigrant Muslims were hardly prepared to admit these indigenous converters to a position of equality. Hence these converted people faced the same aggression of social customs, tribal restrictions, and unchangeable rules of marriage and

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<sup>1</sup>A fixed direction that a Muslim should face to perform his prayers.

<sup>2</sup>Karim, *Social History of the Muslim in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)*, 165-67.

<sup>3</sup>Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteen to Nineteen Century)*, 1st ed. (Calcutta: Ratana Prakashan, 1972), 34-41.

inheritance even in the Muslim society. The stratification of the Bengali Muslim society on the ethnic and cultural basis divided the society into Arab or *Azam* on the top of the social ladder who restricted themselves to marry others. The next group consisted of the genuinely *sharīf*<sup>1</sup> who had contracted marriages with non-*sharīf*. Third category included those who were the products of mixed marriages but succeeding in contracting marriages with the daughters of genuine *ashrāf*. The fourth category was those who were non-Arabs immigrants to Bengal and contracted marriages with local converts. Lowest in the social scale were those local converts who failed to establish connection with the recognized *ashrāfs*.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident that much fusion of Islamic and Hindu principles and practices took place in the history of Bengal. But it would be an exaggeration to believe that the above mentioned heterodoxy became part and parcel of these two major religions of Bengal. The true picture of Bengali society could be traced in the statement that neither the whole Muslim community adopted the *Pīrism* or *Satya pīr* cult nor all Hindus subscribed to Chaitanya's *Vaishnavism* or *Dharma* cult.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore the above mentioned condition was the situation in Bengal for several centuries. Then a relatively sudden period of significant social and religious awakening started in the nineteenth century Bengal. But what stimulated this awakening process? The answer takes us to the second religious influx (Christianity) in the history of Bengal with the arrival and coming into power of the East India Company (1757-1857) in Bengal. This development facilitated the activation of Protestant missionaries that were uniquely shaped by the endeavors of Serampore trio<sup>4</sup> and Alexander Duff (1830-1840).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ashraf represents those Muslims who are the descendants of Arab, Afghan, Persia and north Indians Muslims.

<sup>2</sup>Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 a Quest for Identity*, 8-9.

<sup>3</sup>Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, 809.

<sup>4</sup>This trio was consisted of three Christian missionaries who first proposed the idea of Serampore collage and latter succeeded in setting up that collage for imparting Eastern literature, European sciences and Christianity. The name of these missionaries were Joshua Marshman, William Carey and William Ward.

<sup>5</sup>J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), 5.

## 1.2-Advent of the East India Company, Christian Missionaries and the Intellectual Awakening

The East India Company was the greatest mercantile organization<sup>1</sup> whose reason of ultimate formation in England in 1600 could be traced in the fourteenth century European conditions.<sup>2</sup> Since the birth of the company, it was motivated by three guiding principles. Firstly, its main focus was maintenance of its monopoly in Eastern trade regarding its rights and privileges against other English merchants. Secondly, it worked hard to implement its plans to throw out its rival mercantile benefit from the eastern trade. Thirdly, it aimed to secure from Oriental governments the special and exclusive privileges for itself in order to receive merchandise at least at the rates from the buying countries.<sup>3</sup> For executing its principles the East Indian Company first appearance in India was noticed in 1608 through its representative William Hawkins in the court of Mughal emperor Jahāngīr.<sup>4</sup> In the beginning, of course, the Company's primary aim was to secure a permanent establishment in India to extend its commerce and to consolidate its position against its European trade rivals.<sup>5</sup> The achievement of this aim demanded Company to transform it from commercial enterprise to political administration.<sup>6</sup> Thus, in 1757 the mercantile East India Company, which raised armed forces as well,<sup>7</sup> became victorious at the battle of the Plassey by defeating Nawāb Siāj-ud-daullah of Bengal. That resulted not only in the accomplishment of the company's desire to attain supremacy over Bengal but also in making this land the center of all religious, cultural and intellectual activities for the next two centuries.<sup>8</sup>

The earnest desire of the Company was rooted in the advancement of commerce in Indian society through their advanced technology and reformed measures. They implemented their core desires in the domain of economic improvement objects, educational and legal reforms. All these

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<sup>1</sup>Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company* (Lahore: Book Traders, 1976), 66.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 222.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 223.

<sup>6</sup>Ryan Brown, "The British Empire in India" (Ashbrook Ashland University, 2010), 2.

<sup>7</sup>Saidul Islam, "The Creeping March of Christianity: The Widespread Evangelization in Bangladesh" (York University), 2.

<sup>8</sup>T. Jacob Thomas, "Interaction of the Gospel and Culture in Bengal," *Indian Journal of Theology* 36.2(1994): 41.

were implemented under the policy of toleration and non-interference in religious matter of the Bengali people. This policy of toleration and non-interference appeared as a barrier in Christian missionary's preaching activities. This resistant behavior of the Company to missionary activities was due to Company's fear that such missionary activities would provoke a reaction from the Indians. Despite this wise neutral religious policy, the East India Company could not reach until 1857 and the British home government took the responsibility of India.<sup>1</sup>

The Company received no thanks from Christian missions for giving any helping hand in their missionary activities.<sup>2</sup> This situation came to an end in 1813 when the Clapham sect evangelists finally succeeded in amending the East India Company's Charter in favor of missionary activity. But still the Christian missionaries could only operate on Company-controlled territory with Company permission and were subjected to many constraints.<sup>3</sup> However a certain amount of the collaboration could be noticed between the Government and mission before the approval of this charter. Firstly, Lord Wellesley appointed William Carey, a professor of Bengali and Sanskrit language in the College of Fort William in 1800. Secondly, this team work came to light when the Government took advantage of the Mission printing press in Serampore to print the Indian language in their own script. These collaborative works made the Government to switch from the strict rule of refusing every missionary landing in India to the policy of amicability.<sup>4</sup>

The other reason of the Government's flexible attitude towards missionary activities could be seen in the missionary new policy. Missionaries replaced their old policies of (preaching the Bible and polemical debates), and introduced missionary rational and logical educational program for cultivating Indian minds under the umbrella of Christian and secular philosophy. The change in mission policy was due to the unfruitfulness of the previous missionary activities. Christian missionary failed in achieving the satisfactory numbers of Indian converts in spite of their tireless efforts in the period of two hundred and seventies years.<sup>5</sup> During this whole period, missionaries succeeded in converting very few locals from the lowestcaste, out caste and tribal

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<sup>1</sup>Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 9-11.

<sup>2</sup>Sanjay Seth, "Secular Enlightenment and Christian Conversion: Missionaries and Education in Colonial India," *Education and Social Change in South Asia*: 27.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.: 28.

<sup>4</sup>Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 10.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas, "Interaction of the Gospel and Culture in Bengal," 44-45.



groups. But upper-caste Hindus were seemed to be unaffected by missionary efforts. The reason of the failure according to the missionaries was embedded in the prevailing Indian religious system. Among these the most important were the institution of caste and the native psychological attachment of the Hindus to their religion.<sup>1</sup> These missionaries were convinced that Indian's lack of intellectual, critical and creative appraisal was due to their local educational system.

Were the above mentioned apprehensions of missionaries had ground reality regarding the Bengalis' low mental genesis due to the local Bengali educational system? And what strategies missionaries had adopted to awaken Bengalis' intellects (especially Hindu mind as the center of these missionary activities was west Bengal that was a Hindu populated area)? Why has the story of nineteenth century awakening missionary education remained incomplete without appreciating the efforts of Serampore trio and Alexander Duff? And was the result of the missionary education, according to missionary expectation?

In Bengal, primary education was imparted in *pathsalas* that enabled students to just reading, writing, arithmetic, accounts and some religious text. These *pathsalas* lacked any organized text books. While secondary education was facilitated by the Persian schools, where Manuscripts were regularly used that gave students a little information about Muslim history and poetry, the indigenous higher education was carried on in the Arabic *madrassas* (for Muslims) and Sanskrit *tols* (for Hindus), that the imparted comprehensive choice of subjects to their students respectively. These *tols* offered grammar, rhetoric, law, literature, logic, philosophy, medicine, and astrology.<sup>2</sup> In Bengal, education was under the umbrella of religion. Such educational system was generating pupils that have no known how of modern knowledge on one hand and the spirit of creativity on the other hand. The Bengali education limited their main concerns and authority to the explanation, defense and maintenance of the religious text, religious customs and practices. These Hindus believed in the infallibility and authenticity of these religious texts and practiced it without any doubts<sup>3</sup>

In such mindset, it was evident to the Missionaries that their desire of extending the domain of Christ in Bengal could not be fulfilled until and unless they succeed in shaking the foundation of

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<sup>1</sup>Seth, "Secular Enlightenment and Christian Conversion: Missionaries and Education in Colonial India," 30.

<sup>2</sup>M. A. Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 44-48.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 49.

Hindu religion. These missionaries believed that this shaking could be done by nurturing young Bengalis by secular modern education from the primary level.<sup>1</sup> In this primary level audience, missionary saw “an audience of prospective converts in an arranged capsule of instruction.”<sup>2</sup> Missionaries’ past experiences had made it clear to them that getting converts from the mature Bengali minds was an uphill task for them.<sup>3</sup> The Missionary started working for gradual and systematic change in stages that according to them would bring revolution. These missionaries were preparing the young Hindu minds like the fields. These Missionaries were trying to cultivate the words of Christ by introducing secularization and rationality to these Hindu pupils and leaving no room for Hinduism.

Among these missionaries William Carey (1761-1834) could be seen as a flag holder of this missionary education. He arrived in India in 1793 and invested his time in the translation of the Bible into the vernaculars of India. His triumph of winning the actual converts from Hindustan was not due to these translations. His success was rather due to his schools, literature and newspaper with the help of which his teachings penetrated in the Indian spirit. But it would be impossible for him to make his work varied and effective without his two colleagues Marshman (1768–1837) and Ward (1769–1823). These three people differed greatly from each other, but in such a way that they complemented each other’s deficiencies that enable them to constitute the famous Serampore trio.<sup>4</sup>

The chief architect of the trio’s educational policy was Joshua Marshman (1768-1837), who took his inspiration from the Lancaster’s monitoring system. Initially they brought the words of God in the reach of the Bengali people by translating it in the local vernacular. This action of the trios opened the door to their second strategy of preaching the teachings of Christ. That was followed by their third and last strategy of establishing schools and colleges to inculcate the native missionaries in India. In 1818 they opened Serampore College with abroadly designed curriculum which included western science and oriental languages.<sup>5</sup> William Carey and his team

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Bara, "From Missionary Machinery to Nation Making: Christian Higher Education in Modern India," *Christian Educational Institute*.abstract

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.abstract

<sup>3</sup>Seth, "Secular Enlightenment and Christian Conversion: Missionaries and Education in Colonial India," 29.

<sup>4</sup>Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 15.

<sup>5</sup>Steve Bishop, "Protestant Missionary Education in British India," *Evangelical Quarterly* 69:3(1997): 247-48.

believed in the creation of Christ's kingdom that would be completely devoid of all heathen social abuses. They exercised much influence on the Government to investigate<sup>1</sup> social practices of throwing children to the Ganges by mothers for the fulfillment of their vow to dedicate their firstborn in the holy river. It was Carey's efforts that made Wellesley to prohibit this practice. Similarly, on the issue of *sati* the Serampore missionaries' article *The Friend of India* was reprinted in other Calcutta newspapers and England to mold the public opinion and the Government against *sati*. This whole scheme resulted in the acknowledgement of Carey as Bengali translator who later on translated the Bentinck's ordinance prohibiting the practice of *sati* into the vernacular in December 1829.<sup>2</sup> And this was the point when "Christian" press began to emerge. The sole purpose of this press was not only to save souls with the message of Christ.<sup>3</sup> They concerned themselves with these heathen social practices partly in a spirit of humanitarianism and partly as auxiliary to achieve their main purpose of converting Indians to Christianity. They concentrated on proclaiming the central doctrines of Evangelical Christianity, trying to convince their hearers that their salvation lay in Christ alone. So they criticized both Hinduism and Islam. Missionary's activities were succeeding when they succeeded in impressing the Indians on account of the Christ's love for the redemption of mankind. The missionaries also got to agree Indian consent that the Gospel was a good book but failed to win the trust of the masses that Christianity was the only means of salvation. Their translations of the Bible at that stage appeared imperfect. Despite these problems, the missionary achievement in the fields of social reforms, literature and education in awakening Bengali intellects could not be ignored.<sup>4</sup> A new era of the missionary education began with the arrival of Scottish missionary Alexander Duff to Bengal in 1830 who adopted quite different methodologies. His initial visits to other missionaries in the area enabled him to conclude that contemporary missionary strategies were failing.<sup>5</sup> He was the first one who felt the essentiality of the English as the official language of education. He was lucky enough to secure the support of the men like Charles Trevelyan, Lord

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<sup>1</sup>K. L. Richardson, "The Missions of the Serampore Trio: An Ecumenical Perspective," *Journal of Indian Theology* 35.1(1993): 29.

<sup>2</sup>Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837*, 58-59.

<sup>3</sup>Jr Donald Alba, Robert H. Woods, JR, and Marsha Daigle-Williamson, "The Writings of William Carey: Journalism as Mission in a Modern Age," *Koninklijke Brill NV Mission Studies* 22.1(2005): 98.

<sup>4</sup>Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837*, 58-59.

<sup>5</sup>Bishop, "Protestant Missionary Education in British India," 248.

Macaulay, and of Governor General Lord Bentinck. These all felt that the transformation of the Indians would be impossible without English language. But this issue was not as simple as it appeared rather the issue of preferring English on Sanskrit was the source of enmity between Orientalists and Anglicists. These two groups differed regarding English language, but this issue was resolved in 1835 when the Lord Bentinck announced his decision in the favor of Anglicists' support of English language.<sup>1</sup>

Duff after obtaining success in his first policy regarding English language started work on his second policy that aimed at educating the high class *Brahmins* rather than orphans and the poor. He hoped that the influential minority would affect the majority.<sup>2</sup> His next plan was to give a good education in secular subjects with the aim of moral and intellectual regeneration of the universal mind. In other words, it was most effective manner for Duff to penetrate deeply into Hindu minds to impress the entire body of the Hindustan.<sup>3</sup> Alexander Duff provided a description in his *Indian and Indian Missionary* (1839) that's how he came to know that modern literature and science could help him in shaking the foundation of Hindu Shastara. He recounted that during his class which he was conducting in junior section he explored a new technique. He asked a simple question, what is rain? In reply he got an interesting answer from his Hindu student. The student replied him that rain came from the trunk of the god *Indra*. When, Duff further inquired him about the source of his knowledge. The student replied that he learnt this from Shastara (a Hindu text) by his *guru* (teacher). Instead of rejecting his student Duff explained him the whole process of rain scientifically from evaporation to rain falling. Duff's scientific explanation of rain compelled this boy to rethink the authenticity of his Shastara. He surprisingly uttered the words that what he was thinking about rain. And if Duff's scientific explanation was corrected one, then what would be the future of Hindu Shastara? This student's statement revealed the truth to Duff that the destruction of Hinduism was embedded in the teaching of geography, general history and natural philosophy. The knowledge of these subjects would crack the foundation of the Hindu religion by substituting the authenticity of Shastara with skepticism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Sa Ward, "The Missionary Strategy of Alexander Duff (1830-1840)," *The Evangelical Quarterly*: 136.

<sup>2</sup>Bishop, "Protestant Missionary Education in British India," 248.

<sup>3</sup>Ward, "The Missionary Strategy of Alexander Duff (1830-1840)," 138.

<sup>4</sup>Seth, "Secular Enlightenment and Christian Conversion: Missionaries and Education in Colonial India," 33-34.

Duff further incorporated these subjects for the Hindu youth in two departments of Calcutta school for attaining his objectives. Alexander Duff strategies proved successful when, after two and quarter years his young Bengali pupils were ranked first class not only on the basis of the their intelligence and sound general knowledge. But they also stood equal in comparison to the educated youth of the England in knowledge of the evidence and leading doctrine of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

Though western education had doubtlessly awakened and enlightened the Bengali minds by corroding their Hindu beliefs. But was the result of this awakening according to the missionaries' expectation of Hindu mass conversion to Christianity? The answer is definitely no, because missionary expectation of establishing the Christ domain was destined to disappoint. The reasons of this failure appeared multi-facets. The peculiarity of the Indian religion did not let its followers to escape from its spell because westernized educated Bengalis were not ready to choose a Christian religion. Rather the rationality and intellectually of these Hindus offered them different options of experimentations. They tried to reform Hinduism to make its survival possible in a Christian environment.<sup>2</sup>

### **1.3- Religious Reform Movements of the Nineteenth Century Bengal**

In Bengal only Hindu community was not supposed to be affected by missionary education, but Muslim community was equally affected by it. Before indulging in the debates of Muslim and Hindu reform movements in the nineteenth century Bengal it is required to notice the reasons and objectives of these reform movements.

The reasons of the Hindu reform movements could be seen in western educated Hindu minds who tried to reinterpret the Hindu religion by incorporating the theory of evolution, western philosophy, logic and rationality. In the context of Hindu reform movements in the importance of missionary criticism of idol worship, caste system and *sati* could not be ignored. The objectives of Hindu reform movements were to reform Hinduism by eradicating all innovations. Because according to Hindu reformer idol worship, caste system, *sati* was *Brahminical* innovations. They

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<sup>1</sup>Ward, "The Missionary Strategy of Alexander Duff (1830-1840)," 138-39.

<sup>2</sup>Seth, "Secular Enlightenment and Christian Conversion: Missionaries and Education in Colonial India," 34-39.

claimed to revive and reform Hinduism on the basis of the Veda's text. The Hindu reformers also aimed to incorporate the technique of reinterpretation of Hindu beliefs and sacred book rationally and philosophically to make Hinduism immune to these western cultural and religious shocks.

The Muslim community emphasized revival of Islam on the basis of Islamic *Sharī'at* by revitalizing the golden period of Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). The Muslim reform movements considered British rule and missionary education as a foe of their religion.<sup>1</sup> Indian Muslims felt that their ruin was due to their moving away from Islam. They began to fancy that a revival of Islam as it flourished in the days of the Prophet would restore to the Muslims what they have lost.<sup>2</sup> Thus Hājī Shaṭ'atullah started a Muslim reform movement in Bengal. His "program was to effect peaceful purification in Islam and removes all undesirable practices of earlier faiths."<sup>3</sup>

### **1.3.1 - Muslim Reform Movements: Hājī Sharī'atullah and the *Farā'dī* Movement**

The *Farā'dī* movement was not only considered to be the first among the reform movements of the nineteenth century Bengal, but it also appeared as a first organized reform movement of India. It was a religio-political, socioeconomic and cultural movement launched by Hājī Sharī'atullah in 1818.<sup>4</sup> This movement was indigenously formed, but with universal appeal. In a universal perspective it could be classified with other religious revivalist's movements like *Wahhabism* of Arabia, *Salafyah* movement of Egypt, *Sannusiyah* movement of Libya, *Fulani* movement of Nigeria, *Paduri* movement of Indonesia and *Tariqah-i- Muhammadiyah* and *Ahl-i-Hadith* movements of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>5</sup> These movements contributed to the conceptual, symbolic and intellectual framework of this revivalist scheme.<sup>6</sup> Indigenous aspect of this movement seemed to take its motivation from the threat that the clear demarcation between Islam and other indigenous religions was melting gradually. Hājī Sharī'atullah tried to revitalize

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<sup>1</sup>A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818-1835* (Netherland: E.J.Brill, 1965), 17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>3</sup>Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteen to Nineteen Century)*, 47.

<sup>4</sup>Faisal, *Haji Shariatullah's Faraizi Movement History-Da'wah and Political Ideology*, 10.

<sup>5</sup>Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, "Fara'idi Movement," *Islamic Studies* 9:2(1970): 1.

<sup>6</sup>Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, 18.

Islam with Islamic spirit of Qur‘ān, *ḥadith* and *sunnah*.<sup>1</sup> But the socioeconomic crisis of the Bengali society in the nineteenth century broadened its indigenous span. Now this religious reform movement worked not only for religious revivalism, but extended its program to protect the Muslim community from the socioeconomic oppression of the European Indigo planters and Hindu Banyans.<sup>2</sup> The founder of this movement, Hājī Sharī‘atullah was born in 1781 A.D. at Shumail<sup>3</sup> in the house of ‘Abd al Jalīl Tālūkdār who was not a man of great means. He died when Sharī‘atullah was hardly eight years old. Thereafter his uncle ‘Azīm ud Dīn became his custodian. His early life was emptied of proper education. When he became twelve he ran from his uncle’s house in Calcutta, where he fortunately met Mawlānā Bishārat ‘Alī. He was a teacher of the holy Qur‘ān who enrolled Sharī‘atullah in Qur‘ān classes. The completion of the reading of the Holy Quran made Sharī‘atullah to proceed to Phurphura<sup>4</sup> to take lessons in Arabic and Persian languages on the advice of his teacher. Within two years he attained considerable fluency and thence proceeded to his other uncle in Murshidabād who was attached to the Murshidabād court. His uncle company proved beneficial for him as he refined his Arabic and Persian languages under his guidance for one year. Then his uncle decided to visit his native village Shamāil with his wife and Sharī‘atullah. On the way they met a boat disaster and Sharī‘atullah had to bear the burden of his uncle’s and aunt’s death. This calamity made Sharī‘atullah to abandon the idea of visiting his native village. Sharī‘atullah decided to go to his old teacher Mawlānā Bishārat ‘Alī who had decided to migrate to Makkah due to his intense disgust for British regime. Sharī‘atullah also wished to accompany him. They both set out for Arabia about 1799.<sup>5</sup>

His stay in Arabia constituted the period of his proper Islamic education that was comprised of three phases regarding his Islamic education. He spent his initial two years in the studentship of Mawlānā Murād who taught him Arabic literature and Islamic Jurisprudence. The second phase, which is the most important and longest phase constituted the period of fourteen years. During

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Khan, "Fara'idi Movement," 124-26.

<sup>3</sup>It is a village in the Madaripur but latter on transferred to the district of Faridpur in 1837A.D.

<sup>4</sup>Muin-ud-din Ahmad Khan, *History of the Fara'idi Movement in Bengal, 1818-1906* (Pakistan Historical society, 1965), 2.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 2-3.

this phase, he took guidance from the Tāhir Sonbal who taught him all branches of religious sciences including *Sufism*. The third phase began, when Sharīʿatullah got reluctantly permission from his teacher Tāhir Sonbal to study the subtleties of Islamic ideals, probably due to the fear or disapprobation of rationalism. But it is still debatable that whether Sharīʿatullah attended any regular course at the great University of al-Azhar. However, he spent long hours at the library of al-Azhar. Sharīʿatullah went to Makkah to pay a short visit to Madīnah with the intention to go back to Bengal for the propagation of Islamic doctrines. After twenty years Sharīʿatullah returned home and started his *Farāʿdī* movement 1818 A.D.<sup>1</sup>

*Farāʿdī* movement began its new journey with great impetus<sup>2</sup> after Sharīʿatullah's second visit to Makkah with the blessings of his teacher, Tāhir Sonbal. This reform aimed to target the eradication of all innovations from Bengali society. This movement was transformed from religious reform movement to socio-political and economic reform movement<sup>3</sup> by his son Dudu Miyañ (1819-62) after Sharīʿatullah's death.

The Sharīʿatullah message of religious purification was bi-dimensional as he was aware of the inseparable correlation between Islamic tenets and Islamic society. The existence of the former in the absence of the latter was impossible. So, he emphasizes the revival of the Muslim identity by a molding Bengali Muslims life according to Islamic teachings that will eradicate all innovation. He starts his mission with the “call to return to the *Faraʿid* (the obligatory duties of Islam), especially the profession of faith (*Kalimah*), attending daily prayers (*salat* or *namaz*), fasting in Ramadan (*sawm* or *rozah*), paying the poor tax (*zakat*) and pilgrimage to Makkah (*hajj*). Along with these rites Sharīʿatullah stressed on the principal of *Tauhid* (monotheism).”<sup>4</sup>

The Bengali society was replete with all kinds of *shirks* (polytheism), *Bid-at* (innovations) rites and ceremonies. Sharīʿatullah sets the criteria of The Qurʿānic authority and *Sunnah* of Prophet Muḥammad to check all these anomalies. This reform movement insists that mere belief in God is not enough unless it is associated with complete adherence to the unity of God. This can be achieved only by negating all kinds of associations and partnerships with Him. Sharīʿatullah's

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 3-7.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>3</sup>Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteen to Nineteen Century)*, 57.

<sup>4</sup>Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, 19.



interpretation appeared antagonistic with the contemporary Bengali interpretation of the *Tauhid*. Contemporary Bengali interpretation of *tauhid* had accommodated many practices of p̄rism (p̄r worshiping).<sup>1</sup> He denounces and abolishes all popular un-Islamic rites and ceremonies like servile devotion to the Prophet (P.B.U.H) or to the *p̄rs*, holding of the ‘urs (death anniversary of p̄rs), and participation in Muḥarram. In the domain of the social plane, he denounces the caste prejudices because it is contrary to the spirit of the Qur‘ānic brotherhood of the Muslim nation. He emphasizes on equality of all the members of the Muslim nation despite their professional and ethnic backgrounds. He rejected the superstitious practices like the rites of *Chatti* (6th day ceremony) and *Chilla* (the period between the first and the fortieth day after the birth of a baby).<sup>2</sup> The illiterate oppressed classes of the Bengali society constituted the main bulk of this reform movement, while the traditionalist Muslims opposed it vehemently. What were the reasons behind this opposition of traditionalist Muslims and support of the oppressed Muslim classes for this reform movement? Is there any connection between religious reform program of Faraī‘dī with the socioeconomic and political activities of traditionalists and oppressed Muslims?

The apparently two opposite opinions regarding Faraī‘dī movement are due to the different interests of the respective Muslim classes. *Fara’idī* movement criticizes the *p̄rism* because these reformers consider p̄rism not only doctrinal but also the economic exploitation of the masses by the *p̄rs*. In the doctrinal side the *Fara’idī*’s believes that the distinction between the veneration and actual worship is hardly clear in the mind of the average Muslim. This belief of the *Fara’idī*’s makes them to denounce such practices, without paying any heed to whatever the intentions devotees have.<sup>3</sup> While on the economic and social side *Faraī‘dīs* were against the material benefits and lucrative trade of *p̄rs* like selling the amulets and charms. In doing so, these spiritual guides not only attained the status of social and religious functionalists, but undisputedly swayed over the social and religious life of common man. The Reformist not only intends to curb their undue influences, but also tries to re-establish the direct contact between man and God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Faisal, *Haji Shariatullah's Faraizi Movement History-Da'wah and Political Ideology*, 122-23.

<sup>2</sup>Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteen to Nineteen Century)*, 54-55.

<sup>3</sup>Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 a Quest for Identity*, 60-61.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

The emotional attachment of the average Bengali Muslim to his *pīr*, living or dead and his faith in his immense miraculous powers was so deep and pervasive that no amount of denunciation could undermine his devotion.<sup>1</sup> The strength of such institution could be determined from the fact that the Farā'ī reformers were absorbed in the course of time. Not long after the death of the Haji Sharī'atullah his son Dudu Miyān allowed himself to be referred as *pīr*.<sup>2</sup>

*Mullahs* and *pīrs* were not opposed to all that the reformists stood for. In fact, these *Mullahs* and *pīrs* wanted to eradicate or modify some of the well-known practices, such as the celebration of Muḥarram and the Hindu festivals. Their principal opposition to the reformist propaganda was directed against the reformists' moves to undermine some of the established religious institutions from which they derived their livelihood.<sup>3</sup>

The traditionalist opposition grew in intensity, especially when their religious leaders, the *Mullahs* and *pīrs*, came under sharp criticism from the Reformist,<sup>4</sup> while on the other side these reformists got supported by the deprived classes of the masses. The reason of this fame and popularity of the *Fara'dī* movement was connected with its awakening subjugated peasantry consciousness against the social injustice and economic oppression. That threatened the superior positions of wealthy landlords and moneylenders.<sup>5</sup> These oppressed and deprived Bengali peasantry recognized this Farā'ī movement as deliverer sent by Allah. The endeavors of Farā'ī movement regarding religious reformation and peasantry awakening consciousness did not go unhampered. Hindu and British indigo planters smelled the danger for them in the growing unity of the peasants and Farā'ī. They planned to take maximum advantages of the adversaries, between the Farā'īs and traditional Muslims for their own benefits. In the end, due to the Hindus, British indigo planters and the opposition of Traditionalists, Farā'ī movement failed to maintain its position in Bengal. The popularity of this movement was affected by the rise of modernism in the Bengal that dominated this Islamic revivalism. The modernism thus succeeded in replacing this revivalist attitude within Muslims with rational and scientific

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 50.

attitude.<sup>1</sup> This attitude was not limited within the boundaries of Islam rather it engulfed Hinduism. And this marked the starting phase of Hindu reform movements in Bengal.

### 1.3.2-Hindu Reform Movements

Hinduism witnessed the process of regeneration and reformation through various movements in history. Although these movements were flag holders of exactly individual philosophy, but generally these were following the route of spirituality, secularity and scientific aspects of the Vedic customs. Whole interrogation was for constructing an egalitarian society. The foundation of which was emptied of caste, gender and race discrimination.<sup>2</sup> Hindu social reform movements of the fourteen to eighteen century are treated under the influence of Islam, monotheism and democracy.<sup>3</sup> One of such social reformer and caste crusader was Sri Chaitanya (1486-1534), an advocate of the *Vaishnava* school of *bhagti yoga* in Bengal. His reform movement appeared distinct from other movements as no other reform movement of Bengal attained recognition and acceptance from whole India except his movement. The reason for the proliferation and promulgation of this movement in India seemed to reside in its lacking of particular Bengalism.<sup>4</sup> Chaitanya's main concern was the exaltation of Krishna over all other Hindu deities and liberating and reforming Hinduism from *Brahmanical* oppression. He stressed that caste system is detrimental to Hindu society, because it had shaken the foundation of Hindu society. He declares the model of universal brotherhood of man on the basis that the soul of every human being is the accommodation of Krishna. That was the key message that opens the door for *Brahmin* and *Shudras* equally.<sup>5</sup>

The reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century in Bengal brought socio-religious and intellectual revival and regeneration in Bengal which is termed as Bengal Renaissance. This

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<sup>1</sup>Khan, "Fara'idi Movement," 125-35.

<sup>2</sup>Rajeev Verma, *Faith & Philosophy of Hinduism* (DelhiS: Kalpaz Publication, 2009), 151.

<sup>3</sup>Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology: Introduction to Hindu Positivism* (Delhi: Narendra Prakash, 1985), 472.

<sup>4</sup>Haripada Adhikary, *Unifying Force of Hinduism: The Harekrshna Movement* (Bloomington: Author House, 2012), 145.

<sup>5</sup>Om Prakash, *Cultural History of India* (New Delhi: New Age Punlisher (P) Limited, 2005), 54.

period was replete with not only intellectual discussions, but also with the critique of prevalent socio-religious ideas. The credit of all these intellectual activities could be given to colonial rule, missionaries' criticism and English education in schools and colleges. These factors allowed the penetration of freedom of idea and post-Enlightenment rationalism in Hindu society. Traditional Hindu sacred text was critically evaluated in the light of these new ideas and Christian morality.<sup>1</sup> Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) is called the father of these socio-religious reform movement in Bengal who founded the *Brahmo Samaj* movement.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3.2.1- Ram Mohan Roy and *BrahmoSamaj*

Ram Mohan was born in an orthodox *Vaishnava* family in the village of Radhanager (Mushidabād district) on 1772. His mother was from a *SaktaBrahmin* family who readily adopted the deities of her in laws after marriage.<sup>3</sup> She was considered strong character, religiously devoted and intelligent woman. Her religious devotion influenced Ram Mohan from his childhood and he was devoted to Vishnu in his childhood.<sup>4</sup> His family was trusted with court responsibilities of Muslim rulers of Murshidabād. Thus his childhood was vulnerable to many religious influences. He received his early education neither from Calcutta, the seat of the East India Company, nor to Hindu *Patshala*. But his early education was from the Muslim *Madrassa* in Patana (c.1780).<sup>5</sup> This was due to the high degree of self-confidence of his family on their religious upbringing of him that they sent him to Islamic *madrassa* at a tender age.<sup>6</sup> There he learnt Arabic, Persian and became interested in *Sufism*.<sup>7</sup> It was that stage when he was influenced

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<sup>1</sup>Shubhra Chakrabarti Kunal Chakrabarti, *Historical Dictionary of the Bengalis* (United Kingdom: Scarecrow 2013), 94.

<sup>2</sup>Bob Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus: An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India* (UK: Regnum Book International, 2004), 5.

<sup>3</sup>Abidullah Al-Ansari Ghazi, *Raja Rammohun Roy: Encounter with Islam and Christianity and the Articulation of Hindu Self-Consciousness* (USA: Library of Congress, 2010), 35.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>7</sup>Klaus K Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, Third ed. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 414.

most profoundly by *Mu'tazilites* and *Muwahiddun*.<sup>1</sup> This education marked the turning point when he abandoned image worship and fell out with his father on this issue. Then he went to Tibet. His only hope to get united with his family was residing in the fulfillment of the condition that his father posed him. That before returning home Ram Mohan had to spend twelve years in Varanasi, the center of Hindu learning from where he learnt Sanskrit and Hindu sacred texts. While he was engaged in learning Sanskrit and Hindu sacred texts he also studied English that made his entrance possible in the East Indian Company in Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> His life in Calcutta can be divided into two phases. The first phase comprised of the period from 1814-1820 in which his main focus was on the formation of Hinduism. During this period he also studied the Bible to equip himself with Greek and Hebrew languages. He tried to reform Hinduism through speeches and writings to circulate his idea in public. His all efforts made him succeeded in bringing the enlightened Hindus in close bondage with him. This bondage latter on attained the form of an organized body *Atmiya Saba*, primarily a religious group. The main concern of this religious group was discussion of the religious matters and to revive the worship of the one True God contained in the Hindu scripture and in the teachings of the sages. *Atmiya Saba* was active from 1815-1819 but the publication of the *Tuhfat* gave Ram Mohan Roy designation of religious reformer.<sup>3</sup>

*Tuhfat* was his first writing that highlighted his ideas regarding religious Universalism and religious pluralism. These two key concepts of religious Universalism and pluralism revolved around the simple faith in the oneness of True God. In it, he looks contemptuously at the socially deleterious religious practices of Hinduism. This pamphlet forecasts the genetic makeup of *Brahmo Samaj*. It also showed his appreciation and inclination towards western scientific outlook on one hand and Utilitarian and Deist thought at other hand.<sup>4</sup>

The second phase of Ram Mohan was the period from 1820-1827. During this phase, he involved himself in various argumentative activities with Christians. The culmination of his

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<sup>1</sup>Ghazi, Raja Rammohun Roy: *Encounter with Islam and Christianity and the Articulation of Hindu Self-Consciousness*, 75.

<sup>2</sup>Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 414.

<sup>3</sup>Ghazi, Raja Rammohun Roy: *Encounter with Islam and Christianity and the Articulation of Hindu Self-Consciousness*, 37.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 78.

efforts in second face could be seen in the foundation of the *Brahmo Samaj* in 1828. That equipped him with the consciousness that Hindu reformation could not be possible until it was based on Hindu foundations. The foundation of the *Brahmo Samaj* was the symbolic representation of the idea that took many years to crystallize out in his mind. The foundation of this idea was laid on the fact that faith regarding the oneness of God must be fulfilled on the criteria of firstly, reason based judgment and secondly, reconciled with Scripture.<sup>1</sup> This was the turning point where he utilizes the *Advaita* Vedanta of Shankaracharya but with new interpretations. This interpretation was based on the amalgamation of different approaches on rationality, scientific, western philosophy, and utilitarianism and to some extent Christian ethics. The resulted interpretation transformed the *Advaita* Vedanta to neo-Vedanta that was the key concept of the *Brahmo Samaj*. As an organization, it was started for social and religious reform, but it was passed through different phases in history. In the first phase, Ram Mohan established monotheism and the worship of one formless God.<sup>2</sup> He considers Upanishads as superior to all other sacred books, as the Upanishads captured the monotheistic spirit of Hinduism, based on reason not on faith. He rejects image worship because he believes that any Hindu practices which lack authenticity from the Upanishad, need to be discarded.<sup>3</sup>

Ram Mohan shifted authority of the Hindu religious text from Vedas to Upanishad. This shifting of authority to Upanishad enabled him to fight for the emancipation of women, eradication of the caste system and propagation of western knowledge. He tries to safeguard the legal rights of women in his *Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachment on the Ancient Rights of Female* 1822. He also works for the abolition of *sati* and he fully supported the anti-*sati* Regulation passed by Bentinck's Government.<sup>4</sup> The religious tenets of the *Brahmo Samaj* were embodied in the Trust deed.<sup>5</sup> Trust deed included the ideas that *Brahman* (formless God) should be worshiped by utilizing *Advaita Vedanta*. So no images were kept and no rituals were allowed.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>2</sup>B. N. Puri P. N. Chopra, M. N. Das, A. C. Pardhan, *A Comprehensive History of India*, vol. 3 (New Delhi: Sterling Publishing Private Limited, 2003), 111.

<sup>3</sup>Robin Rinehart, ed. *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice* (USA: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publishing Datta,2004), 58.

<sup>4</sup>P. N. Chopra, *A Comprehensive History of India*, 111.

<sup>5</sup>Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818-1835* 38.

The participation in the worship of God in *Brahmo Samaj* was not credited on the basis of Hindu religion. The follower of any religion could participate in *Samaj's* worshiping practices. All religions were respected in *Brahmo Samaj* and this further tried to create the atmosphere of worldly brotherhood.<sup>1</sup>

*Brahmo Samaj* failed to attract the Hindu masses due to his modern beliefs and also due to his emphasis on borrowing the ethical precepts of the Jesus teachings.<sup>2</sup> This resulted in a limited membership of *Brahmo Samaj* from high caste and educated upper classes Hindus. In 1833 the death of Ram Mohan was the greatest loss of an ardent leader for *Brahmo Samaj*.<sup>3</sup>

The revival of the declined *Brahmo Samaj* after the death of Ram Mohan Roy constitutes the second phase of *Brahmo Samaj*. In this phase Debendra Nath Tagore (1817-1890) managed the affairs of *Brahmo Samaj*. He prepared treaty of *Brahmo* that emphasized the devotee to pursue a religious life prescribed by Vedanta and worshiped the formless God by reciting *Gayatri Mantra*.<sup>4</sup> He rejected the infallibility of the Vedas and his book *Brahmo Dharma*, that is the compilation of the sacred texts from the Upanishads and smrti, attained the status of official catechism of this movement.<sup>5</sup> He criticizes Ram Mohan Roy for his inclination and preference of the Christian morality on Hinduism by considering superiority of Hinduism over all religions.<sup>6</sup> Debendra Nath Tagore tried to counter affect the spread of Christian missionaries' by starting a Bengali paper and a school for *Brahmo* missionaries.<sup>7</sup> In 1857 Keshab Chandra joined hands with Debendra Nath Tagore to revitalize the *Samaj* and their united efforts succeeded to a significant level.<sup>8</sup> Keshab Sen left no stone unturned to make the *Brahmo Samaj* as a dynamic all India organization. He took the responsibility of propagating and preaching *Brahmo Samaj* teachings, but in 1866 a split resulted in the portioning of the old *Brahmo Samaj* into two

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<sup>1</sup>N. Jayapalan, *Social and Cultural History of India since 1556* (New Delhi: Atkantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000), 113.

<sup>2</sup>Rinehart, *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture and Practice* 58.

<sup>3</sup>Jayapalan, *Social and Cultural History of India since 1556*, 112.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 112-13.

<sup>5</sup>Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 415.

<sup>6</sup>Indian Philosophy in Modern Times, *M. B. Chande* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000), 244-45.

<sup>7</sup>Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 415.

<sup>8</sup>Jayapalan, *Social and Cultural History of India since 1556*, 113.

organizations. *Brahmo Samaj* of India was headed by Keshab Chandra while *Adi-Brahmo Samaj* was under the leadership of Debendra Nath Tagore.<sup>1</sup> Keshab Sen aimed to conduct the inter caste and community marriages of *Brahmo* organization. Keshab Sen wanted to integrate the ethical teachings of Christ into *Brahmo* movement.<sup>2</sup> Latter on the *Brahmo Samaj* of India underwent another partition. But Keshab Sen services regarding fund raising for flood victims, the foundation of the schools for boys and girls, protest against child marriage, appeals for widow remarriage and inter caste marriages could not be ignored without acknowledging.<sup>3</sup>

It is noteworthy here that the reinterpretation of the Vedanta was institutionalized in *Brahmo Samaj* by Ram Mohan. This ideology of Ram Mohan Roy revolved around the universalistic interpretation of Hinduism. His ideology on one side utilized the Indianized adaptation of Enlightenment and Unitarian Christianity, and on the other hand, he relied on monotheistic theology of Upanishad and Vedanta. The rationalized and modern interpretation of the selective monotheistic theology of Upanishad and of the *Advaita* Vedanta resulted in neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy. In its concern with the neo-Vedanta was humanistic that was devised for the betterment of the Bengali population by implementing socio-religious reforms. But here Ram Mohan unconsciously introduced the secularization of the Bengali strata by propagating the naturalistic interpretation of the religion.<sup>4</sup>

Ram Mohan's selection of *Advaita* Vedanta to reform and revive Hinduism was not obvious due to following reasons. Firstly, Ram Mohan belonged to *Vaishnavas* and secondly, in Ram Mohan Roy's Bengal, the Vedanta philosophy was less popular as compared to other Hindu schools of thoughts. Among these schools the most popular were the devotees of Krishna and the goddess *Kali*. Thirdly, Ram Mohan was the *Brahmin* Hindu who was trained in Muslim *madrassa* in Arabic, Persian and Islamic theology. But he abandoned this Islamic framework for the promotion of particular *Advaita Vedantic* Hinduism.<sup>5</sup> Then what made him to select Vedanta? The answers of this question seem to reside in the socio-religious and political condition of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>2</sup>Roshen Dalal, *The Religions of India: A Concise Guide to Nine Major Faiths* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006), 69.

<sup>3</sup>Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 416.

<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 45-46.,

<sup>5</sup>Rinehart, ed. *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice*, 187.



Bengal. Ram Mohan appeared to represent that age when Hinduism was evaluated and interpreted by the Europeans in term of its origins and decay, between its past and present.<sup>1</sup> These Europeans comprised of Orientalists and Christian missionaries whose role in the Ram Mohan Roy's selection of *Advaita Vedanta* is very significant. Orientalists' coinage of the assumption of the golden age of Hinduism that depicts the pristine Hindu culture played the key role in shaping the Ram Mohan's ideology. As these Orientalists considered Hinduism of their time as the mere corruption and decay of the traditions due to prejudice, polytheism, image worship and gender discrimination.<sup>2</sup> Their clear demarcation of Hinduism resulted in popular Hinduism and real Hinduism. They showed no interest in popular Hinduism, but considered real Hinduism as a set of hard and fast doctrines that were derived from the Hindu sacred texts, which they placed as religious authority.<sup>3</sup> These Enlightened Orientalists used Unitarianism and humanism<sup>4</sup> the criterion of classical golden age of Hinduism that found culmination in the monotheistic concept of *Advaita Vedanta*. The philosophical interpretation of the Upanishad and Gita appeared to appeal to their interests and agenda. These texts also seemed to be anti-clerical and anti-ritualistic that supported their western intellects.<sup>5</sup> Voltaire depicts this pristine age in his claim that "the first Brahmins, who were kings and pontiffs all at once, could establish religion only on the basis of universal reason."<sup>6</sup> He further said "that our Holy Christian religion is solely based upon the ancient religion of Brahma."<sup>7</sup> It can be said these were orientalist's selective text methodology of Upanishad and their axiom of pristine monotheistic concept of God that pursued Ram Mohan toward *Advaita Vedanta* .

Christian missionaries in nineteenth century considered Upanishad and *Advaita Vedanta* the climax of Indian thought as they considered it the transitional point that would enable these Hindu monotheistic teachings to attain accomplishment in Christianity. These missionaries

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<sup>1</sup>Wilhelm Halbfass -, *India and Europe: An Eassy in Understanding* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 198.

<sup>2</sup>Rinehart, ed. *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice*, 182-84.

<sup>3</sup> Synthesizing the Vedanta: The Theology of Pierre Johanns, S.J, 91-92

<sup>4</sup>Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 54.

<sup>5</sup> Mystical Hinduism Vedanta and the politics of representation,

<sup>6</sup>Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Eassy in Understanding* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 58.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

envisioned in *Advaita Vedanta* the preparatory phase of mass conversion of Hindus to Christianity. They believed that universal message of Christ is present in *Advaita Vedanta a priori* to satisfy their inclusivist Christian spirits.<sup>1</sup> These were the socio-religious encountering factors that seemed to highlight the *Advaita Vedanta* as a central key to reform Hinduism.

Ram Mohan got the final impetus for *Advaita Vedantic* Hinduism from the criticism and polemic published literature of Christian Missionaries on Hindu Doctrine. He published his apologia for Hindu Doctrine in *The Brahminical Magazine* in 1821 and 1823. The controversy began in 1821 when *Samachar Darpan* published a letter that was raising doubts on Hindu Shastara and inviting for satisfactory answers. This letter was the continuation of the missionary polemics against the Hindu religion. Ram Mohan defended Hinduism and tried to prove that the doctrine of Hinduism was more logical than the missionary's doctrine of Trinity. In 1823, Serampore Missionaries published and distributed literature that bitterly criticized Vedas with the charge of atheism as knowledge of God is unattainable by men. All these objections that they raised were from the Ram Mohan Roy's translation of *An Abridgement of Vedanta* that he published in 1816. Ram Mohan Roy later gave satisfactory answers of all these objections.<sup>2</sup> Similarly; Serampore Missionaries in 1823 published polemic literature that criticized Vedas as atheistic in nature and placed Hinduism on the lower rungs of evolutionary plane.<sup>3</sup>

Here it could be concluded that the selection of the *Advaita Vedanta* for Hindu reformation and revival of Ram Mohan Roy was interconnected with the socio-religious interaction of Christianity and Hinduism. Here the rationalistic contribution of the Mu'tazilite school of Muslims cannot be ignored also. The real credit on one hand appeared to go to Orientalists' axiom of classical golden age of Hinduism and pristine monotheistic concept of God in Hinduism, which Christian missionary tried to gain mass conversion for Christian faith. And on the other hand, the Christian missionaries pointed out the fallacy of the theological doctrines of Hinduism. The Missionaries considered theism of the Hindu religion inadequate, as Hindu

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>2</sup>Ghazi, *Raja Rammohun Roy: Encounter with Islam and Christianity and the Articulation of Hindu Self-Consciousness*, 144-46.

<sup>3</sup>Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe :An Essay in Understanding*. (Albany: University of New York, 1998), 56.

schools did not contain monotheistic beliefs and moral code for social life.<sup>1</sup> Among the six philosophical schools of Hinduism only *Advaita Vedanta* describes the nature of the relationship between the Creator and creation. The culmination of this relationship could be seen in the monotheistic *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya. That emphasized that *Brahman* is *atman* and *atman* is *Brahman*. *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya was reinterpreted by Ram Mohan Roy into neo-Vedanta. What was the link between this traditional *Advaita Vedanta* and neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy?

The neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy and *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya shares the common ground of monotheistic Brahman. But these both differ from each other regarding authority of the religious Hindu sacred book. *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya considers the Vedas the absolute repository of truth, while according to neo-Vedanta the spiritual experiences are primary in nature and Vedas are relative truth as these lacked records of the experiences of enlightened *rishis*. Thus Vedas are not infallible and vulnerable to criticism. Ram Mohan Roy took the task of reform movement by abolishing caste prejudice, widow remarriage, child marriage and *sati*<sup>2</sup> by putting the metaphysical non-duality to political and ethical domain. This is an attempt to relate the Absolute with empirical world which demarcates neo-Vedanta from *Advaita Vedanta*. In classical *Advaitin*, liberation remains the link with the metaphysics unification of *atman* with *Brahman*.<sup>3</sup> This neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy appears to attain spiritual aspect within the mystical experiential realm of Ramakrishna.

### **1.3.2.2-Ramakrishna and the Spiritual Awakening of Hindus**

Ramakrishna's (1836-1886) accurate biographical description is not an easy task as the biographies were written by his followers after twenty years of his death. These biographies are seemed to be firstly, hagiographical and secondly, these are regardless of historical sequences of time and place. These works appeared as mere edited work to portray their master according to

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<sup>1</sup>Ghazi, *Raja Rammohun Roy: Encounter with Islam and Christianity and the Articulation of Hindu Self-Consciousness*, 147.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Xavier Clooney, ed. *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 163.

<sup>3</sup>Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (New York: United States of America, 1991), 285-86.

their aims. Scholar evaluated these works with historical and textual analysis approaches.<sup>1</sup> Instead of all these above mentioned facts this research is trying to explore the biography of the Ramakrishna from other sources like research theses and western scholar's works.

Khudiram and Chandra were blessed with the second son on February 18, 1836 and they named him Gadadhar, the future Ramakrishna. Their elder's son's name was Ramkumar. Ramakrishna was deprived from the love and affection of his father while he was only seven years old in 1843. The death of the father shifted the responsibilities of the family on the shoulder of Ramkumar<sup>2</sup> who was the appointed priest in the temple of Dakshineswar near Kolkata. Ramakrishna moved to Dakshines in 1855 where he was overwhelmed by the death of his elder brother in 1857 and found his survival in serving mother *Kali* in the temple.<sup>3</sup> He remained here as a *Brahmin* priest for the rest of his life and devoted his love for the goddess *Kali*.<sup>4</sup> He satisfied his soul by experiencing different types of Hinduism that ranges from the devotion of the goddess of *Kali*, *tantric* to non-dual Vedanta.<sup>5</sup> The *tantric* and non-dual Vedanta represented two different Indian traditions. The instruction in these two opposite tradition subjected Ramakrishna to the teaching of female Tantric teachers, Brahmani Bhairavi and a *Vedantic* teacher, Tota Puri Paramahansa.<sup>6</sup> The thirsty soul of Ramakrishna remained unquenched by the devotional practices within the boundary of Hinduism. He started worshipping Allah in 1866 when he came in contact with Govinda Roy<sup>7</sup> probably a *Sufi* who chanted the mantra of Allah, performed five daily prayers at the appointed time and did not visit the temple. The Ramakrishna performance of the religious practices as instructed by masters yielded in three day a vision of Allah as an old man having long beard. And Allah after illumination merged into *nirguna Brahmin* (God without attributes). Ramakrishna also explored the Christian devotional practices under the patronage of Sambhuchandra Mallick, while it is not clearly evident that Mallick was a Christian. Ramakrishna visited his home daily on his invitation where he read the Bible for Ramakrishna.

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<sup>1</sup>Sofie Hauch, "Reassessing Religious Experience in a Scientific Age: Early Approaches to Religious Pluralism." (University of Glasgow, 2013), 45-46.

<sup>2</sup>Swami Tejasananda, *Short Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Swami Mumukshananda, 199), 14-16.

<sup>3</sup>Hauch, "Reassessing Religious Experience in a Scientific Age: Early Approaches to Religious Pluralism.", 48.

<sup>4</sup>Richards, ed. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*, 50.

<sup>5</sup>Rinehart, ed. *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice*, 220.

<sup>6</sup>Hauch, "Reassessing Religious Experience in a Scientific Age: Early Approaches to Religious Pluralism.", 49-51.

<sup>7</sup>Richards, ed. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*, 52.

That resulted in a vision to Ramakrishna in which Jesus appeared as a great *yogi* who embraced him and disappeared into his body. This ecstatic experience lets him conclude that Jesus the God incarnate is *saguna Brahman* (Omnipotent God with attributes). Ramakrishna's religious experiences were not limited to Islam and Christianity; rather, he claimed to experience Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism except Judaism. It is quite surprising that Ramakrishna while experiencing these religious practices claimed to be the true follower of that specific religion. This claim appeared to be ambiguous when different religious practices of every religion ended with Ramakrishna's vision only in term of *nirguna* and *saguna Brahman* of *Advaita Vedanta*.<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna's vision raised many doubts as he's experiencing of Allah by devotional practices that extended to the period of just three days, appeared quite superficial. The merging of Allah in *nirguna Brahman* pointing toward the infinite nature of Hinduism that makes possible the absorption of Islam on Hinduism.<sup>2</sup>

If the issue of the authenticity of the claims of religious experiences and visions mentioned by Ramakrishna is puts aside, then it would help to focus on his idea that all religions are the paths that culminates in the unity of one God. This was the point that made Ramakrishna a pluralist and enabled him to attract the crowd of young disciples. These disciples wanted to benefit their souls from Ramakrishna's teachings. Among these disciples was Narendra Datta, the future Swami Vivekananda.<sup>3</sup> These disciples remained with him throughout his life and these disciples would not be only credited in portraying the image of Ramakrishna as *Advaitic Vedantic* master. But they were also involved in promulgating Ramakrishna's *Advaita Vedantic* teachings while ignoring and to some extent hiding *tantric* teachings of Ramakrishna.<sup>4</sup>

In 1880 Ramakrishna was inflicted with an irritable throat that later on developing into cancer and the curing attempts from Indian and western doctors brought no desirable results. Ramakrishna died in 1886 when he was fifty one years old.<sup>5</sup>

In the nineteenth century Hindu reform movement, Ramakrishna reinterpreted the rational and western neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy with Indian spirituality. This spiritual neo-Vedanta of

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<sup>1</sup>Hauch, "Reassessing Religious Experience in a Scientific Age: Early Approaches to Religious Pluralism.", 52.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 53-56.

<sup>4</sup>Richards, ed. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*, 53.

<sup>5</sup>Hauch, "Reassessing Religious Experience in a Scientific Age: Early Approaches to Religious Pluralism.", 56.

Ramakrishna was characterized by experiencing and realizing God. This realization is free from the limitation of caste, race, gender and even religions<sup>1</sup> that constitutes the gist of Ramakrishna neo-Vedanta. This same core concept of God's realization and experience attains different name and ideology when dealt in watertight compartments of Hinduism and other world religions. Within Hinduism, Ramakrishna claimed to utilize the classical *Advaita* Vedanta of Shankaracharya, but with few amendments, while in the case of the rest of the religions he employs the pluralist approach in the context of the classical Hindu text of Bhagvatgita and *Advaita* Vedanta to postulate his theory of religious toleration and harmony.

The root factors that appeared to prompt Ramakrishna to reform and revive Hinduism in terms of *Advaita* Vedanta seem to reside in the nineteenth century Bengal. The spiritual neo-Vedanta of Ramakrishna took the blood and flesh from religious encountering of the then Bengal society. That persuaded Ramakrishna to experience the God of Muslims and Christians. Ramakrishna concluded on the basis of his spiritual experiences that there were no other than *saguna* and *nirguna Brahman*.

Spiritual neo-Vedanta of Ramakrishna within the boundary of Hinduism emphasizes on the spiritual experience and realization of one God. This one God attains the different names of *Brahman*, *Bhagvana*, *Paramatman* and *Kali* (primordial power of creating, preserving and destroying).<sup>2</sup> The apparent difference in their different names according to Ramakrishna resides in the different spiritual paths a devotee selects to experience one God. In Hinduism, the term spiritual path is indicated with two terms *yoga* and *marga*. *Yoga* comprises of all those techniques that are used by the devotee to transform his consciousness to divine consciousness. *Vedantins* accept three *yogas*: *jnana yoga*, *bhagti yoga* and *Karma yoga*.<sup>3</sup> Ramakrishna points out that a devotee who searches God with *jnana* called Him *Brahman* and *yogi* who adopts *karma yoga* finds Him as *Paramatmah* and the one who employs *bhagti yoga* recognizes Him as *Bhagwana*.<sup>4</sup>

The term *marga* is used to specify the highway toward liberation or *mukti*. *Vedantins* recognize only two *margas*; *jnana marga* and *bhagti marga*. The non-dualistic *Advaita Vedantins* admit

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<sup>1</sup>Swami Bhajanananda, "Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age," *Prabuddha Bharata* (2012): 32.

<sup>2</sup>Richards, ed. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*, 54.

<sup>3</sup>Bhajanananda, "Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age," 43.

<sup>4</sup>Richards, ed. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*, 54.

*jnana margas* the superior one, while dualistic *Vedantins* believe in the superiority of *bhagti marga*.<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna claims to employ *Advaita* Vedanta of Shankaracharya for his spiritual neo-Vedanta, but denies the validity of *jnana marga* in realizing God. He stresses that the knowledge considered by *jnani* is not the highest knowledge. He points out that beyond this *Brahmanjnani* is *vijnana*. But what is *vijnana* and how is it superior to *jnana*? Ramakrishna distinguishes these two by an example that the knowledge of the fire's presence in the woods is *jnana*, but utilization of this fire for cooking rice and getting nourishment from the rice is *vijnana*. To know God by self-experiencing is *jnana*, while conversation with God and enjoying God as a child, friend, master and beloved is *vijnana*. In other words, experiencing God alone in the universe and all living beings are *vijnana*.<sup>2</sup>

Ramakrishna replaces the *jnana marga*, the basic and compulsory constituents of the Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta, with *bhagti*. The amendments of Ramakrishna are not confined to this *marga* rather his interpretation of the *maya* is different from Shankaracharya's *maya*. According to Shankaracharya *saguna Brahman* becomes personal God due to its association to *maya*. Shankaracharya believes that apparent world is the product of *maya* or *avidya*. *Maya* is the indescribable power of *Brahman* that hides the real (*Brahman*) and manifests itself real till the devotee acquisition of knowledge of the Real result in vanishing of *maya*. The existence of *maya* is directly relates with *avidya* (ignorance).<sup>3</sup> Ramakrishna's *Advaita* Vedanta revolves around the core concept in which his categorization of *nirguna Brahman* he sees his mother *Kali* in potential form while in *saguna Brahmin* his mother *Kali* manifests herself *dynamically*.<sup>4</sup> In relation to mother *Kali* as *saguna Brahmin* the world of Ramakrishna's *Advaita* Vedanta is confirmed due to goddess *Sakti* (energy).<sup>5</sup> Ramakrishna feels this world mansion of mirth where lover of God enjoys his life.<sup>6</sup> *Sakti* fulfills all wants of child (*bhagta*) and facilitates all necessities and energies requires for this.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bhajananda, "Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age," 43.

<sup>2</sup>Bardwell L. Smith, ed. *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions* (Netherland: Printed in Netherland, 1976), 90.

<sup>3</sup>Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, 134.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>5</sup>Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna*, 2 ed. (USA: The University of Chicago, 1998), 155.

<sup>6</sup>Smith, ed. *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, 83.

However Ramakrishna may have adopted the terminologies of *maya*, *vidya* and *avidya* from Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta to describe his spiritual neo-Vedanta.<sup>2</sup> But structural and constitutional elements of the Shankaracharya *Advaita* Vedanta and Ramakrishna neo-Vedanta are describing two distinct ways of realizing God. Here it is harder to deny that Ramakrishna was not an *Advaitin*. But was this *Advaita* of Ramakrishna comparable with Shankaracharya's *Advaita*? The answer of this question could be traced by critical evaluation of the concept of *Brahman* in his teachings. Ramakrishna describes *Brahman* to his disciples in *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as

He whom you address as *Brahma* is none other than She whom I call *Sakti*, the Primal Energy. It is called *Brahman* in the Vedas when it transcends speech and thought and is without attributes and action. I call it *Sakti*, *AdyaSakti*, and so forth, when I find it creating, preserving, and destroying the universe.

*Brahman* alone is addressed as the Mother. This is because a mother is an object of great love. One is able to realize God just through love. Ecstasy of feeling, devotion, love, and faith – these are the means.<sup>3</sup>

Ramakrishna is comparing *Brahman* with *Kali*. Does such comparison of *Brahman* and *Kali* appear in Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta? Ramakrishna's *Advaita* is not Shankaracharya's *Advaita* rather it is *tantric Sakta Advaita*.<sup>4</sup> The first and foremost evidence of the supremacy of *tantric Advaita* over Shankaracharya's *Advaita* can be seen when his *Vedantic* teacher Totapuri during his attempt to drown in Ganges experience *Kali's* presence rather *Brahman*. That convinces the acceptability of Kripal evaluation and conclusion regarding the experiential presence of *Kali* in Ganges that Totapuri was converted to *Sakta* theology rather Ramakrishna's conversion to *Advaitin*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, 161.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, ed. *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, 83.S

<sup>3</sup>Swami Nikhalanda, *Gospel of Sri Ramaktishna* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math), 660.

<sup>4</sup>Smith, ed. *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, 86.

<sup>5</sup>Nicholas F. Gier, *Spiritual Titanism: Indian, Chinese, and Western Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New Yor, 2000), 142.



In the teachings of the Ramakrishna one finds that he denies the applicability of *jnana* in *Kali yuga* (his own time) when he asserts that “in the *Kali yuga*, man, being totally dependent on food for life, cannot altogether shake off the idea that he is the body. In this state of mind it is not proper for him to say, 'I am He.' When a man does all sorts of worldly things, he should not say, 'I am *Brahman*.’”<sup>1</sup>

Ramakrishna does not limit himself in denying *jnana* rather, he points out the limitation and superficiality of the *Advaita Vedanta* by explaining *Advaita Vedanta* with an example. It is like a master sleeping in the dark room and someone searching that master in the darkness. During that search he comes in contact with many different things, but he says no to any master. Thus uttering of the word “no” by the devotee, while searching his master is the constitutional element of *Advaita Vedanta* system. At last devotee succeeds in searching master and exclaims that he is a master. Ramakrishna believes that devotee succeeds in searching his master, but he is only conscious of his master existence. The devotee is unable to know God closely and thoroughly at that time. So he not only proposes, but also preferred the way of love and devotion for the intimate knowledge of God.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike *Advaita Vedantins* who believe to see God with the knowledge that shatters the veil of ignorance, Ramakrishna tells his disciple that one can see God with the body of love. The devotee receives this love body due to his *baghta*. This claim of Ramakrishna’s love body has love eyes, love ears and so on. The devotee sees God with loving eyes and hears God with love ears while explaining this love body Ramakrishna fails to restrain his tantric *Advaita bhagti* when he mentions that love body, even gets sexual organ that is made up of love and devotees commune with God through this.<sup>3</sup>

Ramakrishna’s utilization of the *avidya* and *vidya* in the context of the universe appears different from *Advaita Vedanta*. Shankaracharya’s *avidya* is ignorance that restrains man to attain the true knowledge of God while *vidya* is knowledge attain by the devotee by *jnana*. In Ramakrishna teachings *Sakti (Kali)* is the root cause of this universe. *Vidya* and *avidya* are the two aspects of this primordial energy. *Avidya* is related to the temptation of woman and gold while *vidya* causes the love, devotion, wisdom and kindness that directs devotee to one God. How to propitiate this

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<sup>1</sup>Nikhalanda, *Gospel of Sri Ramaktishna*, 120.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.,139

*avidya* according to Ramakrishna? Ramakrishna believes that this *avidya* must be propitiated by the rites of the *Sakti* worship.<sup>1</sup>

Ramakrishna's *tantra Sakti Advaita* was revealed from his reply to Vivekananda. One day Vivekananda asked Ramakrishna, is the presence of women a must in the prescribed *tantra* spiritual discipline? In his reply he mentions three kinds of disciplines in *tantra* which considers women as mistress or considered oneself her handmaid or her child.<sup>2</sup> He further shared his own spiritual experience that worshipping *Sakti* is an uphill task. I experienced her two years as handmaid, and companion to divine mother, but my natural inclination and satisfaction resides as a child longing her mother.<sup>3</sup>

Vivekananda claimed that *Vedantic* Totipuri taught Ramakrishna something higher and ultimate that made *Kali* to lose its authenticity and legitimacy in Ramakrishna's life.<sup>4</sup> When this saying of Vivekananda is compared and evaluated in light of the statements of Ramakrishna that he uttered while describing his *Advaita sadhna* that "once I fell into the clutches of a *jnana*, who made me to listen to Vedanta for eleven months. But he couldn't altogether destroy the seed of *Bhagti* in me. No matter where my mind wandered, it would come back to the Divine Mother."<sup>5</sup>

Therefore Ramakrishna appears to follow the *tantra Advaita* Vedanta during his whole life. Even two years before his death during the pain of throat cancer, he utters the words that completely negated him as the follower of Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta.<sup>6</sup> He said, "O Mother does not plunge me in the knowledge of *Brahman* and take away my consciousness! Do not give me *Brahmanjnānā*; I am but thy child. I have fears and anxieties! I do want my Mother! A thousands salutation to *Brahmanjnānā*! Give it to him who wants it, O Mother."<sup>7</sup>

It appeared from the above discussion that Ramakrishna was *Kali's* priest throughout his life and his devotion and love was for his mother *Kali*. He shows no interest and inclination in the impersonal *Brahman*, rather finds satisfaction and contentment in Mother *Kali's* *tantric*

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>4</sup>Gier, *Spiritual Titanism: Indian, Chinese, and Western Perspectives*, 142.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, ed. *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, 84.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>7</sup>June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls : Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 194.

devotional *Advaita* practices as his personal *saguna* God. Ramakrishna's *tantric* inclination becomes evident when he utters that I never wish to become sugar (*Brahman*) rather want to taste it. He further adds that he never denies God, but I think that the attitude hidden in the uttering in I am He is not wholesome. Because if any devotee acquires this idea without annihilating the consciousness of his physical self than instead of moving up, his spiritual growth will be retarded day by day. In this way he will not only deceive another, but also himself in uttering this mournful repetition.<sup>1</sup>

It can be concluded that Vivekananda and the other disciples of Ramakrishna and the neo-Vedanta mission place Ramakrishna's *Sakta tantric Advaita* on the scheme of Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta*.<sup>2</sup>

The main concern of Ramakrishna was to dissolve the caste system. Firstly, he tries to interconnect the selfless services of humanity to transcendental duties. *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya on the other hand, seems to emphasize on spiritual transcendence by denouncing world. In classical *Advaita Vedanta karma marga* (the selfless services of Ramakrishna) has no concern with the *Advaita Vedantin*, who believes their salvation from this world is only by *jnana*. Ramakrishna being a *bhagat* (devotee) of Mother *Kali* considers liberation in *Kali yuga* impossible without *bhagti*. This slogan of Ramakrishna "Work is worship" that connects *karma* and *bhagti yoga* enables him to substitute the *jnana marga* of Shankaracharya.<sup>3</sup> The amalgamation of these two *margas* enables Ramakrishna to abolish the caste system of Hinduism. According to Ramakrishna God dwells in every man and selfless services of a man with love and devotion is equal to the services of God. He further incorporates his idea to fabricate equality of man irrespective of their caste which, according to him is the representation of the social dharma not social status of superiority and inferiority.<sup>4</sup>

Though Ramakrishna was the result of his spiritual experiences, but these experiences did not remain locked within the Hindu boundaries. In the historical context Ramakrishna realizes one God through different religious paths of Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. This experiential attitude of Ramakrishna was shared by many preceded historical figures of India like saint Kabir

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, ed. *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, 89.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>3</sup>Gabriel R. Ricci, ed. *Politics in Theology*, vol. 38 (New Jersey: Transactional Publishers, 2012), 79-80.

<sup>4</sup>Bhajananda, "Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age," 35-37.

(o. 1500 CE), Guru Nanak (1469-1539), Chaitanya (1486-1533), *Sufis* and Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542-1605). Ramakrishna considers religious experience as an authentic source of knowledge in the realms of religion.<sup>1</sup>

Ramakrishna's theory of religious harmony and toleration was based on his above mentioned approach of pluralistic religious experiences to which he concluded with these words that "I have practiced all religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, I have also followed the paths of different Hindu sects...I have found that it is the same God towards whom are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must try all beliefs and transverse all the different ways once."<sup>2</sup>

Ramakrishna's words demand critical evaluation when he believes that following of diverse path and practices (within Hinduism and in other religions) is yielding the realization and experiencing of one God. This scrutinizing approach generates many questions to work on as what gives Ramakrishna the confidence and confirmation that every time he was experiencing one same God? Why Muslim God, the Christian God and Buddha were realized by Ramakrishna in pure Hindu *nirguna* and *saguna Brahman*? If all religions are equal according to Ramakrishna then why he categorizes three levels of the devotee as lower, mediocre and superior on the basis of realizing God by adopting different paths? Why he describes persuasion of different paths by a devotee due to different levels of knowledge?

The answer of these entire questions demands an overview of Ramakrishna experiencing of Allah and Jesus. In his realization, according to him, Allah appears as an old man with a white beard who becomes illuminated and merges into *nirguna Brahman*. While Christ appears as a *yogi* who embraces him and disappears with his body to which he names the *saguna Brahman*.<sup>3</sup> Here the appearance of Allah as a man highlights the loopholes of superficiality and incompatibility of his Islamic knowledge on one hand, and the dominance of his Hindu frame of love that can be traced from his anthropomorphic concept of God. This anthropomorphism is totally against the Islamic teachings. And merging of Allah in *nirguna Brahman* affirms the

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<sup>1</sup>Hauch, "Reassessing Religious Experience in a Scientific Age: Early Approaches to Religious Pluralism.", 69-73.

<sup>2</sup>M( Mahindra Gupta), *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Nikhilanda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952), 264-65.

<sup>3</sup>Hauch, "Reassessing Religious Experience in a Scientific Age: Early Approaches to Religious Pluralism.", 52-53.

presence of another God beside Allah that confirms Ramakrishna's incompatibility with the Muslim creed that there is no God but Allah.<sup>1</sup>

During his experiential realization he realizes merging of Allah in *nirguna Brahman*, but very interestingly not vice versa. This shows Ramakrishna's preference for *nirguna Brahman*. In the context of Christianity this same Hindu fondness can be noticed in the vision of Ramakrishna about Christ. Christ was materialized in his vision as a *yogi* who is a symbolical representation of a Hindu monk that Ramakrishna perceived and later explained him in terms of *saguna Brahman*. It can be assumed that Ramakrishna's tolerant and harmonious pluralist does not match with his religious experiences due to his favorite for Hinduism. Ramakrishna is a Hindu and a *bhagta* child of *Kali* seems to be unsuccessful in breaking the shackle of his own religion. And he fails to justify his claim of a true follower of Islam and Christianity.

"There is no doubt that Ramakrishna, in spite of his universality, was a Hindu of Hindus."<sup>2</sup> As a Universalist, he claims that every religious path is equal in offering universal Truth that appears ambiguous when he categorizes devotees in three different levels on the basis of the path they selected. His sequential arrangement placed the devotee in the lower position who believed that God resides in heaven and placed the devotee on the upper most position who believes that God has penetrated in everything. While the center position between these two extreme (upper and lower position) is destined to that devotee who believes that seat of God occurrence is at heart as the Inner Controller.<sup>3</sup>

Hence it can be said that pluralistic approach of Ramakrishna is inclined more towards inclusivity. Because he preached the universality of one Truth in every religious message but believed that all religions are part and parcel of Hinduism.

Ram Mohan Roy and Ramakrishna were the predecessors of Vivekananda from whom Vivekananda took inspiration to formulate his neo-Vedanta or practical Vedanta.

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<sup>1</sup>Muhammad Akram, "Rmakrishna's Theory of Religious Plralism an Analytical and Critical Study" (International Islamic University, 1998), 89.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>3</sup>Bhajananda, "Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age," 34.



## Chapter 2- Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta

The neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda is also known as practical Vedanta. But before elaborating the concept of the neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda, it demands first to throw some light on the history of Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta in term of its origin. Or what were the reasons that gave birth to Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta? Who was the inspirational source of Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta? The history of the neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda could be traced from his discipleship of Ramakrishna, who was an *Advaitin Sakta tantric Vedantist* as elaborated in the previous chapter. But technically neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda makes its first appearance in his endeavor to write a commentary on his master's mystical aphorisms. This commentary of Vivekananda later on acquires the form of complete and distinct philosophy of neo-Vedanta due to his incorporation of rational and western philosophical approaches. By utilizing these Western approaches in interpreting his master's spiritual experiences he succeeds in portraying his teacher as a *Vedantist*.<sup>1</sup> In other words Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta got mature during his endeavor of super-structural construction of his master Ramakrishna as an *Advaita Vedantin* from his actual practices of *Sakta tantra*. In comparison Ramakrishna's neo-Vedanta is more spiritual and more experiential (in *tantric* context) than Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta that is inclined towards rationality and modernity. Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta firstly, overlaps with Ramakrishna's neo-Vedanta in its synthetic nature. Here the synthetic nature of Vedanta is pointing towards the fact that they both tried to reconcile the *Advaita* and *Dvaita* Vedanta in their neo-Vedanta.<sup>2</sup> And secondly, the core of the Vivekananda's practical Vedanta is hidden in Ramakrishna's slogan, work is worship.<sup>3</sup>

Vivekananda claims his teacher Ramakrishna is the source of his inspiration in formulating his neo-Vedanta. But his neo-Vedanta is representing another side of the coin. The synthetic nature of neo-Vedanta of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda depicts two different pictures regarding the sequence of Vedanta from *Dvaita* to *Advaita Vedanta*. Ramakrishna places *baghata* on the top position while the evolutionary concept of Vivekananda about Vedanta generates the sequence from *Vivishka (Vedic dharma)*, *Dvaita* to *Advaita Vedanta*. Thus Vivekananda placed *Advaita* at

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<sup>1</sup>Anil Sooklal, "The Neo-Vedanta Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda," *Nidan* (1993): 34.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.: 33.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

the apex of his revolutionary sequence<sup>1</sup> and he shows his inclination towards Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta*. This claimed inclination of Vivekananda demands the exploration that how far the neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda plainly follows, improves upon or diverts from the classical *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya? Critical questions that need to be addressed in this context are regarding the issues like idol worship, caste discrimination, gender discrimination, *sati*<sup>2</sup> and the concept of missionary Hinduism. More specifically, what made Vivekananda focus on these issues and not others, and how far his reinterpretations are plausible within the framework of classical *Advaita Vedanta* philosophy of Shankaracharya?

The answers of these questions demand the evaluation of Vivekananda's practical Vedanta in classical *Advaita Vedanta* framework of Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta* constitutes of three main concepts of *Brahman*, *atman* (soul) and *maya* (illusion). The essence of Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta* is "*Brahma Satyam Jagan Mithya Jivo Brahmaiva Na Aparah—Brahman* (the Absolute) is alone, real; this world is unreal; and *Jiva* or the individual soul is non-different from *Brahman*."<sup>3</sup> In *Advaita Vedanta* Shankaracharya gave the formula of the relationship of the *Brahman* with man and the universe. Among these *Brahman* is the central metaphysical concept upon which whole building of monism is constructed. While addressing the Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta the first and prime issue is the utilization of his new approach in interpreting classical *Advaita Vedanta* regarding metaphysics.

## **2.1- Metaphysics of Vivekananda's New Approach (neo-Vedanta)**

Vivekananda's metaphysics are claimed to be based on the classical *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya. If Vivekananda shares the same concept of Shankaracharya's *Advaita* then what factor has given Vivekananda's metaphysics a new shape and identity as neo-Vedanta or practical Vedanta? The comparison of the Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta* with Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta will reveal the true picture. The basic constituents of both theories are *Brahman*, but do they both (Shankaracharya and Vivekananda) share the same concept of

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas, "Swami Vivekananda, His. Reconstruction of Hinduism as a Universal Religion", 25.

<sup>2</sup>Sati is a religious Hindu custom of burying widow at her husband funeral pyre to liberate her from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

<sup>3</sup>Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, 133.



*Brahman*? Or in other words, what are the differences in *Advaita* of Shankaracharya and neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda in interpreting *Brahman* as an ultimate Reality?

Shankaracharya defines *Brahman* in terms of Impersonal *nirguna Brahman* (having no attributes) and personal *saguna Brahman* (having attributes). He defines *nirguna Brahman* as “*Satyam, jnanam, anantam Brahma (Brahman is Reality, Knowledge and Infinite)*.”<sup>1</sup> This formless, limitless and attributeless *Brahman* of Shankaracharya creates the life and material world with His power of *maya*. This *maya* hides the reality and depicts the unreal. Man can only realize *Brahman* with his self-realization (*atman*) that brings *moksha* or salvation. But this *moksha* demands true knowledge through *jnana marga* while *bhagta* and *karma marga* are the prerequisites that enable man to attain the most elevated position of *gyan* (knowledge).<sup>2</sup> Shankaracharya while formulating his *Advaita Vedanta* employs the approach of *neti neti* (not this, not this) in realizing *Brahman* that stresses renunciation of the world by asceticism and meditation. While describing *Brahman*, he described three levels of beings, firstly those realities that are the production of hallucination and mirage, secondly, the empirical or phenomenal reality like the world and thirdly, transcendental or nominal ultimate reality. One can get rid of the illusive or mirage realities with the aid and knowledge of empirical realities. But empirical level experiences are very hard to transcend. The only way that frees man from the bondage of this empirical world in order to realize *Brahman*, is the direct realization of *Brahman* by soul (*atman*). When *atman* experiences the unification with *Brahman* the activity of the empirical world does not terminate rather it continues its existence and activity in experiences of other souls.<sup>3</sup> But this experience reveals the unreal nature of the world to this *jnani*.

On the other hand *saguna Brahman* is thought to be a personal God. However, the question arises here, what relationship exists between *Ishvara*, *atman* and *maya*? Here it is important to notice that the reality of *atman* is concealed by *maya*. This *atman* is controlled by *maya* but *Ishvara* is *mayavin* (creator of *maya*), omnipotent and omniscient controller of *maya*. Therefore *Ishvara* who has the power of creating, maintaining and destroying the universe is perceived as

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<sup>1</sup>Anant Anand Rambachan, "The Attainment of Moksha According to Shankar and Vivekananda with Special Reference to the Significance of Scripture (*Sruti*) and Experience (Anubhava)" (The University of Leeds, 1984), 150.

<sup>2</sup>Y.k Singh, *Philosophical Foundation of Education* (New Delhi: A P H Publishing Corporation, 2008), 164.

<sup>3</sup>Edwin Francis Bryant, ed. *Krishna: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 310-12.

the controller of past and present. Shankaracharya believes that *Ishvara* maintains the whole attributes of Divinity within the domain of the world. Then what role does *Ishvara* plays in the liberation of man? Shankaracharya confines the liberation of man from the cycle of rebirth with the self-realization of *atman* when it becomes identical with *nirguna Brahman* by *jnana marga*. This Impersonal *nirguna Brahman* is independent of this universe. Hence, there is no room for attaining liberation through personal *saguna Brahman* that is dependent on the world for manifestation and perception. When *atman* experiences, identification with the Impersonal *nirguna Brahman* this mystical experiential realization results in the disappearance of the world. *Ishvara's* presence can be experienced within the realm of the world, so its disappearance is supposed to automatically remove the Personal *saguna Brahman* from the realm of *nirguna Brahman*, the Ultimate Truth.<sup>1</sup>

Shankaracharya does not reject idol worship completely rather he acknowledges the importance of the *bhagti marga* as the preparatory phase of *Advaita Vedanta*. The devotion and love for *Ishvara* purifies the mind. When a devotee moves further into the realm of *jnana* for liberation, then Shankaracharya considers that attitude most harmful for the devotee's spiritual progress in differentiating between *Brahman* and *atman*. One's attachment with idols will be a serious hindrance in self-realization of *atman* with *Brahman*, the peak ascent of the *Advaita Vedanta*. Shankaracharya recommends the *Baghti marga* to those devotees only who cannot progress to *Advaita Vedanta* because of any limitation of their caste, gender, aptitude or due to their family obligation.<sup>2</sup>

Classical *Advaita Vedanta* concept attained the shape and name of practical Vedanta of Vivekananda due to the replacement of ascetical and mystical approach, while incorporating the elements of rationality and utilitarianism. The incorporation of these two western elements resulted in changing the classical philosophy of Shankaracharya's *Advaita* into the theology of social responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

What compelled Vivekananda to propose his Practical Vedanta? The reasons that forced Vivekananda for practical Vedanta can be evaluated in two different contexts firstly, in his disciple-hood and secondly, as an Indian Hindu. These two contexts are different and distinct in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 314.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Rinehart, ed. *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice*, 193.

persuasion of different purposes. The first reason is linked to his teacher's *tantric* past that deeply disturbed him. During his sincere scheme of transforming his teacher's (Ramakrishna) feminist's *tantric* tendencies to strong masculine Vedanta, Vivekananda introduces the concept of practical Vedanta. He claims that he is interpreting the divine message of the *avatar*<sup>1</sup> (Ramakrishna) and tries to transform it as a tool to awaken his nation.<sup>2</sup> He, during the course of constructing the image of his master as an *avatar* and national hero, formulates his philosophy of practical Vedanta.

Secondly, the major reason can be seen in his reaction towards socio-religious and economic-political oppression of the masses. The corrupt and incompetent *Brahmins* and *Sadus* were the main socio-religious oppressors, while foreign rule was oppressing the masses in the economic-political domains.<sup>3</sup> The problem of maintaining and reviving the Hindu religious identity in pluralistic Bengali society where Hinduism received contemptuous and ridiculous responses from the West appeared as the provoking reason of practical Vedanta. In his Practical Vedanta, he finds the solution of Indian awakening and spiritual conquest of the West. He believes that Hindus armed with spiritual Vedanta will bring multi-beneficial results to them. This spiritual army of Hindus will conquer the West by promulgating Hindu spirituality and will re-establish their lost identity and glory.<sup>4</sup> To achieve his goals on the footprints of his *neo-Vedantins* predecessors, Vivekananda adopts the *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya with few amendments.

Vivekananda's concept of *Brahman* also consisted of impersonal *nirguna Brahman* and personal *saguna Brahman (Ishvara)*. But unlike Shankaracharya, he equates his Impersonal *Brahman* to personal *Brahman (Ishvara)*. In his practical Vedanta it appeared that the sequence of *Brahman* was reversed of Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya advises his disciples to take help of *baghti marga* of *Ishvara* for purification of the mind that will enable them to realize Impersonal *Brahman* by *jnana marga* and by the utilization of *neti neti* approach. Shankaracharya's

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<sup>1</sup>Avatar is the descendent of deity on earth to safe gard humnity from evil and to guide humanity to righteousness.

<sup>2</sup>Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics and Power in the Study of Religion*, 1 ed. (India: The University of California Press, 2007), 154.

<sup>3</sup>Gwilym Beckerlegge, "Responding to Conflict: A Test of the Limits of Neo-Vedāntic Social Activism in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission?," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11(2007): 5.

<sup>4</sup>Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics and Power in the Study of Religion*, 155.

realization of Impersonal *Brahman* reveals the unreality of the empirical world. *Ishvara*, the personal God, whose realization is inseparable with this empirical world, will also attain the status of relative reality with regards to Impersonal *Brahman*. Vivekananda begins the journey with *neti neti* for realizing Impersonal *Brahman*. Realization can only be attained by giving up ignorance and denouncing the world. This will reveal the truth. But the truth will be embodied in the deified world which is *maya* of Shankaracharya.<sup>1</sup> The deified real world and *Ishvara* of Vivekananda appear in sequence later than the realization of Impersonal *nirguna Brahman*. Vivekananda prefers realization of the personal *Ishvara* over Impersonal *nirguna Brahman* and he also considers *karma marga* superior to *jnana* of Shankaracharya.

Shankaracharya's emphasis on the unity of the one Reality negates pantheism by implementing the negation methodology of *neti neti* (not this, not this). This supposition of *neti neti* of Shankaracharya rejects *Brahman* as an objectified being.<sup>2</sup> While Vivekananda believes, on the footprints of his teacher Ramakrishna, that one and many are the same realities. Practical Vedanta is a synthesis of monism and pantheism as it contains the monism of Shankaracharya and the heart of Chaitanya.<sup>3</sup> According to Vivekananda, this variation in the perception of one and many by same mind is due to varying modes of one experience in different times. The aphorism "*Sarvam Khalu Idam Brahman, Brahman has become everything and Isha Vasyam Idam Sarvam* one must cover all that exist with God's all-pervading presence"<sup>4</sup> attains the key concepts of his practical Vedanta.

The concept of permeation of *Brahman* in the universe presents the different and distinct concept of the universe when compared with Shankaracharya's concept of *maya*. Vivekananda maintains that realization of *Brahman* does not demand the rejection of the world's reality while Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta* perceives the universe as *maya*. Shankaracharya emphasizes the renunciation of the world while Vivekananda taught the lesson of the deification of the world and not its rejection. Vivekananda believes that this defecated world is God alone<sup>5</sup> and raises the

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<sup>1</sup>Sooklal, "The Neo-Vedanta Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda," 35.

<sup>2</sup>Rambachan, "The Attainment of Moksha According to Shankar and Vivekananda with Special Reference to the Significance of Scripture (Sruti) and Experience (Anubhava)", 149.

<sup>3</sup>Hans Torwesten, *Vedanta: Heart of Hinduism* (USA: Grove Press, 1991), 178.

<sup>4</sup>Bani P. Banerjee, *Foundations of Ethics in Management*, 1 ed. (New Delhi: Excel Book, 2005), 123.

<sup>5</sup>Sooklal, "The Neo-Vedanta Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda," 35.

status of this deceptive *maya* (universe) of Shankaracharya to God. The major difference that demarcates his practical Vedanta from Shankaracharya *Advaita* lies in his endeavor in connecting the metaphysical experiential mystical *Advaita* of Shankaracharya to social humanitarian worldly experiential philosophy for uplifting Hindu society. In developing this connection he is bringing out Vedanta from the ascetic life of the monks of the forest to his claimed deified world.<sup>1</sup> This manifestation of the *Brahman* in the world of Vivekananda makes his world lose its illusionary secular dimension in the sacred reality of one God. Vivekananda believes that selfless worldly activities also become sacred by confirming his teacher Ramakrishna's slogan that work is worship.<sup>2</sup>

With *jnana yoga* of Shankaracharya, he devises *seva yoga* by the utilization of the karma yoga like Ramakrishna.<sup>3</sup> The core concept of the *seva yoga* is embedded in Vivekananda's ideology of "divinization of man"<sup>4</sup> that he inherits from his master's message that the *jiva* is *Shiva*. His *seva yoga* introduces a new Hindu humanitarianism by borrowing the *Advaita* oneness of *atman* and *Brahman*. He reinterprets this classical concept of oneness and *seva*. In oneness he objectifies the equality of *Brahman* to the human body. Similarly, the traditional definition of the word *seva* means worship and services of God. Vivekananda's interpretation of permeation of *Brahman* in human body changes the meaning of *seva* from worship of God to selfless services for the poor and the deprived.<sup>5</sup> He equates the service of man to God. In the heart of Vivekananda's practical Vedanta "the institutionalized practice of *seva*, organized service to humanity."<sup>6</sup> His practical explanation of Shankaracharya's concept of oneness of *Brahman* and *atman* breaks the link of his neo-Vedanta from classical *Advaita*. That neither of the two believes in the objectification of *Brahman* to man, equates the service of man to the worship of *Brahman*.

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<sup>1</sup>Beckerlegge, "Responding to Conflict: A Test of the Limits of Neo-Vedantic Social Activism in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission?," 1.

<sup>2</sup>Shrinivas Tilak, *Understanding Karma: In Light of Paul Ricoeur's Philosophical Anthropology and Hermeneutics*, 1 ed. (India: International Center for Cultural Studies, 2006), 250.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Bhaiya S. Prasad, "The Socio-Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda" (1999), 47.

<sup>5</sup>Ruma Nath Choudhury & U S Nath, "Metaphysical Foundation of Swami Vivekananda's Social Ethics," *Barnolipi-An Interdisciplinary Journal* I, no. IV (2011): 51.

<sup>6</sup>Beckerlegge, "Responding to Conflict: A Test of the Limits of Neo-Vedantic Social Activism in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission?," 1.

These radical interpretations of Vivekananda about classical concepts of oneness and *seva* also introduce new concept of *moksha* that appears different from Shankaracharya's *Advaita*. In Shankaracharya's *Advaita moksha* can be achieved only through *Brahmajnana*. He advocates the authority of *shruti* as a unique source of *jnana* that bears fruits of *moksha* under the discipleship of a qualified teacher. Vivekananda certifies the *samadhi*<sup>1</sup> rather than *shruti* as the valid source of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In case of *moksha* he believes that salvation cannot be achieved by following traditional ways of renouncing the world, rather by serving man as *Brahman*. So, the salvation of man is hidden in the welfare of mankind.<sup>3</sup> Vivekananda says:

We must prove the truth of pure *Advaitism* in practical life. Shankaracharya left this *Advaita* philosophy in the hills and forests, while I have come to bring it out of those places and scatter it broadcast before the workday world and society. The lion-roar of *Advaita* must resound in every hearth and home, in meadows and groves, over hills and plains. Come all of you to my assistance and set yourselves to work.<sup>4</sup>

Vivekananda's viewpoints appear unmatched firstly, when on one side, he denies idol worship on the authority of Veda and then rejects the authority of the Vedas on the other. It seems that he has fabricated his practical Vedanta around the concept of deified world and in this context; these idols also become the part of this deified world. Then why he rejects idol worship? It seems that the Christian missionaries 'criticism of Hinduism as a child religion on the evolutionary plane made Vivekananda reject idol worship.

Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta shares the concept of monism and specific terminologies of *Advaita*. But it differs from Shankaracharya from transcendental *Brahman* to the authority of Vedas and idol worship. But his contribution in providing an ethical code of action for the social uplift<sup>5</sup> of

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<sup>1</sup>It is non-dualistic state of consciousness in which the experiencing consciousness subject will become one with experienced object.

<sup>2</sup>Rambachan, "The Attainment of Moksha According to Shankar and Vivekananda with Special Reference to the Significance of Scripture (Sruti) and Experience (Anubhava)", 404.

<sup>3</sup>Nath, "Metaphysical Foundation of Swami Vivekananda's Social Ethics," 51.

<sup>4</sup>Ruma Nath Choudhury & U S Nath, "Metaphysical Foundation of Swami Vivekananda's Social Ethics," *Barnolipi-An Interdisciplinary Journal* IV(2011): 51-52.

<sup>5</sup>Rinehart, ed. *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice*, 193-94.

oppressed low caste Hindus and women cannot be ignored. That he achieves by bringing *Brahman* to empirical world and by equating *moksha* with service of humanity.

## 2.2- New interpretation of the Hindu Caste System

In Hinduism the religious duty is inseparable from social grouping (*varnas*) and four successive stages of life (*ashramas*) that results in a hierarchy of the four major social groups. This system is called *Varnashrama Dharma*.<sup>1</sup> Vivekananda considers this caste system as a *Brahminical* innovation that demands the exploration of this topic from Hindu sacred books. The term *varana* in *Sanskrit* has different meanings as “color, description, explanation, interpretation, praise, extension, observation, perception, form, beauty, caste, race, type.”<sup>2</sup> If word *varana* is taken as color, then it is questionable that whether these *varnas* are based on racial discrimination or in color pride<sup>3</sup> or it is used as a tool for differentiating among different groups. The answer of these questions can be traced from the sacred Hindu texts. In most texts of Rig Veda the word *varna* appears with the meanings of color or light. In the Rig Veda the term *Asuryam Varnam* (dark complexion) is used for *Shudra* tribe. During a comparison between *Brahmin* and *Shudra* Taittiriya Brahman uses *varna* for *Brahmin* in the sense of light and *Asurya* (darkness) for *Shudra*. While Rig Veda describes *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* without mentioning the term *varna*. Therefore, one may conclude that the word *varna* in Rig Veda is used to denote the color discrimination between *Brahmin* and *Shudra*.<sup>4</sup> But does this difference in color depict superiority or inferiority of any class? The earliest reference of caste system can be traced in the hymn of *Parusha Shukta* in Rig Veda. This hymn describes the origin of the four castes *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisyas* and *Shudras* from *Parusha*, the Supreme Being. The *Brahmin* comes from his mouth, *Kshatriya* from his arm, *Vaisyas* from his thighs and the *Shudras* from his feet. This scheme of creation uses the allegorical descriptive style. *Brahmin's* creation is done from the mouth of *Parusha* that represents *Brahmins* duty of teaching and interpreting sacred text.

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<sup>1</sup>James G. Lochtefeld, "The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism: N-Z," (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2002), 741.

<sup>2</sup>Rajendra K. Sharma, *James G. Lochtefeld* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004), 11.

<sup>3</sup>R.K. Pruthi, ed. *Indian Caste System* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2004), 5.

<sup>4</sup>Rajendra K. Sharma, *Indian Society, Institutions and Change* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004), 11.

*Kshatriya* represents the function of warriors due to their origination from *Parusha's* arms. *Vaisyas* being an agriculturist due to their birth from the thighs and *Shudras* function is to serve other due to their origination from the feet of *Parusha*. Hence the caste system can be traced in the period of the Rig Veda. But the caste system till this period was nothing more than the explanation of the social obligation of these castes. The final conclusion regarding superiority or inferiority of any class cannot be derived from this hymn of *Parusha Shukta*.<sup>1</sup>

The evolution of the Hindu caste system remains in its initial position “from the beginning of the Vedic period to the middle of the Sutra”<sup>2</sup> just a mere presentation of the four classes with their assigned functions. The highly developed form of caste system with the description of the superiority of *Brahmin* and with doctrine of non-mobility among four castes appears in the Laws of *Manu*. Compiled by *Manu* these laws date back to around fifteen century BCE.<sup>3</sup> *Manu* believes that there are four castes and no fifth one. He assigns *Brahmin* the designation of the lord of other castes on the basis of their origin and sanctification. He further formulates superiority chart of the other three castes on their respective degree of divergence in their creation of the body of *Parusha*. He places *kshatriya* after *Brahmin* and *Vaisyas* after *Kshatriya*. These three classes were considered as twice born and were superior to the *Shudra* that being born once.<sup>4</sup>

Vivekananda accepts the caste system as social order of the Vedas, but he rejects the superiority of one caste on other due to equal sharing of divinity.<sup>5</sup> It is debatable if Vivekananda's rejection of caste system receives any support from Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta or it is based on his own ideology of Practical Vedanta?

Shankaracharya emphasizes metaphysical oneness of all things that constitutes his concept of reality. But can this transcendental oneness be experienced within the empirical world of the social *varana* system in Hinduism? All caste differentiations and social barriers constitute Shankaracharya's *maya*. Shankaracharya's *Advaita* destines the self in the transcendental

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<sup>1</sup>Ekta Singh, *Caste System in India: A Historical Perspective*, 100.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Amrutur V. Srinivasan, *Hinduism for Dummies*, 72.

<sup>4</sup>Pillachira Mathew Thomas, "Swami Vivekananda, His. Reconstruction of Hinduism as a Universal Religion" (McMaster University, 1969), 174.

<sup>5</sup>Glyn Richards, ed. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism* (Richmond: Curzon Press Ltd.,1985), 70.



unification of *Brahman*, but this unification does not dissolve the social barriers. Here, the *varna* system loses its relevancy with relation to absolute unity, but it maintains its position among the interrelationships of social stratification.<sup>1</sup> The *jnani* of *Brahman* is supposedly beyond the empirical boundaries of caste. Unification with *Brahman* releases him from the limitation of space and time. In other word, at the stage of experiential unification with *Brahman* this *jnani* realizes and experiences reality by the disappearance of *maya* (the whole world), which includes caste system. But when *jnani* is not experiencing that mystical experiential unification, then caste barriers attain the designation of reality in a sensory world.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Shankaracharya annihilates all social differences and caste at the transcendental level during mystic-experiential *Brahman* and insists on the conservative persuasion of social stratification in everyday life.

Shankaracharya not only accepts this *varna* system and social stratification, but he strengthens it. He suggests that due to their natural inclination for detachment and renunciation of the world *Brahmins* are particularly chosen as wandering monks. He further highlighted the superiority of the *Brahmins* by insisting that only *Brahmins* and three upper class males are qualified for spiritual instruction.<sup>3</sup> Shankaracharya's position is very clear that *Shudras* may not be allowed for the study of *Vedas*. He further adds that *Shudras* should be excluded from the textual, educational and also from the *Vedic* ritual scarifies. According to him the *varna* system is embedded in the birth and physical association with the family. So, the metaphysical unity of *Advaita* cannot be taken in social and religious equality in an empirical sense. He supports his viewpoint by citing many passages from the *shruti* and *smrti*. His approval of the *varna* system can be checked from his inclination towards the rule in Gautama's Dharmashatra that describes the punishment of filling the ears of *Shudra* with molten tin who illegitimately listens Veda.<sup>4</sup>

Shankaracharya being a classical *Advaitin* accepts the caste discrimination. The comparison between Shankaracharya's *Advaita* and Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta regarding caste system

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<sup>1</sup>Fred Reinhard Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter* (USA: State University of New York Press, 1996), 133.

<sup>2</sup>Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (NY: State University of New York, 1991), 383.

<sup>3</sup>Reid B. Locklin, *Spiritual but Not Religious?: An Oar Stroke Closer to the Farther Shore* (USA: Saint John's Abbey, 2005), 20.

<sup>4</sup>Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* 380.

remains incomplete without evaluating the social factors that lead Vivekananda to reinterpret caste system in term of *guna*'s theory.

In a nineteenth Century Bengal society where the different religious civilizations were encountering each other, the validity of Hinduism was challenged in the realm of social customs by Christian missionaries. They considered these Hindu *varna* practices inhuman and cruel. They did not only reject the caste system and widow burning rather invoked the feeling of severest disapproval of these religious and social practices in the hearts of Hindus.<sup>1</sup> These challenges of the missionaries, along with other religions who believe in the equality of mankind, threatened the survival of Hinduism. This was the situation that motivated the *neo-Vedantins* generally and Vivekananda particular to strengthen Hinduism through reform and social activism.<sup>2</sup>

Vivekananda's policy of social activism envisions a society strengthen by the pillars of equality and justice. Vivekananda's proposed society is free from the caste and gender prejudices. He bases his propose society on his ideology of social activism with right attitude. His right attitude works for the betterment of the society and it is considered by Vivekananda the only mean to attain and actualize the transcendent. He utilizes the *karma yoga* for promulgating his social activism among the monks and nuns of Ramakrishna order to achieve *moksha* (liberation). That will elevate the Hindu society by spiritually awakening of the masses with the Practical Vedanta. Therefore, he sows the seed of rejection of the caste system when he admits every caste among the rank of a *sanyasi* in Ramakrishna mission. He justifies his negation of caste among *sanyasis* on the basis of the classic Hindu notion that *sanyas is* transcend caste system.<sup>3</sup>

He accepts the *varna* system as one of the greatest social institution gift by the Lord to man. He believes that although this system needs readjustment to avoid the apparent defects that have crept in this system due to foreign persecutions and undeserving *Brahmins*.<sup>4</sup> However Vivekananda readjusted the *varna* system as a social institution in Hinduism by redefining caste or *jati*.

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<sup>1</sup>Anantanand Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas* (USA: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 13.

<sup>2</sup>Ricci, ed. *Politics in Theology*, 76.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 79-81.

<sup>4</sup>Dorothy M. Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity*, 138.

He defines caste scientifically in term of composition of *gunas* rather *dharma*.<sup>1</sup> He defined *jati* as “freedom of the individuals to express his nature in *Prakriti*.”<sup>2</sup> On the footsteps of his apologetic predecessors, he re-interprets caste system in *Samkhiya* philosophy by utilizing the *gunas* theory of *Prakriti*.

*Samkhiya* philosophy basically concerns with investigation of the different categories of existence by seeking discrimination of *Parusha* from *Prakriti* for salvation.<sup>3</sup> The failure of discrimination of *Parusha* from *Prakriti* bears the fruits of *samsara* (rebirth) while disunion of these two will result in the isolation of these two. But here releasing of the *Parusha* from *Prakriti* does not mean merging to *Brahman*, but only freedom of the *Parusha* from the bondage of *Prakriti*.<sup>4</sup>

The nature of *Prakriti* and *Parusha* are completely contrary to each other. The *Parusha* is the representation of consciousness, inactive and destitute of *gunas*. *Prakriti* is representative of non-consciousness, active material that is composed of three *gunas* *sattva* (purity), *raja* (passion) and *tamas* (darkness) respectively.<sup>5</sup>

However, *guna* theory describes man in the context of *samsara* then what sort of relationship can be found between *guna* theory and social duties (*varna* system)? The classical *Samkhiya* neither extend any relationship to man’s social life, nor does it have any relation with *varna* system. But one cannot ignore the possible link of the *Samkhiya* with social life in general and *varna* system, in particular in the context of Bhagavad-Gita. That states the *varna* system as a socio-religious institution that work according to the distribution of the *gunas* and work (*karma*) among men. Work is related to the specific social duties, distributed by *dharma* among the different *varna*. The specific work for each caste attains the name of *svadharma*, the way of *mokhsa* for each *varna*. Similarly, Laws of *Manu* also utilize this Bhagavad-Gita’s *svadharma* and *guna* theory for supporting the hierarchical *varna* system. Anugita from Mahabhartta applies these three *gunas* to four *varnas* by assigning *tamas* to *Shudras*, *rajas* to *Kshatriya* and the highest *guna sattva* was

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<sup>1</sup>Mohapatra, *Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* 73.

<sup>2</sup>Narasingha Prosad Sil, *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment* (England: Associate Press, 1997), 66.

<sup>3</sup>Gerald James Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya: An Interpretation of Its History and Meaning*, 2 ed. (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1979), 2.

<sup>4</sup>Sivananda, *All About Hinduism*, 118.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 116.

given to the *Brahmins*. Therefore, Vivekananda's explanation of *varna* system by *guna* theory receives support from the above mentioned philosophical and cosmological explanation of *varna* system.<sup>1</sup>

Vivekananda's explanation and interpretation of the caste system belong particularly to his personal philosophy having little overlapping concepts with the classical *varna* system and Shankaracharya's Advaita Vedanta. He considers the rigid superior and the inferior classical division of the caste, the root evil that has degraded Hindu society.<sup>2</sup> He formulates his *varna* system by selective collection and combination of different philosophies. He establishes his *varna* system by shifting Shankaracharya's transcendental *Advaita* Vedanta unification (of *Brahman* is *atman* and *atman* is *Brahman*) to *Brahman's* permeation in the empirical world. That enables him to equate four castes on the basis of equal sharing of divinity in them. He tries to support his *varna* foundation of equality by re-interpreting *guna* theory. He emphasizes that man's supremacy cannot be decided on his caste rather it lies in his inherent qualities (*gunas*). Vivekananda who always claimed to follow the rational and scientific approach. However, his *guna* theory, upon which he wants to retain some sort of caste system, hardly seems rational or scientific. For, if the cosmological composition of *Shudra* shared the equal *sattva* of *Brahmin*, then why the *Shudra* cannot become Brahmin? The same objection applies to all such Hindu scholars who try to defend the *varna* system by giving an example that in spite of all his hard work a donkey cannot become a horse.<sup>3</sup>

He rejects caste barrier prevalent in Hinduism known as Don't-Touchism and Kitchen religion. The former term empties Hinduism of the path of knowledge and restricts to "Don't- touchism". While the latter approach reduces Hinduism to a religion that emphasizes dining rules for the members of different castes the violation of which impure the higher castes. Here Vivekananda raises a rational question about the superiority and purity of the *Brahmin* that gets polluted by *Shudras* breath and touch.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*, 356-61.

<sup>2</sup>S.K. Sharma Urmila Sharma, *Indian Political Thought* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publisher and Distributors, 1996), 177.

<sup>3</sup>Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*, 360.

<sup>4</sup>Ricci, ed. *Politics in Theology*, 82.

The critical evaluation of the Vivekananda's caste system illustrates that somehow he fails to escape from the spell of the Hindu *varna* system. He accepts the lowliness of *Shudras* because of their failure to absorb *Brahmins'* teachings regarding *Sanskrit* culture and their ugly looks. That can be noticed on the occasion when he is comparing and teasing his neighbor girl's face due to her ugliness. He further admits the cultural inadequacies of the *Shudras* while predicting the advent of the *Shudra* regime in the world. He describes the characteristics of this regime as lowering of culture, distribution of ordinary knowledge and scanty of extraordinary genius classes. He names his enemies *pariahs*, which he uses to humiliate them. Therefore his approval of *Shudra's* meekness becomes evident from his admiration of the upper Hindu classes. When as a *sanyasi* he feels proud to call himself belonging to *Kshatriya* class. His discrimination can be noticed in his proposed solution for getting rid from this caste system. He claims that the solution of this problem cannot reside in degrading *Brahmin* by lowering them to *Shudras* as these *Brahmins* depict the ideal pattern of Hindu humanity. But the real solution is present in elevating the lower up to the level of higher.<sup>1</sup> So, his rejection of the caste system on the base of superiority and inferiority of caste becomes suspicious when he on the one hand, denies caste among *sanyasi* and on the other hand, he feels proud in claiming himself *Kshatriya*.

The new caste aspects of Vivekananda's caste system get revealed when it is compared with Shankaracharya's *Advaita*. Vivekananda's claim of equality of all castes in Hinduism on the basis of *Advaita Vedanta* negates Shankaracharya's acceptance of the caste discrimination. That can be seen in Vivekananda's criticism of Shankaracharya when he forbids *Shudras* from the *Vedic* rituals that include the higher modes of worship and knowledge.<sup>2</sup> It is also noticeable that his message of equality of all Hindus is more often discussed and highlighted in front of the Western audiences. His indigenous lectures lack such assertion of equality of all castes. Vivekananda's explanation of caste system in the context of *guna* theory also appears implausible and unconvincing.

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<sup>1</sup>Sil, *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment*, 68-69.

<sup>2</sup>B. Vithal Shetty, *World as Seen under the Lens of a Scientist* (USA: Library of Congress, 2009), 523.

### 2.3- Liberation of Women from Unjust Social and Religious Practices

Women's liberty always appeared to be restricted in the Hindu religion that assigns man's dominance over women to establish patriarchal society. In Hinduism this subordinated condition of women is further aggravated by the contemptuous approach of the Hindu sacred texts towards women. These texts considered women's nature emptied of virtues while considering women the composition of vicious desires.<sup>1</sup> Hindu women received the prescribed treatment of their respective men and these women were contended with such treatment. This contentment was challenged many times when these women got exposed to other religions like Islam and Christianity. The impact of Christian religion was very different and far reaching when compared with Islam. Christianity in general and Christian missionary criticism of Hindu religious rituals and customs regarding a female issue in the nineteenth century Bengal were the main reasons that forced Hindus to revisit and reform women's status in their society. These endeavors of emancipating the Hindu women in Indian society were made by many modern Hindus in the nineteenth Century Bengal. Before acknowledging the efforts of these modernist brief sketches regarding the condition of the women in nineteenth century Bengal is given below.

Social status of women in Bengal can be evaluated from their educational system, the family system and gender arrangement that evolved out from the Hindu religious traditions. These religious traditions feel satisfaction not only in placing women as the weaker sex rather gives her the most humiliating and contemptuous status. She was not considered fit for the studies of the Vedas. In family life she was completely dependent on her father, husband and then a son.<sup>2</sup> Hence, regarding the sacred teachings of the Vedas the women shared the equal status of *Shudras* but some *Vaishnavites* women were allowed to learn the Puranas.<sup>3</sup> The authority of these women in religious education was also restricted in the oral transmission of the *smrti*, music, ballad and folklores. The women of the upper classes were allowed for home learning but in seclusion. The women who were not considered intellectually fit for religious education were well equipped with the household art. They were equally trained to be obedient enough to

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<sup>1</sup>James Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1990), 291.

<sup>2</sup>Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India," *American Ethnologist* 16(1989): 622.

<sup>3</sup>Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, vol. 4 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 35.

perform their household duties of serving father, husband and son in religious realm that would enable them to attain *moksha*.<sup>1</sup>

These Indian secluded women were trained as beast of burden by keeping them away from self-realization and self-awareness of their right as a human being. These Hindu women were given the subordinate inferior status of life as part of their dharma. These women were satisfied with the prescribed *dharmic* duty, then why and by whom the reaction and rejection of the women inferior status was originated? Or who demanded to reform the women's status in Hindu Bengal society?

It was the orientalist and missionaries who considered Hinduism the combination of meaningless rituals and barbaric religious customs that provoked the reformation of women's status and position in Bengali society. Thus, all efforts for emancipating the women's status were not started by women themselves but by Hindu men. Among these Hindu men some were inspired from the west and some were cultivated generation of western education named as *Bhadhriloka*. The earliest flag holder of women emancipation was Ram Mohan Roy, who condemned *sati*, *kulin* polygamy and debated for the women's right in property. Thus, from here the women emancipation became the basic tenet of the social reform movements.<sup>2</sup> The list of these reformists' appears incomplete without acknowledging the services of Vivekananda in improving women's status in Bengal society. He elevates women to the equality of man by sharing the same divinity. He emphasizes on providing equal chances of education for women as men. He denies and condemns the religious custom of *sati*. He denies the authority of *sati* from Hindu sacred texts.

His viewpoint regarding the equality of women in the framework of the *Advaita Vedanta* demands the exploration of women's status in *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya's biography reveals that he was an ascetic and he never got married. This denial of marriage by Shankaracharya discloses his perception about women as are presentation of sexuality, reproduction and family life. He also considers women the basic cause of hindrance to achieve *mosksha*. If conceptual status and nature of women is evaluated from Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta* it reveals women neither appreciated nor criticized by him. But one can experience the same traditional negative image of the women in the philosophy of

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<sup>1</sup>Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, ed. *Education and the Disprivileged: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India*, 200.

<sup>2</sup>Aparna Basu, "Indian Women's Movement," *Human Rights, Gender and Environment*: 1.

Shankaracharya's *maya*. This *maya* is the creative force of *Brahman* depicting feminist characters. Her feminism is accepted both as a consort of God or as the Goddess who is the ultimate reality in herself.<sup>1</sup> This feminine *maya* of Shankaracharya is comparable with *prakriti* with its different *namarupa*<sup>2</sup> that hides the truth and reveals what is not truth. Thus, from this feminine nature of *maya* one can understand that for Shankaracharya women's nature is illusive and one cannot attain liberation until one is able to overwhelm this illusion with true knowledge. Similarly, in *Advaita Vedanta* one cannot find the concept of equality of women with man. Shankaracharya establishes his *jnani* mystical order exclusively for men, leaving no space for women. This exclusive treatment clarifies Shankaracharya consideration of women incompetent for the higher and critical stages of *jnana marga*.<sup>3</sup> The self-realization of *atman* to *Brahman* through *Vedas* is restricted to three upper class male Hindus, which leaves no room for Shankaracharya to equate women with man. While regarding *sati* one finds only silence in Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta*.

However, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* contain the detailed account of women regarding their status, education, and their ideal forms as wife, mother and as an independent woman. He considers women the manifestation of God that has no groundings in Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta*. Vivekananda tries to authenticate his above mentioned claim by citing his master's practice of worshiping young girls. These young virgins in this *tantric* ritual are considered to be goddesses. His concept of ideal womanhood is embedded in motherhood and wifehood. He further elaborates that as a mother, a woman is a mere *sanyasi* because she keeps her body, mind, food, clothes and imagination clean and pure while she is bringing up her child. While as a wife, he considers her ideal, loyal and faithful wife like Sita, Savitri and Damayanti. Vivekananda does not identify women with sexual being and feels no hesitation in portraying and supporting his idea of independent women from Mahabharata from the character of Draupadi. He criticizes the status of Hindu women in the nineteenth Century as the sole reason for the downfall of the Hinduism generally and retardation of progress of Hindu society particularly. He portrays the contemporary Hindu women as decadent lots whose main

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce M. Sullivan, *The a to Z of Hinduism* (USA: Scarcrow Press, 2001), 134.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Smoley, *The Dice Game of Shiva: How Consciousness Creates the Universe* (California: Novato, 2009), 40.

<sup>3</sup>Arvind Sharma, ed. *Women in World Religions* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1987), 32.



concern of life is eating, drinking, gossiping and scandals. While explaining the barbaric Hindu custom of widow burning he adds that Hindus has never believed in widow burning but this custom is observed by those wives who in their fanaticism immolated themselves in the funeral pyre of their husbands.<sup>1</sup> He offers women the equal opportunity for monastic life on the basis of their spiritual qualification.<sup>2</sup>

He finds the solution of all problems of women in reinterpretations of *Advaita Vedanta* but during this he fails to remain connected with the Shankaracharya's teachings. He claims the equality of women to man by utilization of Shankaracharya's concept of *atman*, but Shankaracharya's *atman* and *Brahman* relationship does not work in the social laws. In Shankaracharya's law of realization where *atman* becomes *Brahman* and *Brahman* become *atman* requires metaphysical realm and this unification is not possible in the social laws of the empirical world. Therefore Vivekananda's attempt of implementing that metaphysical experiential unity in an empirical world does not allow women to learn *Veda* because Shankaracharya considers women ineligible for *Jnana Marga*. The superficiality of Vivekananda's *Vedantic* equality of women becomes evident further when he describes the liberation of women in *karma marga* by facilitating their father, husband and children and he himself leaves no room for her in *jnana marga*.

Vivekananda rejects *sati* because he considers that this act represents fanatic widow psyche. His assertion regarding *sati* demands the re-exploration of the widow burning from Hindu sacred text that why the reformists like Vivekananda deny and condemns *sati*? And how and why he interprets it in the frame of *Advaita Vedanta* ? Does any connection exist between Vivekananda's practical Vedanta and Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta* regarding *sati*? And does Hindu sacred text support *sati* or not? *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya is silent over the topic of *sati*, but as it is clear from the previous discussion that Shankaracharya was classical *Vedantist*. To explore and evaluate the answer of these questions regarding *sati* and Shankaracharya's opinion, it is necessary to understand the traditional religious concept of *sati* from the religious texts. What is the meaning and possible origin of the custom *sati*?

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<sup>1</sup>Sil, *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment*, 69-72.

<sup>2</sup>, in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America: Native American*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether Rosemary Skinner Keller, Marie Cantlon (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006), 668.

The term *sati* represents the duty of the virtuous wife of predominantly the upper class Hindu by immolating herself to enjoy heavenly pleasure with her husband. According to Hindu spiritual texts this *sati* will be escaped from the cycle of birth and death.<sup>1</sup> *Smrti* text supports widow burning because “as long as a woman does not burn herself in fire on the death of her husband, she is never free from being born as a woman (in successive birth).”<sup>2</sup>

The authority of *sati* can be traced from the hymn of the Rig Veda that states “*Om*. Let these women, not to be widowed, good wives adorned with collyrium, holding clarified butter, consign themselves to the fire. Immortal, not childless, nor husbandless, excellent; let them pass into the fire, whose original element is water.”<sup>3</sup>

The above mentioned sacred text of the Rig Veda categorized *sati* and widow women on the basis of burning. Or in other words *sati* is the religious custom to avoid widowhood. Thus *sati* seems antonym of widowhood because *sati*'s synonymic term is *avidhava nari* (non widow).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the same demarcation can be seen in the two *Sanskrit* terms “*sahagamana* (“going together with [one's husband]”) or *anumarana* (“following [one's husband] in death”).”<sup>5</sup> *Sati* receives the support from the funeral verse of Atharva Veda that widow woman “choosing her husband's world, lies down (*nipad*) by you that are departed, O mortal, continuing to keep [her] ancient duty (*dharma*); to her assign you here progeny and property.”<sup>6</sup>

The presence of *sati* as a religious custom in *shruti* texts further encourages the exploration of this custom from *smrti*. That reveals the multiple opinions from whole heartedly support to half heatedly advocacy of *sati* and from complete ignorance to total rejection of this religious custom. Veda-Vyasmrti (11.53) strongly advocated the *sati* of the *Brahman* wife, but if she does not want this then she is given the option to adopt widowhood but with austerities. Bhagvata Purana encourages *sati*. While the epic point of view about *sati* is of quite mix nature. Mahabharata

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<sup>1</sup>Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions the Debates on Sati in Colonial India* (London: University of California Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Arvind Sharma, *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1998), 32.

<sup>3</sup>Wilson, "On the Supposed Vaidik Authority for the Burning of Hindu Widows, and on the Funeral Ceremonies of the Hindus," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 16(1856): 203.

<sup>4</sup>John Stratton Hawley, ed. *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse the Burning of Wives in India* (New York: New York Press, 1994), 13.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Brooke Brassard, *The Tradition of Sati* (2006).

advocacy of *sati* can be traced from the act of self-burning of Madri, the most favorite wife of Pandu. Mahabharata reveals the opposite side of the *sati* in the widowhood of the Krpi, the wife of Drona. In the case of *Manusmrti* the detail account of the widowhood is described and on finds *Manusmrti* silent on *sati*. Such mixture of opinions can be seen in the other Hindu sacred texts.<sup>1</sup>

It becomes evident that the authenticity of *sati* cannot be denied as this Hindu religious custom has reward for those widows who fulfill it as a religious duty and penance for those who first resolve to commit *sati* but turn back from it in the last moment. The rewards of the *sati* are not limited only to the liberation of those *sati* women from the cycle of birth and rebirth but she also becomes the source of *moksha* to her mother, father and husband family. These *sati* women also liberates their husbands from their sins like killing of *Brahmin*.<sup>2</sup> Consequently *sati* cannot be denied as Hindu religious custom but there is no compulsion on Hindu women to commit *sati* at her husband's death, but she has the option to adopt widowhood with piousness.

Vivekananda's rejection of *sati* as a religious custom demands analysis of his interpretation of this custom. He addresses this issue in the context of his sister who, after the death of her husband resolves to burn herself in the funeral pyre of her husband. Vivekananda calls the death of his sister a suicide rather than *sati*. He experienced the grief of his sister's death, but he also had to witness the painful and miserable condition of his mother after losing her daughter. This seems to be the reason that he considered *sati* as suicide and *Brahminical* innovation that should be eradicated from Hindu society.<sup>3</sup>

His inspiration and inclination towards the reform movement of the Ram Mohan Roy and *Brahmo Samaj* also plays vital role in his rejection of the *sati*.<sup>4</sup> As Ram Mohan was the first Hindu who rejected *sati* because he believed that *sati* had attained the form of unhappy religious symbol of fear that terrorized Hindu women.<sup>5</sup>

Vivekananda's denial of *sati* is also embedded in his ambition to revive and reform Hinduism on humanitarian and utilitarian point of view to save Hinduism from missionaries' criticism. They

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma, *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays*, 32-33.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>3</sup>Chaturvedi Badrinath, *Swami Vivekananda, the Living Vedanta* (India: Penguon Book, 2006), 153-54.

<sup>4</sup>Mīnā Agravāla Meena Agrawal Bhawan Singh Rana, *The Immortal Philosopher of India Swami Vivekananda*, 19.

<sup>5</sup>Hawley, ed. *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse the Burning of Wives in India* 23.

considered Hindu religion accumulation of degenerated and barbaric customs and practices. And in his scheme of reformation *sati* is misfit due to the wastage of important human life for just maintenance of tradition.<sup>1</sup>

These are the reasons that make him to argue that *sati* is against *Advaita Vedanta* as women share equal divinity with men. His scheme of empowering women is constituted on the equal status of women that is completely in contrast to Hindu traditional teachings. He believes in the independent and liberal women who can enter in monkship to become a *sanyasi*. This principle is dissimilar with *Advaita Vedanta* that considered women ineligible and incompetent for the *jnana marga*.

He believes in empowering women that will enable them to realize their uniqueness, potentialities and powers in all spheres of life. He envisions fearless women to revive their traditions of Sanghamitta, Lila, Ahalya Bai and Mira Bai as mothers who bear heroes due to their purity, selflessness and in strength the manifestation of God.<sup>2</sup> His revival and reform enables him to construct a Hindu religion as a missionary religion.

#### **2.4- Reinterpretation of Hinduism as Missionary a Religion**

Vivekananda was the staunchest proponent of the idea of missionary Hinduism that was shaped by the socio-religious environment of nineteenth century Bengal.<sup>3</sup> The evaluation of his missionary Hinduism demands to identify what is a missionary religion? What are the basic characteristics of missionary religion?

In missionary religion the term missionary is derived from a mission that is associated with the religious duty of propagating the faith to another.<sup>4</sup> Definition of missionary religion involves theoretical and practical aspects. On the theoretical side, it produces religious consciousness among its followers that they are the flag holders of the universal message for the whole humanity. While on the practical side missionary religion is fully acquired with steps that

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ramkrishna Mandal, *Women in North East India: Role and Status of Arunachal Women* 5.

<sup>3</sup>T orkel Brekke, "The Conceptual Foundation of Missionary Hinduism," *The Journal of Religious History* 23(1999): 203.

<sup>4</sup>Arvind Sharma, *Problematizing Religious Freedom* (London: Springer, 2012), 177.

provide its followers the complete guide to seek the conversion of the nonmembers.<sup>1</sup> The missionary approach lacks confinement in ethnicity or particular region, but in case of non-missionary religions the situation is quite different. Non-missionary religions are fabricated in the religious ideology of ethnicity and particularity, but sometimes these non-missionary religions claim to have a universal message as is the case with Judaism. Therefore, the universality of the religious message is not the distinct point in differentiating missionary religion from a non-missionary one. Rather the differentiation lay in the freedom of propagating the religious message and in seeking the conversion of non-members.<sup>2</sup>

The term freedom of propagation denotes a religious responsibility of the follower of that particular religion to preach their religion and to invite the non-member to its exclusive membership. It means that the propagation of the sacred books is not restricted in a few hands and the propagator is promised to get rewards in hereafter for converting non-members to their religion. Hence, these two characteristic concepts of universal religion: freedom of propagation and seeking conversion are used as standard to explore the missionary nature of Vivekananda missionary Hinduism. Does Hinduism qualify for these characteristics of the missionary religion? The answer of this question can be explored from the *Vedas* and other religious texts.

The Vedic text neither encourages the propagation of Vedas to non-Hindus nor appreciates conversion from non-Hindus. Aryans (the upper three castes) were not interested in mass conversion because they were inclined to preserve their identities. That seems to be the reason that non *Aryans* (*Shudras*) were not allowed to listen or memorize a single *mantra* of *the Vedas* and if any *Shudra* disobeyed this rule then he was punished by filling his ears with molten lead.<sup>3</sup> The cosmological description of the creation of the four *varna* system approves *Shudra's* emergence from the same God of *Aryan* (three upper castes). The difference only resides in the appearance of this caste from different body part (feet) of the same God. Due to this reason *Shudras* cannot access Vedic literature and Vedic rituals. Then, what is the possibility of *maleechas* (non-Hindus) becoming Hindus without having access to the sacred texts of this

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<sup>1</sup>Reidar Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant: The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century* (Germany: J.C.B.Mohar, 1996), 270.

<sup>2</sup>Sharma, *Problematizing Religious Freedom*, 177.

<sup>3</sup>Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion* (USA: State University of New York Press, 2010), 65.

religion? The entrance of non-Hindus to Hinduism without approaching its sacred books, belief system, ritual and practices appear inconvincible.

Any religion that desires to seek conversion must have prescribed code for such conversion. As, in Islam a man can enter in the Muslim *Ummah* by repeating *Shahādah* (profession of faith) in the presence of two witnesses.<sup>1</sup> In *Shahādah* converted man declares that “there is no God but God and Muḥammad is the messenger of God.”<sup>2</sup> In Christianity conversion to Christianity follow the same single route of baptism. Judaism believes that the Jew is by birth Jew, but in case of Rabbinical Judaism, the convertor must fulfill three conditions *milah* (circumcision, for men), *tevilah* (baptism) and accepting the commandments.<sup>3</sup>

Does Hinduism also claim to have such uniform codes of conversion? And does the term conversion to Hinduism depict the same meaning of exclusive membership of that converted religion? Or meaning of the word ‘conversion’ differs in Hinduism from other missionary religions?

Hinduism does not have such formal code of conversion because Hinduism is a polytheistic and *varna* based religion. The polytheistic theology of Hinduism is the main hindrance in a formal procedure of conversion. Likewise, *varna* system decides the dharma of each Hindu with his or her birth in the respective caste. The connection of *varna* and *dharma* restricts Hindu religion to ethnicity in such a way that non-Hindus by birth find no place in it. Because the Hindus believe that *Brahmin* cannot attain liberation until and unless he fulfills his *dharmic* duties sincerely. Similarly, a *kshatriya* cannot be liberated if he tries to perform the *dharma* of *Vaisyas*. As *dharmas* are decided at the time of birth according to the caste then what dharma the converted non-Hindu will follow to attain *mosksha*? And what criterion will be utilized to decide the *dharma* of converting non-Hindu? The question of the *dharmic* fate and liberation of the newly converted Hindu cannot be ignored because the conversion to another religion is linked with two important psychological aspects. Firstly, the converts are not satisfied with their family religion that they inherit at the time of birth so they convert to another religion to get satisfaction in this world. Secondly, people convert to another religion because they believe that they can get

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>2</sup>Oliver Leaman Kecia Ali, *Islam: The Key Concepts: Islam: The Key Concepts* (UK: Taylor & Francis e-library, 2007), 122.

<sup>3</sup>Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion*, 135-36.

liberation through the new confession. But the *varna* system of the Hinduism fails in providing any satisfactory religious law in deciding the *dharma* of these new converts and for their *moksha*.

Do Hindu texts provide any support regarding conversion of the members of the other religions to Hinduism? The epic and Purana texts have many myths; among these early myths the legend of Daksha is pointing towards the conversion of the Daksha from *Vaishnavism* to *Sivism*. Similarly, the *Naradaparivrajakopaniṣad* describes the detailed method of reconverting the denouncers to the *Dasanami* orders (claimed to be established by the early disciples of Shankaracharya). A *tantric* text *Kubjikanityahnikaṭilaka* (1197) describes the story of the Srinatha alias Tushnisa alias Unmanisanatha (ancient guru of *tantra*) who had converted the nine Buddhists to *Kaula* religion. The same missionary zeal can be noticed in the *bhagti* saints and gurus who formulated different devotional sects, especially in early medieval South India.<sup>1</sup>

However, Hinduism became missionary in the context of pluralistic religious environment, but it appreciates the differentiation of the word “conversion” in Hindu and other missionary religious contexts. The Hindu sacred texts describe the conversion of the *Vaishnavas* to *Shivism* and from Buddhism to Hinduism. Not in single place the conversion of the Muslims or Christian are mentioned as Hindu texts use the term *maleecha* (impure) for such non-Hindus. The word *maleecha* implies that they cannot access Hindu sacred texts due to their impurities. Hence, the above mentioned Hindu sources that describe the conversion of non-Hindus (Buddhists) to Hinduism in reality they pertain to the reconversion of those only who were born in *varna* based society. As *Vishnuism*, *Shivism* and *Tantra* are all sects of Hinduism and even the Buddhists were also Hindus before the emergence of Buddhism. Thus, the conversion of Buddhists in Hindu folds is not the case of conversion rather reconversion.

Similarly, when objectives of *bhagti* movements are evaluated regarding missionary zeal and conversion it reveals two truths. Firstly, these *bhagti* movements were the Hindu revival movements that tried to revive Hinduism in the medieval India to defend the mass conversion of the Hindus to other religions generally and to Islam particularly. It never aimed at converting Muslims or other religious communities’ to Hinduism. Rather, the apparent motive of this movement was to stop the Hindu’s conversion to Islam. In one way the conversion of non-Hindus to Hinduism was restricted by polytheism and caste barriers of Hinduism. And on the

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<sup>1</sup>Dwijendra Narayan Jha, "Looking for a Hindu Identity," 41-42.

other hand it was difficult for the *bhagtas* to convert Muslims to Hinduism in the presence of Muslim rulers as conversion of the Muslims to any other religion is a great sin and according to majority of the Muslim scholars its penalty is death. Therefore, it appears impractical that these *bhagti* movements were aiming conversion of Muslims. Though in history some exceptions to this rule are noticeable, for instance Chaitanya movement in Bengal succeeded in conversion of the chief minister Mir Munshi Shah to Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> Hence, it can be concluded that the intermingling of *varna* with *dharma* confines Hinduism to ethnic religion to a great extent.

The tendency of missionary Hinduism is seen in nineteenth century Bengali *neo-Vedantists*. These *Vedantists* claim to be Hindu reformers and revivalists by following Shankaracharya's *Advaita*. But has missionary Hinduism any connection with Shankaracharya's *Advaita* or it was the new idea introduced by these *neo-Vedantists* in Hinduism in the name of *Advaita Vedanta*? Did Shankaracharya preach his message of *Advaita Vedanta* to seek conversion? And from which religion, he accepted conversion? Apparently, the answer of the first question is affirmative. Shankaracharya did preach this message to the followers of Jainism and Buddhism to whom he considered the heterodox Hindus. However, again the point is that his preaching was intended to bring back the followers of these two religions to their ancestral religion. He was particularly successful in bringing back many Buddhists to Hindu folks and their temples were also converted to Hindu temples.<sup>2</sup> Shankaracharya's intention of preaching and inviting Buddhists and Jains back to their ancestral religion reveals the truth that this apparent story of conversion was rather reconversion.

Then, how the *neo-Vedantists* of nineteenth century developed the idea of missionary Hinduism? The history of the missionary Hinduism can be traced from the neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy, who in the basic tenets of *Brahmo Samaj* allowed the non-Hindus to attend their functions, which are in structure quite near to Christian functions. In the same way, Debendra Nath Tagore and Keshab Chandra also facilitated the membership of the non-Hindus to *Brahmo Samaj* but they were not seeking conversion. These *neo-Vedantists* rather introduced this missionary aspect to neo-Vedanta to address dissatisfaction of the low caste Hindus. Actually, these *neo-Vedantists* aimed to prevent Hindu conversion to Christianity. Dayananda Sarasvati (1824–1883), is another

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion*, 101.

<sup>2</sup>Ansar Hussain Ansar Hussain Khan, *Rediscovery of India, The: A New Subcontinent* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Publishers 1999), 29.



proponent of the missionary Hinduism. He described two objectives of his movement *Arya Samaj*:<sup>1</sup> to recall India to the abandoned Vedic paths and to preach the Vedic teachings throughout the whole world.<sup>2</sup> Here, these points clearly differentiate the missionary nature of these *neo-Vedantists* as firstly; these reformers specify the recalling of Vedic path to only Indians not to whole humanity that seems to point towards revival of Hinduism by reconverting the diverted Hindus or those who forgot the Vedic message. Secondly, he intended to preach Vedic knowledge to world. His objectives nowhere reveal his intention of seeking conversion from non-Hindu religions. If these nineteenth century revivalists had no intentions of gaining converts from other religions then why they reformed or reshaped it on the footsteps of missionary religion? The first reason was their concern about the mass conversion of the Hindus to Christianity. Secondly, they sought to stop Hindu conversion by reviving Hinduism on the footsteps of Christian missionary. Thus, it can be said that this notion of the missionary Hinduism was adopted to retaliate Christian missionary activities and to stop Hindu mass conversion to Christianity.

But, how among these revivalists Vivekananda proposes his concept of missionary Hinduism? Does he provide steps of converting non-Hindu to Hinduism? Or in what aspects his missionary Hinduism is different from his predecessor reformers? While addressing the first question, one does not find the definition of missionary Hinduism in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* or from his interviews. And whenever he takes up the concept of missionary religion Vivekananda refers to Buddhism instead of Hinduism. What is the relationship of missionary Hinduism and Buddhism in the thought of Vivekananda? Or why Vivekananda uses Buddhism as an alternate to missionary Hinduism?

He tries to describe the missionary aspect of the Hinduism by incorporating Buddhism because he does not get any support from sacred Hindu texts regarding his missionary zeal. But how he manages to include Buddhism in his claimed Hindu missionary religion? He develops the relationship between Buddhism and Hinduism by categorizes Hinduism in two categories; ceremonial Hinduism and Spiritual Hinduism. According to Vivekananda, this spiritual Hinduism is practiced by monks and it is devoid of caste discrimination. He believes that in spiritual monkship the higher and lower caste became equal because these castes are simply

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion*, 33-34.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

social institutions. He further adds that Buddha was a monk who succeeded in bringing out the hidden truth of the Vedas and very firstly broadcasted this spiritual Hinduism by utilizing proselytizing technique.<sup>1</sup> He claims that the Buddha was Hindu and Buddha did not come to destroy Hinduism. Buddha in his logical conclusion fulfilled the Hinduism by adding logical aspect of Hinduism.<sup>2</sup> His whole scheme of missionary Hinduism becomes clear when he emphasizes that Hinduism and Buddhism are complementary to each other. The existence of Hinduism has no meaning without Buddhist heart and survival of Buddhism is not possible without brain and philosophy of *Brahmins*. He further adds the reason of the downfall of India in the separation of Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> His intention of declaring Buddhism as missionary Hinduism becomes obvious when he considers Buddhism as a flag holder of Indian civilization and Indian nation by democratizing the Upanishad.<sup>4</sup>

His missionary Hinduism cannot maintain its independent identity without relying and depending on Buddhism. Hence Vivekananda's missionary Hinduism has no foundation in *Aryan* Hindu religion. He symbolizes Buddhism as missionary and spiritual Hinduism that preaches the message of the Upanishad. Missionary Hinduism of Vivekananda becomes unconvinced when one finds unmatched statements of Vivekananda concerning Buddhism and Buddha. For instance, at one place he is using Buddhism as an alternate of missionary Hinduism and one second place he claims Buddhism the "heterodox religion of *Veda*."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, one finds him praising Buddha as fearless and rational Hindu while on the second occasion he calls Buddha a rebel child of Hinduism.<sup>6</sup>

The above mention confusion gets clear from his definition of Hinduism that he explained to an American girl on London Airport. He tells her that "you can believe in one god and you can be a Hindu. You may believe in multiple deities and still you can be a Hindu. What's more - you may not believe in god at all, still you can be a Hindu. An atheist can also be a Hindu."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Work of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 volumes vols., vol. 5, 21-22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>4</sup>Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him Being Pages from the Life of the Swami Vivekananda* (London: L ongmans, Green and Co., 1910), 109.

<sup>5</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Work of Swami Vivekananda*, 282.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>7</sup>"Swami Vivekananda's Message at the World Congress of Religions," [www.swamiJ.com](http://www.swamiJ.com).

Therefore his elastic and absorbent definition of Hinduism enables him to include Buddhism in the domain of missionary Hinduism. This perplexity will further reduce to negligence when his neo-Vedanta is compared with Buddhism. These both share many common points as neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda rejects the authority of Vedas like Buddha. He discards the caste system of Hinduism on the footsteps of Buddha. He also permits women to become *a sanyasi* like Buddha. Similarly Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta shares the concept of missionary zeal of Buddha.

Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta appears quite close to Buddhism due to their overlapping concepts that may be the reason that he represents Buddhism as spiritual missionary Hinduism. But here few more questions should be searched out to completely comprehend Vivekananda missionary Hinduism. Did missionary Hinduism of Vivekananda seem to seek conversion from non-Hindu religions? Does Vivekananda provide the concrete code for this conversion?

Vivekananda defines conversion in the words that "the Eternal, Faith must become active and proselytizing capable of sending out special missions, of making converts, of taking back into her fold those of her children who had been perverted from her, and of the consciousness and deliberate assimilation of new elements."<sup>1</sup> One can see here that his proselytizing mission has to perform two different objectives. Firstly, they will seek conversion of perverted children and secondly, they will try to produce consciousness and deliberate assimilation of new elements.

But who were the perverted children, according to Vivekananda? He includes the followers of Buddhism and Jainism in the children of his religion. He opines that "the books called by that name were refused by some of her children - the Jains for example - yet the Jains were none the less Hindus for that."<sup>2</sup> Thus, in the light of such statement it appears that his conversion also intends to get reconversion from Jainism and Buddhism. Regarding those religions that emerged outside the boundaries of Indian domain his proselytizing mission aims to produce consciousness and deliberate assimilation of his religion. But he never tries to seek conversion from them. Vivekananda denies the concept of conversion of followers of foreign religions to the Hindu religion or followers of Hindu religions to those foreign religions in these words. "The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to Become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to

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<sup>1</sup>Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him Being Pages from the Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, 111-12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 112.

his own law of growth.”<sup>1</sup>But what does the term assimilation mean here? According to Vivekananda assimilation means following one’s own religion while incorporating the goodness of the other religion without converting to other religions. He incorporated and assimilated many Christian and Muslims social ethics in Hinduism (like rejection of idol worship, caste system and *sati*) but claimed to maintain his Hindu identity.

He describes the concrete steps for the reconverted Hindus. That these reconverted Hindus will join the same caste and *dharma* from which they belong before conversion to Buddhism or Jainism. But he describes no rules for those converts that converted from foreign religions to Hinduism. In the reply to the question asked from him regarding the caste of such foreign religion convertors to Hinduism. He replies that they can form one caste as was done in the time of Chaitanya. And on further inquiry of the asker about the renaming of such foreign converted he prefers to keep silence when he replied him no further questions.<sup>2</sup>

His missionary Hinduism appears an innovation in his equating of Buddhism to missionary Hinduism. For the reason that Hinduism is an ethnic religion as the *dharma* of the individual is decided at the time of his birth by inherited respective caste. His concept of the reconversion of the Buddhists and Jains to Hinduism gets support from Shankaracharya and the medieval history. Because Buddhists and Jains were Hindus before their conversion to these different religions and their reconversion to Hinduism will not face any problem regarding their *varna* and *dharma*. The reconverted Buddhist and Jain can enjoy their previous status and *dharma* of Hinduism. His missionary Hinduism aims to spread Hindu awareness not for conversion is also justified by history, but his idea of assimilation of the good from other religion and his rejection of the idol worship, caste system and *sati* gets support neither in the light of religious texts nor in *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankaracharya. Actually, the whole missionary Hinduism is hidden in its fabricated idea of universal religion that developed and progressed in nineteenth century Bengal in a reaction to defend Hinduism from Christian missionary.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Work of Swami Vivekananda*, 24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 283.

<sup>3</sup>Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion*, 34.



### Chapter 3-The Journey of Vivekananda from Revival and Reform to Pluralism and Universalism

Vivekananda began his journey as Hindu revivalist and reformer by reinterpreting the concepts of idol worship, women's socio-religious status, caste discrimination and Hinduism as a missionary religion. Then, what made him to switch his journey of a reformer to a universalist by taking admission in the realm of religious pluralism and universalism? And how did Vivekananda define the term toleration and harmony?

The switching of Vivekananda to the zone of pluralism and universalism seems to be marked by uninterrupted religious pluralism of the nineteenth century Bengal. That not only allows him to flourish the intra Hindu pluralism of *astika* and *nastika*<sup>1</sup> but also it facilitates flourishing of inter religious pluralism of foreign religions (Islam and Christianity). The long existing intra Hindu pluralism was affected by Muslim presence, but the degree of intensity of this effect seemed to be far less as compared to the Christian invasion of this area. This was due to Western criticism of Hinduism and Christian missionaries' exclusivist attitude that enabled these missionaries to preach the message that salvation could be attained only through Christ. For establishing Christ's domain in Bengal, these missionaries treated contemptuously other religions generally and Hinduism particularly.

History of his religious pluralism did not begin as an abstract theoretical scheme; it was rather the result of religious encounters of the pluralistic nineteenth century Bengal society. In this society, the religions were not in watertight compartments rather in dynamic socio-cultural and religious encountering. His pluralist approach on the one hand was matured under the influence of Western education and Christian missionaries' criticism, while on the other hand the importance of the apologetic attitude of his *neo-Vedantic* predecessors and the wave of Western theories of religious pluralism (spreading in the nineteen century Bengal) should not be ignored.<sup>2</sup> Let us deal with the question as to what exactly is the nature of Vivekananda's pluralism? In other words, what are the doctrinal bases of Vivekananda's religious pluralism?

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<sup>1</sup>John Clayton, *Religions, Reasons and Gods: Essays in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion* (UK: Cambridge University Press 2006), 44-45.

<sup>2</sup>Olav Hammer James R. Lewis, ed. *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science* (Netherland: Koninklijke,2010), 210.

### 3.1- Vivekananda's Doctrines of Pluralism

Before addressing the doctrines of Vivekananda's pluralism, it is important to discuss, how Vivekananda defines religion? His definition of religion will be helpful in deciding whether his approach is universalistic or it reveals the dominance of Hinduism. If his model has a preference for Hinduism, then the following questions need to be focused on. Does he consider Hinduism the only true religion? Or did he consider the metaphysical truth of all religions as part of Hinduism. Or did he place Hinduism as a true religion among many other true religions. Beside this, did he try to abridge the distance between Hindu and non-Hindu religions or he widens the gap between the Hindu and non-Hindu religions? Or did Vivekananda melt the individual boundaries of non-Hindu religions in neo-Vedanta?

Search in his writings reveals the absence of a single composite definition of the term 'religion'. Term 'religion' appears multifaceted in *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* due to the following reason. He does not define religion completely in one place rather definitional phrase are scattered in his writings. The reader needs to piece together various fragments of his writings in order to figure out what he really means by the term 'religion'.

In the first volume of *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* the reader finds his definition of religion as realization of God. According to him religion is neither following a specific doctrine, nor intellectual or rational evaluation.<sup>1</sup> He equates religion with freedom as he sees man's perfection in his perfect freedom. He further adds that this desire of man to attain freedom rotates around the Absolute Being (God) who is beyond all restrictions and bonds. According to him this concept of God is the basic and fundamental unit of human constitution and Vedanta is proposing this highest concept of God that the human mind can comprehend.<sup>2</sup>

But his story of religion is still incomplete without assembling the remaining components of the definition of religion from his writings. For instance, at another place he writes: "my religion means expansion, and expansion means realization and perception in the highest sense — no mumbling words or genuflections. Man is to become divine, realizing the divine more and more

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<sup>1</sup>Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Work of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols., vol. 3, 301.

<sup>2</sup>———, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols., vol. 1, 270-71.

from day to day in an endless progress.”<sup>1</sup> Vivekananda also defined religion as true selfless services by making intense self-sacrificing for the betterment of others.<sup>2</sup>

While describing the importance of sacred text in a religion, he denies that the sacred books constitute religion rather he believes that religion constitutes books.<sup>3</sup> He believes that manifestation of the divine potentiality of all souls is the aim of religion.<sup>4</sup> He categorizes religions into two categories in the pluralistic Bengali society. Firstly, those religions that proceed from God to man and this type of religions include all Semitic religions which he thinks place the idea of God above without showing any concern to the soul. Secondly, the other type takes the course from man to God; this includes particularly Aryan religions.<sup>5</sup>

The above mentioned concept of religion appears identical with Vivekananda’s definition of Hinduism when he defined Hinduism as:

The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realizing [*sic*] - not in believing, but in being and becoming. Thus the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God, and this reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus. <sup>6</sup>

The above mentioned definition of religion endangers Vivekananda’s image of a pluralist. His definition of religion is no more than the repetition of his definition of Hinduism. Masking of term ‘religion’ with Hinduism makes his pluralist claims suspicious. That demands to explore what he actually stands for vis-à-vis religious diversity?

The definition of the term ‘pluralism’ is not as simple as it appears because it lacks single unanimous and agreeable definition. For resolving this problem the following definition will be cited as it contains pluralism in two affirmations; one negative and the other positive. It states that:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 263.

<sup>4</sup>M.G. Chitkara & Girdhari Sharma, *Religion 21st Century* (New Delhi: S. B. Nangia, 2002), 91.

<sup>5</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Work of Swami Vivekananda*, 5.

<sup>6</sup>Ronald Neufeldt, "Reflections on Swami Vivekananda's Speeches at the World Parliament of Religions, 1893," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 6(1993): 1-2.



The negative affirmation is the rejection of religious absolutism, which means rejecting the a priori assumption that [one's] own religion is the only one that provides saving truths and values to its adherents, that it alone is divinely inspired, that it has been divinely established as the only legitimate religion, intended to replace all others. The positive affirmation, which goes beyond the negative one, is acceptance of the idea that there are indeed religions other than one's one that provide saving truths and values to their adherents.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of the above mentioned definition the main tenets of Vivekananda's religious pluralism are analyzed here. The central pole of Vivekananda's religious pluralism is his teacher Ramakrishna's claimed experience of unity in diverse religious experiences which led the latter proclaims truth in all religions. On the footsteps of his teacher, he also believes that different religions are no more than the different paths leading towards the same goal (the realization of God).<sup>2</sup> But what are his own views about the diversity of religions beyond his teacher's experiential conclusions?

The topic of religious diversity makes its appearance in Vivekananda's work with a question that he asks: Are all the religions of the world contradictory to each other? He replies this question in negation meaning that all world religions are not contradictory rather the apparent contradictions lie in external forms, language, buildings, rituals and books. He accepts that all religions have their individual internal souls that apparently constitute the diversity of religions. But in actuality, these internal souls are part of great universal truth (Soul) and he arranges these souls into an evolutionary order.<sup>3</sup> Vedanta attains the crowning position of his evolutionary ordering. While discussing the internal individual souls of each religion in terms of evolution, he violates the basic principle of religious pluralism; different religions are different paths that are leading towards the same goal (realization of God). If every path is leading towards the realization of God then how these paths (souls) can be arranged in evolutionary order?

Because in doing so he places internal individual souls of the few religions (Christianity and Islam) at the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder. This placement according to him is based on his claimed "great universal truth", which he identifies with "transcendental spiritual

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<sup>1</sup>David Ray Griffin, ed. *Deep Religious Pluralism*, 1 ed. (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press 2005), 130.

<sup>2</sup>Neufeldt, "Reflections on Swami Vivekananda's Speeches at the World Parliament of Religions, 1893," 1.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 295-96.

consciousness, man's struggle to attain that consciousness and his experience of it."<sup>1</sup> His claim is that the great universal religion has the capacity to accommodate other world religions inside it. This schematization puts a question mark on the consistency of his theory of religious pluralism. Therefore Vivekananda's pluralist theory demands some further analysis. His doctrine of religious pluralism can be traced from a hymn and a quotation from the Gita which he quoted at the world's parliament of religion on 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1893. The words of that hymn are as follows: "as the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."<sup>2</sup>

He tries to formulate his pluralist approach when he quotes a text of the Bhagavad-Gita in which God (Krishna) is declaring all religions as different paths that end to God. The first doctrine of Vivekananda's pluralist approach is found in the following words: "Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me."<sup>3</sup> It may be noticed that firstly, he did not give a complete reference of the book (Bhagavad-Gita) from which he had cited it. Secondly, this hymn which he chose to support the doctrine of pluralism is specifically Hindu.

One can also say that in the context of Bhagavad-Gita these different paths of God realization refer to the different path within Hinduism like *jnana marga*, *bhagti marga* and *karma marga*. Apparently, he is reinterpreting the text by equating the term 'different paths' with different religions. Why is he trying to reinterpret and replace the sectarian diversity within Hinduism with religious pluralism? The understanding of the Bhagavad-Gita's above quotation demands the knowledge of its historical context. Actually, Bhagavad-Gita emerged as the post Vedic Hindu sacred text, the recitation of which completes Hindu daily prayer. It reflects a unique Hindu worldview that presents the salvation, not in renunciation rather in fulfillment of one's own duty with sincerity and devotion. It endorses multiplicity of the paths instead of one proposed path of Classical *Dharma Shastara* that leads man in the course of life from the stages of studentship, household, and renunciation to attain salvation. In fact, these different paths

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<sup>1</sup>Swami Bhajananda, "Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda – Iii," *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture* (2012): 253.

<sup>2</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

mentioned in Gita represent different *yogas* (paths) effective in different situations as many gods of the Vedas are worshiped in different situations without being compromised or subordinated by one another.<sup>1</sup>The Hindu specific context of Gita limits the scope of his first doctrine of pluralism for non- Hindu religious perspective.

In Gita's quotation the term "Me" stands for whom? Is this "Me" of Gita identical with his projected Absolute Universal Being? Or the term 'Me' represents the Hindu deity. In Gita the term "Me" revolves around the concept of Vasudeva-Krishna, believed to be an incarnation of the single highest god who has created the world and He is present in the world in different appearances (*maya*) to protect *dharma* and destroy *adharma*. This highest god is the *Purusha*, the highest liberated self which is the source of liberation to all selves. The paths of salvation demand ascetic practices and devotion for Krishna. All Vedic gods are dependent on this single supreme God.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the concept of god in Gita appeared fourfold; firstly it represents the transcendent, absolute impersonal *nirguna Brahman*. Secondly, it appears as a god who pervades and manifests in the world. Thirdly, in Gita god Krishna appears as an avatar of Vishnu.<sup>3</sup> It could be said that the term 'Me' in the context of Gita represents Hindu god that is less likely to be accepted in non-Hindu religions.

He tries to utilize a synthetic approach to reinterpret Gita proposing in favor of his pluralist theory about all world religions.<sup>4</sup> However, one could maintain that he is imposing a Hindu concept of God as a universal god and Hindu method of worships as universal worships.

The second element of his doctrine of pluralism can be seen in his claim of abandoning the dogmatic religious approach and adoption of common sense approach.<sup>5</sup> But before examining the second element of his doctrine of pluralism, one would need to first define the term the dogmatic study of religion? What are the main reasons that persuade one to adopt a dogmatic approach towards religions?

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<sup>1</sup>Christopher Key Chapple, ed. *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 25th ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press,2009), Xiii-XXV.

<sup>2</sup>Angelika Malinar, *The Bhagavad Gītā Doctrines and Contexts* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6-7.

<sup>3</sup>Jeanneane D. Fowler, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Text and Commentary for Students* (USA: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), XXXiV.

<sup>4</sup>Chapple, ed. *The Bhagavad Gītā*, XXiV.

<sup>5</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 292.

The dogmatic approach is the product of dogmatic attitude that makes one to accept or reject the truth of another religion by setting the criteria of one's own religion and convictions. Such person will be ready to accept only that part or segment of the other religion as being true if it shares and overlaps the knowledge of religion he is persuading. And he rejects all those beliefs of the other religions that appear contradictory to his own religious beliefs. The main reasons for adopting this approach seem to be many. Sometime it is resulted from the fear and threat to lose ones religious identity or may be due to the product of the misguidance of religious leaders. It may also be embedded in the ignorance of once own sacred text or intentional misinterpretation of the sacred text to achieve personal or national motives.<sup>1</sup>

Vivekananda's own approach of pluralism sometimes appears to be dogmatic due to his conglomeration of friendly and hostile attitudes towards other religions. The friendly attitude can be seen where there is agreement between his Practical Vedanta and other religions. While in the inverse situation his inclination towards his own religion becomes evident.<sup>2</sup>For instance, he criticizes Christianity, due to its clash of belief with his Practical Vedanta. Christianity considers man as a sinner from his birth while Vedanta believed *atman* is *Brahman*. In this case he supports and prefers Vedanta over Christianity. He refuses to accept the fundamental doctrine of Christianity that man is by birth a sinner.<sup>3</sup>He promotes his inherited *Vedantic* dogma that "Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth — sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature."<sup>4</sup>

His fondness for Vedanta can be noticed when he calls Buddhism a heterodox religion of Hinduism instead of recognizing Buddhism as a distinct religion. The reason that compels him to label Buddhism as a heterodox religion appears in his assertion that the Buddha was a rebellious child of Hinduism who reduced all sacred things of Hinduism into dust.<sup>5</sup>

The third element of his doctrine of pluralism is quite complex due to its composition from three different but complementary concepts. These concepts are missionary activities, assimilation of

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<sup>1</sup>Ali Ihsan Yitik, "Swami Vivekananda's Idea of Religious Diversity and Harmony," *Journal für Religionskultur* (2001): 3.

<sup>2</sup>P. L. John Panicker, *Gandhi on Pluralism and Communalism* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006), 43.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 12.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 282.

good from other religions and maintenance of individual identity of different religions. Here he opines about the missionary activities of religion that they were pointless. He maintains that instead of converting assimilation of the good elements of the other religions and maintenance of the individual faith should be preferred.

In the words of Vivekananda: “the Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.”<sup>1</sup>

The point under consideration is that in the first part of this statement non-conversion of Hindus or Buddhists to Christianity and then non-conversion of Christians to Hinduism or Buddhism has been mentioned. Why did he mention and highlight only these three religions and ignore the rest of the religions? Secondly, in the second part he emphasizes on the assimilation of the spirit of the other and preservation of the individual identity that seems to be quite difficult a task, or even impossible in certain cases. As he does not clarify what does he mean by the “spirit” of the other religions and if it could be taken as the good elements, then what criteria would be employed by him for selection of the good elements?

The definition of good varies from religion to religion. For example, idol worship and caste systems are the spirit of Hinduism while in Islam Idol worship is a grave sin and caste system has no place in it. Similarly, man is considered a sinner in Christianity while it is against the basic tenets of Vedanta. Then how these different spirits can be assimilated? And if the assimilation takes place, then how one religion can maintain and preserve its individuality?

Assimilation is the opposition of individuality and these both cannot walk together, if one wants to preserve his/her religious individuality then it demands strong measure to stop assimilation. And if one wants to assimilate then she or he has to forgo the idea of preservation.

### **3.2- Vivekananda’s Notion of Universal religion**

Before describing Vivekananda’s doctrines of universal religion, it is important to find out what does the term universal religion mean in the context of philosophy of religion? Like many other philosophical terms, the term ‘universal religion’ also lacks a composite and agreeable definition. But there are a few characteristics of universal religion that can be used to evaluate his view of a

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 24.

universal religion. While dealing with universal religion, it should not be taken as a new religion that would replace the existing religions. The notion of universal religion does not mean that people would cease to identify themselves as Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists. Universal religion seems to be an umbrella doctrine that shows less interest in describing God, metaphysics or life after death. The main concern of the Universal religion is practical and ethical. As these ethics and morality are practical issues these must be derived logically to satisfy the emotional and rational needs of human beings. Universal religion does not aim at unifying the whole world by dissolving the identities of individual religions rather it appreciates the peaceful co-existence of all the religions in the universal ethical code of universal religion.<sup>1</sup>

The above mentioned framework of universal religion stands in need of further elaboration regarding its characteristics and other elements like universal philosophy, universal mythology, and universal rituals.

Vivekananda puts the foundation of his universal religion by ignoring the apparent differences of all religions by searching out the single common essence of diverse religions, that is, the realization of God in the soul. He considers that “the end of all religions is the realizing of God in the soul.”<sup>2</sup> And for him this realization of God is the key that enables humanity to recognize divinity in every man and woman”<sup>3</sup> through *atman*. That is the gist of his universal religion.<sup>4</sup> But here what does the term realization of God mean? How could one realize God in the context of his universal religion? He equates this realization of God with Vedanta. He said that “I think it is Vedanta and the Vedanta alone that can become the universal religion of man, and that no-one else is fitted for that role.”<sup>5</sup>

His two above mentioned claims about universal religion seem to lack common ground and point towards his two different opinions. On the one hand, he calls realization of God in soul common essence of all religions that constitute the universal religion and then makes exclusive claims of

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<sup>1</sup>David Hockey, *Developing a Universal Religion: Why One Is Needed and How It Might Be Derived* (Canada: Stephenson-Hockey Publishing, 2003), 204-06.

<sup>2</sup>Swami Adiswarananda, ed. *Vivekananda, World Teacher: His Teachings on the Spiritual Unity of Humankind* (Woodstock: Skylight Path Publishing, 2006), 68.

<sup>3</sup>Kalpana Mohapatra, *Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1996), 49.

<sup>4</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 263.

<sup>5</sup>Heiko Frese and Ulrike Schröder Michael Bergunder, ed. *Ritual, Caste and Religion in Colonial South India* (Germany: Franckeshe Stiftungen zu Halle, 2010), 57.

Vedanta's authority for his universal religion. A reader becomes further perplexed to find out that he approves different world religions as different paths and effective means to realize God, but at the same time he also appears to emphasize the four Hindu *margas* as the only authentic paths of realizing God.

He describes that the very basic and fundamental characteristic of the universal religion is that it should not only satisfy but also fulfill the spiritual hunger of all types of people.<sup>1</sup> His universal religion however, does not mean bringing of "all humanity to one method of thinking in spiritual things."<sup>2</sup> In other words, he believes that due to the above mentioned characteristics of the universal religion it is wholly impossible that universal religion contains one set of doctrines for all humanity.<sup>3</sup>

It is quite surprising that on the one hand he claims the diverse and inclusive nature of universal religion and on the other hand he is equating this universal religion with Vedanta. He claims that Vedanta is a universal religion because "it is inclusive enough; it is broad enough to include all ideals."<sup>4</sup> For justifying his Vedanta as the universal religion, he supports his proposal with arguments. He justifies Vedanta as a universal maintaining that it not only fulfills the scientific experiential approach, but also justifies all challenges of materialist sciences due to its rationalism. This is the reason why he placed internal experiential aspect of the religion superior in authority than sacred books and rituals. While describing the fundamental character of universal religion, he criticizes the ritualism forms of religion because he considers ritualism as the basic reason of fundamentalism. His claims that tolerant universal religious demands the abolition of ritualism, but his writing reveals that he himself could not break out of the traditional attitude of the *Advaita Vedantins*.<sup>5</sup> *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* are replete with the presentation of *jnana*, *bhagti*, *karma* and *raja yogas* as the ways of salvation, but one could hardly find any name of the religious ritual or practices of other religions as a source of salvation. His universal religion rejects the authority of religious texts, but one can find the quotations of Hindu sacred texts in his *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* for supporting

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 302-03.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 294.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 308.

<sup>4</sup>Michael Bergunder, ed. *Ritual, Caste and Religion in Colonial South India*, 57.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 58-59.

his arguments. Though a few quotations of the Bible could also be seen in his writings that are utilized by him to support his *Vedantic* teachings one can hardly find any citation from the Holy Qur‘ān.

His universal religion was not designed for conversion of non-Hindus to Hinduism rather his intention was the assimilation of other religions in neo-Vedanta. He said: “in this Oneness [*Advaita* Vedanta] is included all faiths, all dogmas. Each of them has its own place in the world. We must recognize this. Though this Oneness’ is the ideal of the universal religion realized..... Let us hope for the day when this ideal of universal religion will shine upon mankind.”<sup>1</sup>

One can conclude that his promulgation of *Advaita* Vedanta as a universal religion is a good attempt to reconstruct received Hindu tradition philosophically. However, at certain points he is negating his own prescribed criteria of universal religion by violating the basic principle of universal religion; by equating *Advaita* Vedanta to universal philosophy, *Advaita* myths as Universal myths and *Vedantic* rituals as realizing God through different *margas* as universal ritual.

He describes the three developmental stages of his universal religion.

### **3.2.1 - Developmental Phases of the Universal religion**

His universal religion consists of three phases, firstly as eternal religion, secondly, as a religion where co-existence of all religions could be seen and thirdly, it attains transcendental phase of religion.

#### **3.2.1.1: The First Phase: The Eternal Religion**

His first phase of universal religion culminates in eternal religion. But how he defines the term eternal religion? What sort of relationship can be seen in his claimed eternal phase of universal religion with the other world religions? What are the characteristics of his eternal religion that makes it fit for being eternal?

Vivekananda describes eternal religion as *Sanatana Dharma* that in his writings are equivalent to *Advaita* Vedanta. He based his universal religion on the infinite and eternal principle of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 55.



realization of eternal God within the soul that also shares eternity as its basic characteristic with God. Eternal religion solely relies on internal experiential methods and claims limitlessness by negating external creed, doctrine or rituals.<sup>1</sup> But how did Vivekananda adjust other religions in his proposed *Sanatana Dharma* is the question to be addressed here?

Actually, Vivekananda puts *Advaita* Vedanta at the apex of his proposed evolutionary religious order, while he places *Dvaita* Vedanta at the bottom of this evolutionary ladder and *Visista Advaita* in the center between *Advaita* and *Dvaita* Vedanta. He opines that Christianity and Islam coincide with *Dvaita* Vedanta in sharing the same belief which completely demarcates the nature of God and man. Here God is the Creator and man His creation.<sup>2</sup>

After framing Islam and Christianity in his scheme of universal religion, he adjusts Buddhism and Jainism. He adopts the approach of submerging and the individual unique religious characteristics of Buddhism and Jainism to make these religions the part and parcel of his eternal religion. He claims that Buddhism and Jainism do not depend on God rather these religions proposed a system of evolving God out of man [*Advaita* Vedanta].<sup>3</sup> From the above discussion it appears that his eternal religion revolves around the claimed eternal concept of the eternity of God and the divinity of the soul (*Advaita* Vedanta). He characterizes his claimed eternal religion as *Sanatana dharma* which, according to him is eternal for not following hard and fast beliefs, doctrines and rituals like Judaism, Islam and Christianity, though in such claims, he interprets Hinduism in a way that it becomes eternal religion instead of a religion among other religions. The second character of his eternal religion is its harmonious frame that supposedly unifies all sects and all religions. Thus, he places his eternal religion as the mother of all religions. In other words, all religions inherit the basic principle of eternal religion.<sup>4</sup>

The third characteristic of the eternal religion is its infiniteness. He claims that infinite, eternal religion is the final destination where every religion of world merges into *Sanatana Dharma* by assimilating its eternal spirit. His eternal religion aims to assimilate others in its eternity.<sup>5</sup> One

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Neil Minor, *Radhakrishnan: A Religious Biography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 13.

<sup>2</sup>Panicker, *Gandhi on Pluralism and Communalism* 43-50.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 18.

<sup>4</sup>Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*, 51.

<sup>5</sup>Karin Preisendanz Eli Franco, ed. *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and Its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*, 1 ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007), 508.

can say that eternal religion is nothing short of Hindu exclusivism when he emphasizes the superiority of *Sanatana Dharma* over other religions, and a kind of inclusivism when he claims that all world religions find their fulfillment in *Sanatana Dharma*.

Fourthly, for him there are some eternal constituents of the eternal religion. These eternal constituents that he lists are eternal God, eternal soul and eternal law of *karma*. He further claims that the seat of the realization of the eternal God in man is the soul. He also stresses that the concept of the eternity of the soul is shared by all religions. According to him, all religions believe that the lustrous nature of the soul is dimmed by failure of God's realization, while its primitive shine could be regained by the realization of God.<sup>1</sup> From eternal religion the principles of truth, loveliness, kindness, integrity and equality emerge that free man from ignorance, jealousy, and narrow mindedness. He believes

that eternal religion makes man the living embodiment of God.<sup>2</sup>

The brief description and analysis of his eternal religion reveals inclusive rather than a pluralistic approach. His eternal religion is nothing more and nothing less than Hinduism with its absorptive nature. He supports his claimed eternal religion by saying that "in India this [Buddhism] gigantic child was absorbed, in the long run, by the mother that gave it birth."<sup>3</sup> Here he singles out absorptive and inclusive nature of Hinduism to explain the extinction of Buddhism from Indian soil and ignores other historical and geographical factors that played a decisive role in this case. He links his eternal religion with the source of love, equality and truth. One can point out that in making such claims he is probably ignoring the fact that other religions too stand for ideals like equality of all humanity, sincere love, and truth on the bases of their peculiar metaphysical and moral systems. Therefore, it can be said that his eternal religion is portrayed superiority of Hinduism over other world religions by utilizing approaches of Hindu exclusivism and Hindu inclusivism.

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 261.

<sup>2</sup>Mohit Chakarabarti, *Swami Vivekananda, a Study on Aesthetics* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1993), 261.

<sup>3</sup>Eli Franco, ed. *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and Its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*, 507.

### 3.2.1.2 - The Second Phase: Co-existence of all Religions

Whereas in the first phase Vivekananda was envisaging the emergence of the individuality of each religion in one eternal religion (*Advaita* Vedanta), in the second phase he describes the coexistence of individuality of each religion. Apparently, the two phases seem to be mutually contradictory.

It appears that certain religious and scientific philosophies lie behind his proposed phase of co-existence of all religions. While describing the religious scheme, he claims that the existence of these diverse world religions is the will of all merciful and all Wise Creator. Otherwise, all world religions would have died except that one which was considered true by Him to rule the whole world. He justifies the existence of all religions as a stimulus that keeps and promotes the development of thoughts because he believes that the survival of one single religion would result in the stagnation and decay of religion intellectually.<sup>1</sup> For supporting his claim of co-existence of religions scientifically he quotes the central idea of the theory of Darwinism: the survival of the fittest. He maintains that all the existing religions still survive because these are the fittest in the eyes of their followers.<sup>2</sup>

After explaining the religious and scientific reasons of religious diversity and coexistence of different religions, he tries to explain the link between the individual existence of these religions and his claimed universal religion. He considers that all religions are depicting the different angles of one truth. The apparent differences are due to culture and society in which one grows up and is educated. These factors allow one to color truth according to one's heart, intellectuality, and mind. However, for him in spite of many apparent differences all religions belong to one universal religion.<sup>3</sup>

He further adds; "all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind; and that not one can become dead, not one can be killed. Just as you cannot kill any force in nature, so you cannot kill any one of these spiritual forces."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 293-94.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 293.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 296.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

He suggests that the approaches of mutual respects for each religion can facilitate the practical existence of these religions as a universal religion. On the other hand universality of the aggregate religion is disturbed by the missionary activities of those priests who embark on preaching of one specific religion as their religious duty. He proposes that instead of this religious preaching that aims to get converts from other religions should be replaced by the friendly interreligious dialogue for mutual awareness and betterment of humanity with the spirit of acceptance.<sup>1</sup>

### **3.2.1.3 - The Third Phase: Transcending the Limitations**

His first and second phases of the universal religion involve all world religions as a part of the eternal religion and co-existence of all world religions. Therefore the first and second phases of his universal religion are directly or indirectly bonded to realms of individual religions. The third phase of universal religion moves beyond the boundaries of individual religions and culminates in transcendental consciousness. This phase involves all humanity without categorizing them into different religions and castes by the fulfillment of the ever urging, desire of man to attain absolute freedom from all his limitations.<sup>2</sup>

He describes transcendental consciousness as a superior state of mind. He categorizes this state of mind into different stages, one leading to another. The first state of mind was the production of instincts that was followed by a more advanced state of reasoning. Reason got maturity into the third most advanced state of transcendental consciousness.<sup>3</sup> He equates transcendental consciousness with a *samadhi* that can be achieved when the mind goes beyond the line of self - consciousness,<sup>4</sup> a state that can be attained only through meditative experience. He further adds that this meditative state is the highest state of existence. In other words, his first state of mind represents the instinctive or animal stage. The second state of consciousness is equal to man's intellect while the third stage signifies spiritually contemplated the state of mind with the

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<sup>1</sup>Bhajananda, "Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda – Iii," 453-54.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.: 554.

<sup>3</sup>Mahendra Kulasrestha, ed. *Learn Rajayoga from Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Lotus Press,2006), 92.

<sup>4</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 148.

realization of God. And, the stage of transcendental consciousness represents the final state of divinity of man.<sup>1</sup>

He believes that transcendental consciousness is experienced by the saints, prophets and *rishis* that illuminate their lives. However, the problem of diversity surfaces again with regard to this transcendental consciousness, as the source of this transcendental consciousness is a spiritual experience which is colored by cultural and historical factors as admitted by Vivekananda himself. Some claim to attain this transcendental consciousness through an angel, the other claims the blessedness through *deva* and another claims to have a direct encounter with God. Now, he sees that these differences arise because of different interpretations, educations, and belief systems. Interestingly, he rejects many claims of transcendental consciousness by considering these experiences as the stumbling of the experientialist.<sup>2</sup> As an example of such stumbled experience, he mentions the name of Muḥammad, peace be upon him. According to him, Prophet Muḥammad was not a trained *yogi* and he did not know what he was doing? He even declares that the book revealed onto Muḥammad, peace be upon him, contained truth with superstitions due to stumbling of Muḥammad, peace be upon him, during this experience. So, Muhammad, peace be upon him, brought good to mankind, but he also brought evil of fanaticism.<sup>3</sup> While making such criticism did Vivekananda fulfill the criteria of his claimed transcendental consciousness or his criticism reveals his religious prejudice? Let us analyze his criticism of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad. The first question that arises is about the criteria. What were the standards set by him to ascertain the validity of transcendental consciousness? He said if a person is claiming inspiration while no difference is found in him before and after *samadhi*, then his claim cannot be considered as correct. He elaborates further that even if a fool enters the *samadhi* he would become sage after experiencing true inspiration. His second standard for distinguishing true inspiration from the false one is that true inspiration never contradicts reason.<sup>4</sup> He further adds that when you hear someone claiming that "I am inspired

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 150.

<sup>4</sup>Anantanand Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas* (USA: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 99-100.

and then talks irrationally, reject it.”<sup>1</sup> The third standard of Vivekananda is interwoven with the personality of the claimant to inspire. He thinks that such a person will be devoid of personal interests and longing for fame, rather the content of this inspiration will be beneficial for humanity.<sup>2</sup> It is hard to see how his own prescribed criteria could nullify the religious experiences of Muḥammad, peace be upon him. He rejects the ascension of Muḥammad as a superstition because it cannot be proved “scientifically”. In such context his whole scheme of universal religion becomes superstitious because his metaphysical schemes of the *neo-Vedanta* along with the idea of an eternal soul, *karma*, and God realization cannot be proved “scientifically” either. This might be the reason that he uses the term soul and mind alternately to give a scientific touch to his dogmatic notion of *atman*.

However alternate usage of soul and mind, enhance the problems for him when these two terms appear to conflict in the context of religious experience in *samadhi*. He believes that all the sages and unselfish people of every religion experiences truth in *samadhi* that they declare to be higher than those experiences that result from the senses.<sup>3</sup> These experiential truths of *samadhi* are beyond the senses. And the mind is the nerve, organ which belongs to the senses, then how could he equate the term soul with mind, and at the same time define the sense as the nerve centers of the brain?<sup>4</sup>

The same disagreement could be noticed when he considers the mind to be an instrument in the hands of the soul.<sup>5</sup> He tries to demarcate between the soul and mind by telling a story about a god and a demon. They went to a sage to gain knowledge of the self. The demon distracted due to his failure to realize the reality of the soul, while the god succeeded in exploring the reality of the soul. That made a god to conclude that the self is neither body nor mind it is beyond all these.<sup>6</sup>

Then, how can the mystery of the mind, soul and transcendental consciousness be solved from the writings of Vivekananda? He identifies transcendental consciousness in *Samadhi* when the

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 151.

<sup>2</sup>Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*, 100.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 105.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 115-16.

mind becomes free from the thoughts that mark the complete destruction of thought in the mind.<sup>1</sup> This destruction will awaken the soul that constitutes his perfect transcendental consciousness. The one who experiences this transcendental consciousness would be able to preserve the soul beyond mind, thoughts and matter.<sup>2</sup> In the formulation of his transcendental scheme his fondness and affection for science become apparent when he argues that his prescribed *samadhi* satisfies the criteria of scientific method. Because he believes it could be achieved through *raja yoga*. But how did he explain the scientific nature of his *raja yoga*?

He calls *raja yoga* the scientific *yoga* because it does not require any faith or belief rather it motivates to find out truth first and to believe later.<sup>3</sup> He declares that like all sciences *raja yoga* also utilizes scientific method to cultivate reason. His *raja yoga*'s first scientific step is based on observation. And without these observations *yogi* cannot understand inner thoughts, internal nature of man and knowledge of mind. The instrument utilized by the *yogi* for this observation is mind.<sup>4</sup> The next step that further employs mind to know and reveal the secrets of the internal world is concentration. This concentration of the mind yields to *yogi* the perception of analysis that helps him in deriving conclusions that either the *yogi* has a realization of his soul or he is experiencing the permeation of the Absolute in the empirical world.<sup>5</sup>

The critical evaluation of the above mentioned scientific *raja yoga* poses many questions. Firstly, it appears to be a combination of contradictory statements in his writings. At one place, he tries to validate his transcendental consciousness as a universal religion being experienced by the *rishis* and prophets through this *raja yoga*. On the other hand, he tries to interpret this *raja yoga* as scientific *yoga* as it justifies the criteria of reason by omitting superstitions. Apparently, the implementation of the principle of scientific verification is limited to sense organs and empirical world while he claims to utilize it in metaphysics. That seems problematic.

The next point that appears objectionable is that he claims himself to be *Advaita Vedantin* and at the same time he stands apart from Shankaracharya's concept of *Brahmajnana* (*Brahman* can be experienced in *atman* through *jnana marga*). He accepts the superiority of the experiential

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 172.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 107-08.

perception of God in *samadhi*, while Shankaracharya authenticates the knowledge of *Brahman* from the Vedas.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of the above discussion, it can be said that his universal religion (realization of the God in soul) on the one hand makes religion an individual endeavor and on the other hand he restricts the authenticity of this realization to Hindu context and rejects or downplays all other religious experiences. His different phases of the universal religion sometime depict him as an exclusivist, and sometimes as an inclusivist. His eternal religion represents his exclusivist *advaita Vedantin* stance. His proposed second phase of the co-existence of all religions reveals his inclusivist approach. And the final phase of transcending the limits represents the scientific justification of *Advaita Vedanta*. The above discussion discloses that his universal religion is heavily entangled in the culture and the dogmatic framework of Hinduism.

### **3.3- Vivekananda's Universal religion and the Concept of Harmony**

An overview of his universal religion has exposed that these phrases appear to be three different approaches to validate the superiority of *Advaita Vedanta*. But how could his concept of harmony of religion be adjusted in his *Advaita Vedantic* universal religion? Before discussing the core question of this topic it is needed to first know why this religious harmony is necessary for him? What approach he has utilized in formulating his concept of religious harmony?

His writings reflect that harmony is not only indispensable for peaceful inter-religious interaction, but also for intra-religious interaction. He considers religious diversity as a core reason behind religious conflicts that brought the disasters of religious wars and bloodshed. He affirms the fundamental reason of this bloodshed in differences of doctrines and religious rituals. He opines that this apparent difference is the root cause of hatred, opposition and religious prejudices. But at the same time one perceives from his writings that he declares his own religious creed and doctrines beyond skepticism. He elaborates further that no religion ever promoted the message of violence, persecution, burning of witches, but that such practices result from men's pursuance of political and personal interests.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*, 106.

<sup>2</sup>Bhajananda, "Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda," in *Exploring Harmony among Religious Traditions in India* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2007), 1-3.



In *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* he uses the term harmony in the sense of universalism and sometimes in the context of diversity of religion. But one cannot find the exact definition of the term harmony rather he seems to equate Vedanta with harmony. His formula of harmony of religions is embedded in his saying that “the idea of the Vedanta is to harmonize all.”<sup>1</sup> If his meaning of harmony is taken for granted then what methodologies are utilized by him for executing his notion of religious harmony?

The first approach that he utilizes is based on his spiritual master Ramakrishna’s experiential postulate of many paths to one goal.<sup>2</sup> He also borrows Ramakrishna’s hierarchical approach to arrange ‘many paths’ in hierarchical order on the basis of the efficiency of these paths in acquiring the desired goals. Ramakrishna judged the belief of a transcendental God’s presence in heaven as an inferior experiential path. While he placed the belief that God is present in all beings as a life, consciousness and inner guide on the mediocre rung of this hierarchical ladder. The upper rung was given to superior experiential path in which a devotee experiences that nothing exists but God. This God pervades not only *maya* but also the universe and all living beings.<sup>3</sup>

Vivekananda’s source of inspiration was the teachings of Ramakrishna, but his own contribution in coming up with a particular interpretation of Ramakrishna and thereby preferring Hindu spirituality over all other forms of religion cannot be ignored. His addition of the spiritual approach in hierarchical arrangement of different religious paths is different from his master. As Ramakrishna’s experiential conclusion of equality of all paths (religions) was based on claimed religious experience of different religions by following their religious doctrines, rituals and sacred texts. On the other hand, Vivekananda emphasizes on the equality of all religions on the basis of his claimed non-dogmatism. For him the realization of God in the soul is the highest religious experience and that is the only way of harmonizing all religions. He believes that this realization is part and parcel of every religion and it is independent of religious doctrines, rituals, and religious texts. His religious harmony is synthetic in nature because it was synthesized by Ramakrishna’s religious experiences and Vivekananda’s arrangement of religion

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 325.

<sup>2</sup>Harold G. Coward, ed. *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 67.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

in evolutionary sequence. While Ramakrishna's teachings lack the hierarchical arrangement of religion in evolutionary order from dualism to non-dualism.<sup>1</sup>

In his doctrine of a universal religion and also in his approaches of religious harmony, he emphasizes the equality of all religions by negation of religious doctrines, rituals and sacred books. But his writings reveal the other side of the coin. All the volumes of *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* unveil the supremacy of *Hinduism* (rituals, books and worships included) generally and *Advaita* Vedanta particularly. The disagreements on his Hindu toleration can be noticed when he describes Hindu creeds as eternal religion and the Hindu *margas* as the only ways to the eternal religion. He even prescribes the recitation of the word *ohm* and mantras of Vedas to attain super-consciousness in *samadhi*.<sup>2</sup>

The above mentioned attitude seems to match his prescribed definition of blasphemy. In which he mentions that "Was there ever a more horrible blasphemy than the statement that all the knowledge of God is confined to this or that book? How dare men call God, infinite, and yet try to compress Him within the covers of a little book!"<sup>3</sup>

A comparison of the portions of his writings and speeches that contain his claims of equality of all religions and the portion which emphasize the exclusive superiority of *Advaita* Vedanta reveal that his writings and debates are dominantly permeated by the latter claim. This makes his stance on religious harmony liable to a critical evaluation.

However, before evaluating the teachings and sayings of Vivekananda, it is important to note that the term 'religious harmony' means a peaceful, tolerant, amicable and non-conflicting inter and intra religious interaction. There are several aspects of the term religious harmony. The first feature of religious harmony is deeply embedded in accepting the diversity and individuality of all religions without emphasizing the sameness of all religions. The term 'equality' constitutes the second dimension of religious harmony. This concept of equality means that each religion has its own plan of universal salvation, self-transformation, its own vision of transcendental being, its own community of preachers and teachers. Hence religious harmony demands restraints for the use of contemptuous, abusive, attacking and degrading remarks orally and in written form. It also suggests that people resolve their conflicts and confusions regarding the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 74-76.

<sup>2</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 156.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 152.

differences in the religious faiths and doctrines by peaceful and reasonable conversation or dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

The above mentioned definition and aspects of religious harmony appear to be helpful in critical evaluation of his writings and debates. The first doctrine of religious equality needs mutual respect of the individuality and diversity of religions without trying to melt these differences into one religion. Now, in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* one can find two inconsistent statements regarding the diversity and individuality of world religions. The first group of statements comprises his emphasis on the equality of world religions because he believes that these all share the same quintessence and reach the same goal. He further adds that he has no grudge against any religion, and no disagreement with the religions that are teaching people to follow Christ, Buddha and Muḥammad. He further adds that he feels pity for those who believe in the survival of their own religions by destroying other religions.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, there is another set of his statements that emphasize not only the superiority of *Advaita* Vedanta, but downplay the individual identity of every religion other than Hinduism, or more precisely *Advaita* Vedanta. He describes the inclusive nature of Vedanta as an ocean that embraces all the world religions in it. To quote him:

Vedantism is an expansive ocean to [sic] the surface of which a man of war could be near a catamaran. So in Vedantic Ocean a real yogi can be by the side of an idolater or even an atheist. What is more, in the Vedantic Ocean, the Hindu, Mohammedan, Christian and Parsee are all one, all children of Almighty God.<sup>3</sup>

His Hindu inclination is not satisfied by negating the individuality of every religion or by merging these religions in the *Vedantic* Ocean but he sometimes also finds it necessary to reject all religions by considering *Advaita* as standard. He writes that Hinduism cannot be compared to other world religions as this religion is truer than any other world religion. This is because, Hindu religion never commits bloodshed during its conquest and for gaining converts. For him Hinduism is the religion which represents the flowers of love, sympathy and toleration. He further adds that it does not matter that other religions possess peculiar ideas of God-head, but if

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<sup>1</sup>Griffin, ed. *Deep Religious Pluralism*, 211-12.

<sup>2</sup>Kim Siebenhüner Kaspar von Greyerz, ed. *Religion Und Gewalt: Konflikte, Rituale, Deutungen (1500-1800)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,2006), 52.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 331.

they deny the authority of the Vedas then their followers cannot be saved from falling into the category of non-believers.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, he considers only that part of other religious scripture true (for instance, the Bible and the Qur‘ān) that share common ground with the Vedas. He rejects the other portions of these scriptures that do not match with Vedas because he considers these portions useless.<sup>2</sup>

He nullifies his own theory of equality of all religion and his idea of religious harmony when he not only places other religions generally and Christianity particularly at the preparatory rungs of the hierarchical ladder and *Advaita* Vedanta at higher ones. He even claims that the followers of Christ are unable to understand Christianity without Vedanta.<sup>3</sup>

These disagreements in the thought of Vivekananda seem to negate his claim of religious equality and tolerance. He postulates that for the harmonious and peaceful existence of all religions preaching and conversion should be abandoned. At one point he says that God forbade me to convert Christian to Hindu or Buddhist faith and God forbade me to convert Hindu or Buddhist to Christian faith. But I rather suggest that one should absorb good from other religions but remain intact in his or her inherited religious boundary.<sup>4</sup> He appears in contradicting situations when he emphasizes that eternal faith (*Advaita* Vedanta) “must become active and proselytizing capable of sending out special missions, of making converts, of taking back into her fold those of her children who had been perverted from her, and of the consciousness and deliberate assimilation of new elements.”<sup>5</sup>

He even seems to misinterpret the text of the Bhagavad-Gita to make Hinduism the flag holder of the most tolerant and advanced religion that embraces all world religions in it. He quotes Krishna declares that “I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou sees [*sic*] extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power rising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kaspar von Greyerz, ed. *Religion Und Gewalt: Konflikte, Rituale, Deutungen (1500-1800)*, 53.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Hacker, ed. *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 332.

<sup>4</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 24.

<sup>5</sup>Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him Bwing Pages from the Life of the Swami Vivekananda* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), 111-12.

<sup>6</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 18.

While interpreting Gita's plural intra-Hindu paths of salvation for diverse non-Hindu religions do not camouflage his attachment for *Advaita* Vedanta as a universal religion. That unveils his intolerance about the individualities of non-Hindu religions. He simply means to merge these religions into *Advaita* Vedanta.



## Chapter 4- Vivekananda's Views about other Religions

It appears from the last chapter that the domain of religious encounters, especially between Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, he is claiming equality of all religions. However, critical analysis of his statements also reveals his attempt of submerging the non-Hindu religions in his philosophy of neo-Vedanta. Apparently, the tension between these two positions makes his theory of pluralism suspicious. In other words, his popular image of a pioneer of religious pluralism needs to be checked by studying his knowledge and presentation of the beliefs, rituals and practices of other religions, as well as, his practical interactions with the followers of different religions during his life. In this connection, it is important to explore how he perceives and depicts the personalities of Buddha, Jesus Christ and Muḥammad. Let us explore his perceptions and interactions with some important world religions.

### 4.1- Buddhism

About Buddhism as a religion, different statements of Vivekananda are found in the *Complete Works of Vivekananda*. He considers Buddhism as a sect of Hinduism. He develops the link between Hinduism and Buddhism by elaborating the historical link between Christianity and Judaism. He emphasizes that as Christianity is nothing more than a sect of Judaism similarly Buddhism cannot maintain its distinct identity because it is one of the sects of Hinduism. He further opines that Buddha was by birth a Hindu as Jesus was by birth a Jew. For him Buddha's teachings and thoughts were also within the boundaries of Vedas while Buddha never accepted the authority of the Vedas.<sup>1</sup> He further adds that the biggest mistake that Buddha committed was the destruction of the old,<sup>2</sup> which Vivekananda considers the cause of downfall of Buddhism. He sums up the relation of Buddhism with Hinduism in the following words: "gigantic child [Buddhism] was absorbed, in the long run, by the mother [Hinduism] that gave it birth."<sup>3</sup>

While elaborating the relationship between Buddhism and Hinduism, he emphasizes that as the duty of the Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of Judaism and not to destroy it. Similarly, Buddhism

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<sup>1</sup>Eli Franco, ed. *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and Its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*, 507.

<sup>2</sup>Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 180.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 426.

is the fulfillment of Hinduism. According to him, Jews could not understand the teachings of Jesus. While in the case of Buddhism the followers of the Buddha were unable to understand the truths of Hinduism that were logically concluded by Buddha.<sup>1</sup>

But what does he mean from the term fulfillment in Buddhist-Hindu context? The answer of this question can be traced from his division of Hinduism into two categories; ceremonial Hinduism and spiritual Hinduism. He confines the practices of spiritual Hinduism for monks and here he supports his viewpoint by considering Buddha as a monk. He points out the spirits of Buddhism on the bases of latter's proposed equality of man and also a missionary aspect of his teachings. He includes Buddhism in the spiritual Hinduism as he thinks that many disciples of Buddha were *Brahmin*. He appreciates Buddhism for reviving the zeal of sympathy and charity for everyone in *Brahmanism*, which had lost that reforming zeal then.<sup>2</sup> He also claims that "Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism... Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the *Brahmins*, nor the *Brahmin* without the heart of the Buddhist."<sup>3</sup>

Besides, this he considers Buddhism a heterodox religion of India.<sup>4</sup> He calls Buddhism the rebel child of Hinduism. This divergence of opinions in his thought regarding Buddhism results from his utilization of inclusivist Hindu frameworks. His classification of Buddhism as a rebel child and heterodox religion of India points towards the Buddhist negation of the concept of God and soul. He adopts an inclusivist approach to Buddhism when both these religions are in a compromising position with Vedanta, but he rejects those Buddhist doctrines that have a direct clash with Vedanta by naming these doctrines heterodox or rebellious doctrines.

In such context, it is debatable that how he perceives and depicts the person of Buddha? He considers Buddha not only one of the great Aryan, but also opines embodiment of perfect sanity in Buddha.<sup>5</sup> He appreciates Buddha for his boldness and fearless rational and logical reasoning. He accepts that it was Buddha's rationality that enabled him to shake the superstitious beliefs and practices of Hinduism. He takes Buddha as a reformer who liberated man from the caste hierarchy by emphasizing the equality of humanity. He titles him the Prophet and a

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 21-

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 282.

<sup>5</sup>Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him Bwing Pages from the Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, 318.



preacher of selflessness. *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda* reflects his assimilating approach towards the Buddha's teachings that gives the subordinated position to Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> This approach first appears when he calls Buddha a *Karmayogi*<sup>2</sup> because he believes that Buddha did everything for elevating and serving humanity selflessly. He abandoned his princely life for searching the remedies of human suffering. And after attaining this remedy in nirvana, he was not contented with his own salvation rather he preached his message to save all human beings.<sup>3</sup> His above mentioned statement requires a comparison between Buddha of Buddhism and his Buddha as a *Karmayogi*. But before comparing these two images of Buddha it is worthy to first explore the concept of *Karmayoga* or *Karma yogi* in Hinduism. In Hinduism, *Karma yogi* is one who tries to unite with the divine through karma or actions or in other words *Karmayogi* dedicates his action to the divine. Bhagavad-Gita describes *Karmayoga* as a path that requires from *Karmayogi* to perform all actions as an offering to divine without expecting its fruits and rewards.<sup>4</sup> These actions constitute religious rites and duties that revolve around the central believe of individual self and the Supreme Self. These actions comprise *nitya karma* (regular duties), *naimittika Karma* (those compulsory rites that are performed on special occasions) and *kamya Karma* (optional rites). *Karma yoga* brings skepticism about the internal organs (*antakarana*) that further give birth to *janana yoga*. *Karma yoga* with or without incorporating the *jnana yoga* is a mean of obtaining the vision of self.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of the above mentioned concept of *Karmayoga* his titling of Buddha a *Karmayogi* seems inappropriate as Buddha neither believed in individual self nor Supreme self. Then, how he calls Buddha a *Karmayogi*? The answer of this question could be traced by finding out that what was the *Karmayoga* of Vivekananda? What were the basic tenets of Vivekananda *Karmayoga*?

He defines the term *Karma* as “every mental and physical blow that is given to the soul, by which, as it were, fire is struck from it, and by which its own power and knowledge are

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<sup>1</sup>John C. Holt, *The Buddhist Visnu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>2</sup>Mohapatra, *Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 23.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 406.

<sup>4</sup>Roshen Dalal, *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 196.

<sup>5</sup>Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism* (Roma: Gregarian University Press, 1982), 503.

discovered, is karma.”<sup>1</sup> He adds that *Karma* is the manifestation of powerful will and actions of gigantic souls that overturn the worlds like Buddha and Christ.<sup>2</sup> He opines *Karma* cannot be solved from hereditary laws rather law of *karma* follows the law of causation that involves the effect of past action on the future.<sup>3</sup>

He further includes in *Karma* all action and moral duties, non- resistance to evil, non-attachment, and selfishness. While describing the topic of duty of man he mentions four phases of Hindu life from studentship to *sanyasi* but later summarizes these four phases into two phases as a householder and *sanyasi*. He describes that the duty of the householder is also to attain the knowledge of God with other worldly duties. He points out that our first duty is not to hate self, but explore the self, which helps the advancement towards God. And one cannot develop faith and love of God without believing in self.<sup>4</sup>

Though he states that *Karmi* should be aware that the purpose of his life is to serve God and the poor, he describes the goal of *Karmi*, like other yogis, is to attain freedom (unification with God).<sup>5</sup> In these definitions and explanations of *Karma* and *Karmayogi* one finds some apparent discrepancies. Vivekananda emphasizes that *Karmayogi* is not bound to any doctrines and that *Karmi* may even deny God, soul or any metaphysical system. He further speaks out that *Karma yoga* is an ethical system and a religion to attain freedom unselfishness and good work.<sup>6</sup>

While on other hand *Karma* of Buddha focuses on mind rather soul, as it is the case with *Advaita*.<sup>7</sup> Vivekananda’s *Karmayoga* is fabricated within the *Advaitic* principle of *atman* is *Brahman* and *Brahman* is *atman*. And the unification of the *atman* with *Brahman* through unselfish works constitutes his concept of salvation. Then, it seems a far cry when Vivekananda attempts to merge Buddhism in Hinduism by claiming that for *Karmi* it is not compulsory to follow any doctrine and belief of God and soul. Here, one can analyze that in Vivekananda’s adjustment of Buddha as a *Karmayogi* he introduced an innovation in Hinduism when he negated obligatory doctrines of God or *atman* for *Karmi*. In doing so he is also denying the basic beliefs

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 34-39.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 39-49.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>7</sup>Genjun Sasaki, *Linguistic Approach to Buddhist Thought* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1992), 127.

and principles of Buddhism as an independent religion that revolves around the principles of no *Brahman* and *atman*.

He further submerges Buddha's individuality in *Vedantins* when he says that "Buddha was the living emblem of *Advaita*."<sup>1</sup> But was Buddha really the living emblem of *Advaita*? Chronologically Buddha and his religion appeared before Shankaracharya and his *Advaita* Vedanta. There seems no logic to call Buddha an *Advaitin* because *Advaita* Vedanta of Shankaracharya revolves around the concept that *Brahman* is *atman* and *atman* is *Brahman*. And Buddha's teachings negate this basic doctrine of *Advaita* Vedanta.

This gap between *Advaita* Vedanta and Buddhism can also be seen in the context of term *atman*. *Vedantins* identify *atman* with Absolute *Brahman* that can be realized by universalization of I in the light of Upanishadic teachings. While Buddha rejects *atman* as "eternal, substantive soul that wanders ceaselessly in the world, but also, and more importantly, it is negating the very source that gives rise to this notion."<sup>2</sup> But he accepts it as finite self, the cause of the projection of *avidya* (ignorance) and the term Absolute is identified with *nirvana*.<sup>3</sup> Correspondingly, the concept of *maya* of Buddhism and *Advaita* Vedanta revolves around two different philosophies. Buddha said about world that it is not real and considered it an illusion,<sup>4</sup> while according to *Advaita* Vedanta world within the illusion is the Real.<sup>5</sup>

The apparently different meanings of *maya* in Buddhism and *Advaita* Vedanta further change the meanings of *samsara* (rebirth) and *nirvana*. In Buddhism the deliverance from *samsara* does not mean the absorption into the Absolute as in Hinduism because it does not represent the physical state as in Hinduism. In Buddhism it rather relates to the state of body and mind of a person that is considered to be subjected by sufferings like birth, sickness, old age and death.<sup>6</sup> The deliverance of a person from this *Samsara* does not reside in the merging and absorption in the

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<sup>1</sup>Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 180.

<sup>2</sup>Melvin E. Miller Dale Mathers, Osamu Ando, ed. *Self and No-Self: Continuing the Dialogue between Buddhism and Psychotherapy* (USA: Routledge, 2009), 162.

<sup>3</sup>Candradhara Śarmā, *The Advaita Tradition in Indian Philosophy: A Study of Advaita in Buddhism, Vedanta and Kashmiri Shaivism*, 1 ed. (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited 1996), 17.

<sup>4</sup>Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him Bwing Pages from the Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, 343.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Koñ-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas, *The Treasury of Knowledge: Book Six, Part Four: Systems of Buddhist Tantra* (USA: Snow Lion Publications, 2005), 26.

Absolute unlike Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> But Buddhism emphasizes achieving *nirvana* to transcend these sufferings of *samsara*. According to Buddhism, the nirvana can be attained by applying a path that enables man to overcome emotions and purifies his habitual patterns. Therefore, in Buddhism *samsara* and *nirvana* represent different states. Nirvana can be attained by negating *samsara*.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, taking Buddha a living *Advaitin* cannot be justified. But, how Vivekananda tries to justify his point of view in *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*? He has discussed this issue in chapter titled “Buddhism and Vedanta” with an assertion that “Vedanta philosophy is the foundation of Buddhism and everything else in India; but what we call the *Advaita* philosophy of the modern school has a great many conclusions of the Buddhists.”<sup>3</sup>

In his above mentioned declaration he is silent on the fundamental concepts of *Advaita* Vedanta; *Brahman* and *atman*. He establishes a comparison of Buddhism and *Advaita* Vedanta with a world that appears phenomenal in Buddhism and noumenal in *Advaita* Vedanta. While highlighting the difference between these two he further asserts that it is an individual right of Buddhist to consider world phenomenal, but Buddhist have no right to say that *Vedantist* cannot call the world noumenal. As this discussion precedes he tries to justify a *Vedantist* point of view that the world is noumenal by utilizing the Indian *Sankhya* philosophy, Western philosophy of Kant and science. During all his efforts to support *Vedantins* he seems to negate the Buddhist point of view.<sup>4</sup>

These above mentioned claims of Vivekananda demands to assess his knowledge regarding beliefs, principles, and rituals of Buddhism. Buddhism contains three basic beliefs that are related to God, soul and the universe. He was merging Buddhism in Hinduism, but at the same time he was pointing towards those Buddhist doctrines that are antagonistic to *Advaita* Vedanta. In the third volume of *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, one finds the above mentioned two considerations of Vivekananda about Buddhism. He writes that “apart from its [Buddhist]

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<sup>1</sup>Helmuth von Glasenapp, "Vedanta and Buddhism a Comparative Study," (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Blo-gros-mtha'-yas, *The Treasury of Knowledge: Book Six, Part Four: Systems of Buddhist Tantra*, 26.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 325.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 325-26.

doctrines and the truths it taught and the message it had to give, we stand face to face with one of the tremendous cataclysms of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

His writings have great reverence for Buddha as a reformer, as a prophet of brotherhood, a *Karmiyogi* and as a living *Vedantist* but in the context of Buddhist religious rituals his stance changes radically. Regarding the Buddhist doctrines he says that he does not believe in Buddhist doctrines because *Vedantic* doctrines of old Hinduism appears to him more thoughtful and philosophically plausible when compares with Buddhist doctrines.<sup>2</sup> He adds on that he cannot understand the Buddhist doctrine.<sup>3</sup> But what were the reasons that made Vivekananda unable to understand these Buddhist doctrines? The reason of this incomprehension lies in his evaluation of Buddhist doctrine within the Hindu doctrinal framework. That attains culmination in his assertion that the main focus of the Buddha was on the negative aspect of religion and this weakness brought the downfall to Buddhism. He blames these negative teachings of the Buddha for the suffocation of the positive aspects of religion that were the sole reason of India’s denial of the Buddhism by tagging it with the name of destructive wave.<sup>4</sup>

He is hesitant in accepting the Buddhist doctrine of denial of *Brahman* and *atman* and fails to appreciate Buddhism as a religion that has its own unique philosophy regarding these two issues. Similarly, his stance towards Buddhism hardly seems accommodating when he calls Buddhism a destructive wave in the India history. His criticism of Buddhist doctrines could be seen when he emphasizes that:

I can say that God is the only being that exist; it is a very positive statement. He is the one reality. When Buddha says there is no soul, I say ‘Man, thou art one with the universe; thou arts all things.’ How positive! The reformative element died out, but the formative element has lived through all times.<sup>5</sup>

This assertion seems to be judgmental when he uses the term “positive” for Hindu doctrine, while he equates the term “negative” for Buddhist doctrines. On which criterion he was categorizing these religions “positive” and “negative”? The answer of this question could be traced from the second portion of the following assertion: “the reformist elements died out, but

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 425.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 438.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 439.

<sup>4</sup>Adiswarananda, ed. *Vivekananda, World Teacher: His Teachings on the Spiritual Unity of Humankind*, 146.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

the formative element has lived through all times.”<sup>1</sup> Here he establishes a link between the reformist elements of Buddhism as negative (destructive wave) while the formative elements of Hinduism (*Brahman* and *atman*) the surviving positive doctrines. Here, his image of a tolerant and pluralistic reformer seems to be at stake.

His other statements about Buddhist doctrines related to God and metaphysics prove that his standard of acceptance or rejection of doctrines of other religions is straightforwardly their compliance with Hinduism. He negates Buddhist metaphysics because “Hindu can give up everything except their God. To deny God is to cut off the very ground from under the feet of devotion. Devotion and God the Hindus must cling to. They can never relinquish these.”<sup>2</sup>

Hence it was the Hindu devotion that makes him to reject the Buddhist doctrines. But why he tries to connect Buddha and Shankaracharya in the mutual relationship? He says that “Buddha was a great *Vedantist*, and Shankaracharya is often called a hidden Buddhist. Buddha makes the analysis, Shankaracharya made the synthesis of it.”<sup>3</sup>

His attempt of transforming the image of the Buddha can be seen in the eighteen century Bengal where Buddhism had lost its status of competitive rival of Hinduism. Already in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Buddhism had disappeared from its birth land, India. It might be the reason behind his decision to not focus on those Buddhist doctrines that are in direct disagreement to Hinduism. Instead, he prefers to appropriate the person of Buddha and Buddhism in the *Vedantic* context.<sup>4</sup> This seems to be the reason that he rejects Buddha’s negation of God and the soul on the rational grounds. But he appreciates Buddha’s kindness and mercy as the best doctrine that Buddha left for Hindus who can see the relevance of these teachings in rejection of caste hierarchy and gender discrimination.<sup>5</sup> In the third volume of *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, one finds a comparison of the concept of caste system in Hinduism and Buddhism. He writes that Hinduism is identified not only as the caste loving religion, but also followed of the caste hierarchy in their social lives.<sup>6</sup> But his next sentence seems to reveal his intention

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), 124.

<sup>3</sup>Holt, *The Buddhist Visnu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture*, 20.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>5</sup>Adiswarananda, ed. *Vivekananda, World Teacher: His Teachings on the Spiritual Unity of Humankind*, 146.

<sup>6</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 444.

regarding caste system when he claims that “I may have a little taint of that superstition [caste system]. I do not know.”<sup>1</sup> After describing his opinion on caste system, he ambiguously moves in a Buddhist context of equality of mankind. He first esteems Buddha as an ideal master and his principle of kindness as a great moral value. Then, he downplays this principle by maintaining that on practical ground, it has been the cause of downfall of Buddhism. He confines caste within the boundaries of blood and he believes that intermarriages between different castes will result in mixing of different bloods for example the bloods of white and Negro which is against “nature.” He further supports his view point that this mixing is hampered by unconscious working of Aryan caste system that keeps intact the races. On reaching this point his opinion further divides in two opposite claims. Firstly, he says that he does not believe or follow the principle of inequality in dealing with different castes. Secondly, he asserts that (Hindu) believes that mixing of the blood of certain races (Aryan and non-Aryan) would bring degradation to them. Though he accepts that in a long run this mixing might result in bringing giant races,<sup>2</sup> However, he concludes that “for the time being, giant must sleep.”<sup>3</sup>

Although he was trying to transform Buddhism into Vedanta on the bases of equality of man but his dominant Hindu tendencies tend to reject the mixing of Aryan and non-Aryan races to avoid the degradation of these races. Thus, he favors to keep intact the caste system.

In *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* one comes across the term Buddhist church that he uses to relate two concepts: Buddhist missionary zeal and Buddhist monasticism. Regarding Buddhist churches, he said that Buddhists were the first one who claimed that “Ours is the only path. Until you join our church, you cannot be saved.”<sup>4</sup> He further points out that Buddha’s Buddhism was devoid of temples, images and saint worships. But with the passage of time these things made their appearance in Buddhism that later on developed into well-organized Buddhist monasteries. He claims that these monasteries are the reason of downfall of Buddhism, because Buddha permitted membership of his monasteries to man and woman equally. That brought the consequent disappearance of the intellectual ones from social life. Thus, the next progeny was

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 443-44.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 444.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 445.

devoid of intellectual qualities because they were generated by remaining un-intellectual social mass.<sup>1</sup>

While describing the missionary slogan of Buddhist churches he criticizes the supposed Buddhist sectarian attitude. He argues that “being of Hindu blood, they [Buddhist] could not be such stony-hearted sectarians as in other countries.”<sup>2</sup> This Hindu frame of mind of Vivekananda becomes highlighted when he emphasizes that Hinduism does not demand anyone to join it. Hinduism believes that you can reach the center from the point that you are holding.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, he defines the term *Vedantic* (Hindu) salvation in the following words: “what is salvation? To live with God. Where? Anywhere.”<sup>4</sup>

A critical analysis of the above mentioned remarks of Vivekananda reveals that on the one hand he appreciates Buddha’s principles of the equality of human beings and negation of gender discrimination. This appreciation culminates in calling Buddha a *Vedantist*, which itself seems problematic. On the other hand, his criticism of the monasteries of Buddhism seems to point out his preference of a Hindu social system that organizes the individual life in four stages and social life in four castes

## 4.2- Christianity

In *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* a detailed account of Christ is present, which comprises of Christian doctrine, the personality of Jesus Christ, Christians as a nation of Christ, missionary activities of the Christian religion and criticism of the Christians in the context of western civilization. Before coming to the Christian doctrine, the focus will be on how he perceives Christianity as a religion? He thinks that Christianity as a religion is younger in chronological order than Hinduism. So, he judges that Christianity is nothing else than the inconsistent imitation of the old Hinduism.<sup>5</sup> But what does he mean by inconsistent imitation of Hinduism? The meaning of inconsistent imitation becomes clear when he equates this imitation

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 443.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 445.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 446.

<sup>5</sup>Bhuyan, ed. *Swami Vivekananda: Messiah of Resurgent India*, 103.



with “a collection of little bits of Indian thought”<sup>1</sup> in Christian religion. He supplements his claim by pointing out that Jesus message utilized the Vedanta that comes from the forest of India (through experiences of Hindu monks), and it belongs to Indian soil.<sup>2</sup>

He spots out reconciliatory approach of *Advaita* and *Dvaita* Vedanta in Jesus teachings when Jesus describes the relationship of God and his devotees.<sup>3</sup> He opines that to the masses who cannot conceive anything higher than a personal God, he [Jesus] said, “Pray to your father in heaven.”<sup>4</sup> To others who could comprehend a higher idea, he told them, “I am the vine, ye are the branches,”<sup>5</sup> but he disclosed himself more fully to his disciples by revealing to them that “I and my Father are one.”<sup>6</sup>

In his above mentioned claim Vivekananda tries to categorize Christian concept of God according to his evolutionary scheme of Vedanta but how do these teachings of Christ appeared in Christianity? In Christian doctrine the Godhead is one in its essence or substance but consists of three persons; God as Father, God as son and God as Holy Spirit. The acceptance of this doctrine is the condition of salvation in Christianity and this doctrine is fabricated with other Christian doctrines like man is by birth sinner and Son of God has relieved man from this sinful nature. Essence of the Godhead is shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but not by human beings. In the same way, Hindu Vedanta and Christian Godhead has distinct purposes as Vedanta aims to help people to return to *Brahman* while Christian Godhead revolves around redemption of mankind through the blood of Son of God (Jesus).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Vivekananda’s claim about Christianity as the imitation of old Hinduism cannot be accepted in a Christian context because his claim reveals that he is trying to benefit Hinduism in Christianity in a way that enables him to reject the basic doctrines of Christianity.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Gareth Griffiths Jamie S. Scott, ed. *Mixed Messages: Materiality, Textuality, Missions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,2005), 185.

<sup>3</sup>Catherine Cornille, ed. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (UK: John Willey and Sons Ltd.,2014), 332.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013), 285.

His rejection of Christian doctrine becomes immanent firstly, when he explains incarnation of Jesus through the Hindu concept of *avatar*, the manifestation of Divine in different forms. He understands Jesus in the Hindu context according to which Jesus becomes just one of the multiple divine manifestations of God in this world. In his writings, he construes the personalities of Jesus and Buddha as many other divine manifestations and negates the Christian's claim of uniqueness of Christ as Son of God. He emphasizes that acceptance of any one of *avatar*, like Jesus, as a unique and complete manifestation of God will limit God which is against the very basic nature of God's infinity.<sup>1</sup>

He also negates basic constitutional principle of Christianity that man is by nature sinner. This doctrinal rejection can be seen in his assertion that "Hindu refuses to call you sinners."<sup>2</sup> Though he not only rejects this Christian doctrine but also reinterprets it in accordance with *Advaita* Vedanta by emphasizing the Christian notion of God as Father. He said that "Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth."<sup>3</sup> After developing the rational link of purity between Father and children (Christians) his explanation leaves no space for doctrine of sin. Such incorporation facilitates him to pass his concluding remarks on this Christian belief as "it is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are soul's [*sic*] immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal."<sup>4</sup>

He also denies the crucifixion of Christ. Otherwise, he has to make compromise on Hindu beliefs of *avatar*. He bears this view by referring to the Qur'ān that crucified one was not Christ. The crucified was his semblance.<sup>5</sup> Instead of refusing the death of Christ, he accepts the resurrection of Christ to support Hindu belief of reincarnation.<sup>6</sup>

He was not satisfied with Christian's salvation through the blood of Christ. He remarks that deliverance through the blood of Christ appears to him quite repulsive.<sup>7</sup> The reason of revulsion

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<sup>1</sup>Cornille, ed. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 332.

<sup>2</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 12.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>6</sup>B alwant A.M. Paradkar, "Hindu Interpretation of Christ from Vivekananda to Radhakrishnan," *Indian Journal of Theology* 18(1969): 66-67.

<sup>7</sup>Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 182.

is embedded in his Hindu frame of mind. He, being a Hindu considers the salvation of any man through Jesus blood or cleansing of men's sins with a blood of Christ quite abhorrent. He was gladdened that such doctrine does not exist in India because in another case he claims that he would prefer to choose hell if he is given the options of being saved by the blood of Christ or dwelling in hell.<sup>1</sup>

After evaluating Christian doctrines he directs his attention to the personality of Jesus Christ. His first approach through which he looks the character of Christ is *Advaita Vedanta* that is in the light of Hindu philosophy and mysticism.<sup>2</sup> This approach encourages him to interpret Christ as incorporeal, boundless and liberated soul. He opines that human beings as children of God inherit this spirit and due to the immortal spirit of human beings the kingdom of God resides within them (*Advaita Vedanta*). He further adjusts Jesus in *Advaita Vedanta* as a personal God (*Ishvara*) while he explains Father as impersonal God.<sup>3</sup> In doing so he ignores that in Christianity, God as Father is distinct from God as Son, but in Hinduism personal God (*Ishvara*) as *saguna Brahman* represents the same *nirguna Brahman* (Impersonal God). Consequently, it appears that he accepts character of Jesus that can easily be fitted to *Advaita Vedanta* frame, but rejects the character of Christ Jesus as the Self-revelation of the Supreme Spirit, because the acceptance of this point will challenge the impersonal infinite and metaphysical God of *Advaita Vedanta* to the physical and the limited personification of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> He also doubted the historical character of Jesus of Nazerath.<sup>5</sup> It is clear from the above discussion that he accepts the Hindu Christ and negates the character of Jesus Christ while he was claiming inverse of his behavior toward Jesus. He said "I pity the Hindu who does not see the beauty in Jesus Christ Character. I pity the Christian who does not reverence the Hindu Christ."<sup>6</sup>

The second approach that Vivekananda utilizes is the historical skeptical theory of the late nineteenth Century that viewed Christ as a mythical figure.<sup>7</sup> This seems to be the reason that his writings lack the systematic outline of the life of the Jesus Christ due to his doubts about the

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 141.

<sup>2</sup>Paradkar, "Hindu Interpretation of Christ from Vivekananda to Radhakrishnan," 65.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 148-49.

<sup>4</sup>Paradkar, "Hindu Interpretation of Christ from Vivekananda to Radhakrishnan," 67.

<sup>5</sup>Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him Bwing Pages from the Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, 253.

<sup>6</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 148-49.

<sup>7</sup>Paradkar, "Hindu Interpretation of Christ from Vivekananda to Radhakrishnan," 65.

historical character of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> He admitted that he was inclined to think that Jesus never existed. Later on, he claimed that he never doubted historical figure of Christ. His belief in the Jesus as a historical figure can be traced from his vision in which he saw an old and beard man. That man was pointed towards a place Crete, an island, which Vivekananda believed was the originating place of Christianity. He took this old man as Jesus and Crete as an island from where Christianity originated.<sup>2</sup> The effect of this dream on his mind cannot be denied regarding acceptance of the historical Jesus, but he never tried to offer his vision as evidence to others. Rather, he emphasized that being a Hindu for me true idea is important, but its place of origin and time has been never worthy of concern.<sup>3</sup>

He perceived Christ as *Vedantist*, then in such context, how did he perceive Christians? His reverence for Christ and Christianity after their adjustment in the Hindu frame is discernable however, this is not the case with Christians. His criticism of Christians is often strong. The reason of this criticism can be categorized firstly, under his claim that Christ and his teachings are missing from the Christians' lives. That makes him to deny that Christians are the nation of Christ because Christ preached the message of renunciation of the worldly comforts while Christians of his time were passing luxurious lives. Here he suggests Christians to follow Christ's teachings because passing life with Christ in rags is better than to live without him in palaces.<sup>4</sup>

It is questionable, however, if the Christians do not follow the teachings of Christ do not follow Vivekananda's version of Christianity? To answer this question a critical analysis of his claim that Christ was absent from the lives of Christian of his times is needed. The very first problem that he points out relates to the missionary activities of Christians. He claims that the Christian missionaries as antichrist because they were not following the lifestyle of Christ. They were passing married life, unlike Christ and they had fair livelihood that is also against the Christ's life. He considers that their missionary activities were contaminating the sacred character of Christ's teachings by shedding blood of innocent for acquiring land that is utterly against Christ's teachings of ethics, peace, and tranquility. He also criticizes Christians in that they

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.: 66.

<sup>2</sup>Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him Bwing Pages from the Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, 351-52.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 253-54.

<sup>4</sup>Adiswarananda, ed. *Vivekananda, World Teacher: His Teachings on the Spiritual Unity of Humankind*, 12.

considered themselves as saviors the souls of others, but in this whole scheme they forgot to save their own souls. He said that if you ask these Christian that what they are preaching they claimed that they are preaching the teaching of Christ. But if Christ's teachings were omitted from their preaching then there would remain nothing but the pointless polemical debates of the Christian missionaries in which they criticized Hindu religion.<sup>1</sup>

He accepts that Christ was a representative of the tolerant, the pluralistic concept of salvation when Christ asserts that he did not come to destroy the old law rather to complete it. However, he considers the missionary concept of salvation inconsistent with the real pluralist teachings of Christ. He rejects the missionary concept of salvation by comparing it with Hindu ideology of salvation. He highlights that in Hinduism salvation cannot be achieved by mere believing in some doctrine rather it is completely embedded in the completion of one's own duties.<sup>2</sup>

Vivekananda's criticism of the Christians generally and Christian missionaries, particularly seems exaggerated. Although the utilization of power and polemical debates and contentious literature in missionary activities cannot be denied, but his claim that Christians generally and missionaries particularly were antichrist cannot be accepted. The aim of the missionaries is to get converts and to establish the kingdom of the Christ. How can one reasonably call them antichrist. Then what was the reason of the Vivekananda criticism of these missionaries as the antichrist? It appears that he was able to appropriate Jesus as one of the incarnation of God among many manifestations in line with the Hindu view of *avatars*. This line of thought assisted him to equate Christianity as the religion of Aryans. But the Christian missionary's concept of Jesus was different from his Hindu Christ due to this reason he condemns the missionaries as the antichrist. Similarly, missionary activities of converting Hindus to Christianity seem to be the major reason of his criticism of missionaries. Here it is also worth pointing out that he disliked Hindu mass conversion to Christianity but emphasized in the reconversion of converted Hindus (Christian) to Hinduism again.

Vivekananda was an apologetic Hindu towards the polemical debates of Christian missionaries about Hinduism and Hindu civilization. He describes the foundation of the Indian civilization on spirituality that manifests itself in Hindu art, literature, ethics, philosophy and religion. The goal

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 147-49.

<sup>2</sup>Nivedita Raghunath Bhide, *Swami Vivekananda in America*, 4 ed. (Chennai: Vivekananda kendra Prakashan Trust, 2008), 34.

of Indian civilization is embedded in spiritual transcendence which neither concentrates on the material nor mental progress.<sup>1</sup> While his approach towards Christian civilization seems to be hostile that makes him believe that the role of the Christian civilization is destructive. He further claims that he is unable to appreciate present Christianity and Christian civilization because Christ and his teachings are missing in the present Christian civilization.<sup>2</sup>

The question is why he targeted western civilization for criticism? Or what were his aims behind this critical comparison of Indian and western civilization? In the context of nineteenth century Bengal it was evident that for him Christianity and western civilization was no more than an open threat to Hinduism.<sup>3</sup> He describes Christianity as a threat in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in the following words: “You train and educate and clothe and pay men to do what? You come over to my country to curse and abuse all my forefathers, my religion, and everything. They walk near a temple and say, ‘You idolaters, you will go to hell.’ But they dare not do that to the Mohammedans of India; the sword would be out.”<sup>4</sup>

He criticized Christianity and western civilization, not only as an apologetic Hindu rather, he tried to settle the scores with the Missionaries by adopting a critical approach regarding the Hindu response to the missionary criticism of Hindus as worshipers of blocks of stone (idols). He believes that Hindus ignored this criticism because they considered that the westerner who exceeded Indians in the physical sciences and construction of huge buildings were like children in the area of spirituality.<sup>5</sup> His denunciation of western civilization seems to be his attempt to invert the hierarchy that place western civilization at the upper rungs due to its advancement in the field of science and technology. He tries to attain his goal by shifting this western superiority by shifting the criteria of superiority from materialism to spirituality or religion.<sup>6</sup> This approach benefited him in two dimensions in one time. Firstly though this approach he applauds Indian civilization that according to him revolves around the central concept of religion and immortality

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<sup>1</sup>Bhaiya S. Prasad, *The Socio-Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (Dissertation.com, 1999), 37.

<sup>2</sup>Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 182.

<sup>3</sup>Shankari Prasad Basu, *Introduction to Vivekananda in Indian Newspapers 1983-1902* (Calcutta: Basu Bhattacharyya, 1969), 73.

<sup>4</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 149.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>6</sup>Catherine Rolfen, "Resistance, Complicity and Transcendence a Postcolonial Study of Vivekananda's Mission in the West" (Queen's University, 2005), 19.

of the soul. Thus the bond that unites Indian nation is neither race nor language rather it is Vedanta.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, his abhorrent attitude can be noticed for western civilization in its pursuit of materialism. He accused this materialism the core cause of immaturity of western civilization in metaphysical and spiritual experience.<sup>2</sup> Vivekananda described this aspect of western civilization in his *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in the following words:

A man may be wonderfully learned in the Western sense, yet he may not know the A B C of religion. I would tell him that. I would ask him, 'Can you think of spirit as such? Are you advanced in the science of the soul? Have you manifested your own soul above matter?' If he has not, then I say to him, 'Religion has not come to you; it is all talk and book and vanity.'<sup>3</sup>

He equates this material progress of the west in materialism as the process of devolution. This devolution, according to him, is embedded in the westerner's behaviors of selfishness, intolerance, secularization that promoted not only the independent image of women but also indecent treatment of female. He points out this selfishness and devolution in his writing that "everything that has selfishness for its basis, competition as its right hand, and enjoyment as its goal, must die sooner or later. Such things must die. Let me tell you, brethren, if you want to live, if you really want your nation to live, go back to Christ."<sup>4</sup>

He highlights that the westerners who considered the criticism of every religion and civilization their birth right when came under criticism then their intolerance became evident. They claimed that "Don't touch us; we are Americans. We criticize [*sic*] all the people in the world, curse them and abuse them, say anything; but do not touch us; we are sensitive plants."<sup>5</sup> After pointing out the malpractices in western civilization, Vivekananda also proposed the possible solutions as the synthesis of higher spiritual values of India and western scientific accomplishments.<sup>6</sup> In short, he sees the perfection of the culture and civilization in Vedanta.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 169.

<sup>2</sup>Rolfson, "Resistance, Complicity and Transcendence a Postcolonial Study of Vivekananda's Mission in the West", 24.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 142.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 144.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>6</sup>Subhash Kak Georg Feuerstein, David Frawley, *The Search of the Cradle of Civilization: New Light on Ancient India* (USA: George Feuerstein, 1995), 284.

<sup>7</sup>Prasad, *The Socio-Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, 51.

The above mentioned description of western civilization and Christianity needs some analysis. Firstly, it is important to notice that while criticizing western civilization and during appreciation of the Indian civilization, he seems to ignore the difference between religion and civilization. Western civilization portrayed by him appeared to be completely devoid of religion, spirituality and ethical values. This cannot be accepted as for granted for two following reasons. Firstly, it is not clear that during the above criticism either he was unaware of the mystical aspect of Christianity or he was ignoring the ethical and moral aspect of Christianity or he was aggravating the image of western civilization. No doubt the secular, rational and material trends of the western civilization of his age could not be ignored. But at the same time it is also not acceptable that all the Christians left Christ's teachings or all Christians became secular and materialist by ignoring the ethical and moral codes of Christianity. Secondly, his suggested cure of the western civilization in Vedanta might not be acceptable for Westerns and Christians. His emphasis on Vedanta as the only way to attain spiritual and blissful life reveals that he was not ready to accept the individuality of Christian religion and its spirituality.

Therefore, it can be said that in the light of the above discussion Vivekananda's treatment of Christianity, Christ, Christian doctrine and western civilization were influenced by his exclusivist, and sometimes inclusivist, Hindu approach. He was ready to accept only those aspects of Jesus, the Christian faith and western civilization that could be adjusted and reinterpreted in the Hindu frame. And he not only rejected that doctrine that seems to be different from Vedanta, but also suggested to change such doctrines in line with Vedanta. After dealing Buddhism and Christianity, let us explore the image of Islam in his writings.

### **4.3- Islam**

In the writings of Vivekananda, Islam appeared as an outsider or a foreign religion that is in complete contrast to Hinduism in its beliefs, doctrines and rituals. He describes the contested nature of these two religions by emphasizing that when fundamental doctrines of Hinduism are evaluated in an Islamic context, these (Hindus doctrines) appear as grave sins. And similarly the fundamental doctrines of Islam lose their sacredness in Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> He opines that this is the

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<sup>1</sup>Amalendu Misra, *Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2004), 32.



reason that Islam and Hinduism maintain their distinct metaphysical and cultural schemes that are non-overlapping and also incompatible with each other. He also highlights that Muslim society is based on monotheism and the caste-less idea of Islam consequently it poses challenges to Hinduism. This might be the reason that he adopted an approach to acquit Hinduism from Islamic doctrinal criticism of idol worship and caste discrimination. At the same time he employs unconstructive attitude towards Islam, Prophet Muḥammad (P.B.U.H.) and the Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

In comparison to Christianity and Buddhism his discourses provide less information about Islam. In all volumes of *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, one could find only one complete chapter “Mohammed” but he did not devote any complete chapter to deal with Islamic doctrines or Islamic civilization as he did in the case of Christianity and Buddhism. Rather, one could find that Islam covers the least part of his work that could be searched in his discourses, and in scattered form.

He introduces Islam as a monotheistic religion that revolves around the concept of one God, having no companion to share His divinity. Muḥammad is the prophet of God. He opines that Islam is easy to comprehend as it has no philosophy, priesthood or complicated ethical code. He believes that the practicality of Islam is hidden in his message of equality of all races and colors that helps Islam to develop a social system of brotherhood, equality and justice.<sup>2</sup> He further adds that Islamic identity as a nation is hidden in the open heartedness of the Muslims that enable them to embrace converted brothers without making any distinction. Even the Sultan of the Turks would be delighted to dine with the newly converted American Indians.<sup>3</sup>

The above mentioned views of Vivekananda constitute very little portion of his *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, while the remaining portion is dominated by his negation of Islamic doctrines and its notion of equality of races. He considers Islamic doctrines as a collection of contradictions that enables him to develop an argument that Islam theoretically denounces the Hindu rituals of idol worshiping. But in Islam the image worship is prevailing in the form of the *Kabah*, to which they prostrate five times a day and in kissing of black stone during their

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>2</sup>Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*, 84.

<sup>3</sup>Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, ed. *Challenges to Religions and Islam: A Study of Muslim Movements, Personalities Issues and Trends*, 1 ed., vol. 3 (New Delhi Sarup & Sons, 2007), 1110.

pilgrimage. He also points out the Muslim social practices of veneration of the saints and *pīrs* which appeared as parallel to idol worship.<sup>1</sup>

He questions the authenticity of Islamic universal brotherhood because for him it is nothing more than covert duplicity. He negates the universal brotherhood of Islam by objecting that the nature of Islamic universal brotherhood does not allow the entrance of non-Muslims in it rather it preferred the cutting of throats of non-Muslims.<sup>2</sup> Vivekananda said that “Mohammadans talk of universal brotherhood, but what comes out of reality? Why anybody who is not a Mohammadan will not be admitted into this brotherhood; he will more likely have his throat cut.”<sup>3</sup> He strengthens his refusal of Islamic brotherhood by pointing out the opposition and antagonism within Islamic sects of *Shiah* and *Sunnis*, negates Islam being a non-sectarian religion. But what was the factor that compelled him to take such stance on Islam? Or what were the objectives of Vivekananda behind such criticism of the Islamic doctrines of monotheism and Islamic brotherhood?

The main factor that annoyed him was the mass conversion of lower Hindu classes to Islam by escaping from Hindu caste discrimination. For curbing this conversion he criticizes Islam to convince his Hindu fellows that this conversion to Islam would not relieve them from sectarian and caste hierarchy. Though, he admitted the weakness of Hinduism and also the threats that were challenging its survival among those religions who were the flag holders of human equality (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam). And that might be the reason that makes him undertake the task of reforming Hindu society in term of *neo-Vedantic* equality of all Hindus.<sup>4</sup>

Vivekananda in his whole discourses not only tries to conceal the aggressive behavior of high caste Hindu, but also the weakness of Hindu society to integrate its unity. But he also blames Islam as a religion that embraced non-Muslims into the fold of Islam through the sword. Vivekananda wrote that “Islam made its progress with sword and Quran in hand. Only two

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<sup>1</sup>Misra, *Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India*, 48.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>3</sup>Patrick Haley, *Islam Is* (Lulu.com, 2010), 173.

<sup>4</sup>Misra, *Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India*, 48.

options they offered- accept Islam or die. Their tyranny helped them move forward, not their valor.”<sup>1</sup>

He criticized Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, but in comparing the degree of criticisms of the three religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) it reveals that he accepts Buddhism as the complementary part of Hinduism. He rejects Christian doctrines, rituals, missionary activities and western civilization, though he treats Christ as pure spirit. While in case of Islam, he not only criticizes Islam, Islamic doctrines, ritual, proselytization but he adopts the approach of apathy and bluntness for Prophet Muḥammad that has no match for other religious teachers (Buddha and Christ).<sup>2</sup>

His introduction of Prophet Muḥammad appears quite objectionable for his followers as he describes him as a young man that had no care for religion rather he was inclined towards money. He, after mentioning his inclination towards money, mentions his first marriage with a rich widow. He then leaps to that phase of Muhammad’s life when Muslims conquered Persia and Rome. Here he calls Muḥammad as an emperor while in reality Muḥammad neither uses this title nor did he passed a life of an emperor. He mentions the number of wives in his custody.<sup>3</sup> The above mentioned is Vivekananda’s style of commenting on the topic “Muhammad” though he did not depict Muḥammad completely in the negative, but it cannot be taken as entirely a positive outlook. Likewise he describes the arrival of Gabriel to Muḥammad in terms of “dreams and vision” but not revelation. He further adds that Muḥammad did great preparation in the form of praying day and night that enabled him to receive Gabriel dream. It is worth mentioning here that in his whole sketching he was trying to give the impression that the rigorous prayers of Muḥammad made Muhammad’s soul to receive messages, but in case of other religious teachers he described them as great souls from their birth. Therefore in such a comparative frame he did not categorize Muḥammad with great souls like Buddha, Christ and Krishna, but he also placed Muḥammad at the lowest niche.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Yashodharma, *Rkm Propagating the Opposite of What Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Had Said Call to the Rank and File at Rkm! Stand up and Uphold the Truth* (Mumbai: Maanoj Rakhit, 2013), 46.

<sup>2</sup>Misra, *Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India*, 40.

<sup>3</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 386.

<sup>4</sup>Misra, *Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India*, 40.

His partiality towards Muḥammad could be noticed when he considers the ascension of the Muḥammad to heaven as nothing more than superstition. He writes that Muḥammad was “inspired, no doubt, but that inspiration was, as it were, stumbled upon. He [Muhammad] was not a trained *yogi*, and did not know the reason of what he was doing.”<sup>1</sup> He was not ready to accept Muḥammad as a mature *yogi* while he called Buddha a living Vedanta and Christ the *Vedantist*. Such discriminating attitude of Vivekananda regarding Muḥammad demands exploring reasons for such a treatment of Muhammad?

The very first reason that could be the reason for Vivekananda’s unfriendly attitude towards Muḥammad appears in his writings when he wrote that “Muhammad’s heart was sick at the sin, idolatry and mock worship, superstitious and human sacrifices, and so on.”<sup>2</sup> The second reason could be seen in his assertion that the level of intensity of Muslim’s hatred towards Hinduism is much higher when compared with Jews and Christians. He further adds that these Muslims named us *Kāfir* because we worshipped idols and these Muslims think that we (Hindu) deserve slaughtering from their hand. Vivekananda said that it is stated in Qur‘ān “Kill the infidels if they do not become Muslims.” He blames Muḥammad for such intolerant attitude towards the Hindus. Vivekananda says that:

Muhammad’s teachings include two pronged strategy. He told Muslims that killing non-Muslims is an act of mercy towards them, as well as a real service to Allah. And therefore, Allah has promised to such men direct entry to heaven and every type of sense pleasure that they may seek with beautiful women who are not affected by the aging process and pregnancy. This belief has driven Muslims into killing numerous non-Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

Vivekananda could not differentiate between the Islamic injunctions that are present in Qur‘ān and role of Muḥammad as a Prophet and preacher. His discourses give the impression that Muḥammad is the sole authority of deciding the fate of infidels and in doing so he ignores the Islamic principle that Allah Almighty is the supreme authority while Muḥammad only preached the message given by Allah. His conception of Muhammad’s authority could be seen in his assertion that “ignorant persons.....dare to say that others are entirely wrong, and they alone are

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<sup>1</sup>Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 386.

<sup>3</sup>Yashodharma, *Rkm Propagating the Opposite of What Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Had Said Call to the Rank and File at Rkm! Stand up and Uphold the Truth*, 46.

right. If they are opposed, they begin to fight. They say they will any man who does not believe as they believed and as Mohammad do.”<sup>1</sup>

He considers Muḥammad responsible for installing intolerant and barbaric nomenclature to his nation (Muslims). He claims that the teachings of Muḥammad due to its narrow mindedness brought forth an arrogant nation, because they [Muslims] believe that there is one God, Muḥammad is His messenger and that those things which are in a clash with Islam are not only bad but should be destroyed. He defines Mohammedanism thus:

There is one God and Mohammad is His Prophet. Everything beyond that, not only is bad, but must be destroyed forthwith; at a moment’s notice, every man and woman who does not belong to this worship must be immediately broken; every book that teaches anything else must be burnt From the Pacific to Atlantic, for five hundred years blood ran all over the World. This is Mohammedanism.<sup>2</sup>

From the above mentioned discussion, it could be said that his unsympathetic treatment of Islam and Christianity is pointing towards the insecure survival of Hinduism in Muslims and Christian preachers. Because both these religions reject polytheistic idol worshiping and caste oriented religion, so, he seems to object not only the curbing of the tides of Islam but also his aim was to stop the Islamic proselytization. For achieving his desired ends, Vivekananda proposed the solution in combining Hindu-Muslim frameworks that “for our motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam-Vedanta brain and Islam body-is the only hope. I see in my mind’s eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with the Vedanta brain and Islam body,”<sup>3</sup>

Here brain signifies the governing organ that controls the whole body by instructions that provide set pattern of thought. In this context, he prefers Hindu philosophy as superior religious instruction that would be utilized to control the Islamic body that symbolizes the central unifying force of equality and brotherhood that not only maintain the identity of Muslims as a nation but also keep them intact without discriminating them into superior and inferior. Thus Vivekananda seems to point towards the abolition of the caste hierarchy in Hinduism. But in actual sense does he really want to abolish caste system of Hinduism? Critical examination of his dealing with the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>2</sup>Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*, 86.

<sup>3</sup>Badrinath, *Swami Vivekananda, the Living Vedanta*, 270.

caste system reveals that he was not in favor of abolition of caste system but he was insisting on caste mobility.<sup>1</sup> Vivekananda considered this adjustment of caste mobility compulsory for the survival of Hinduism among those religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) who preached the message of equality of all races.

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<sup>1</sup>Misra, *Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India*, 50.



## **Chapter 5- A Contextualized Interpretation of the Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta**

The contextualized interpretation of the Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta is fabricated in the historical perspective of the pluralistic society of Bengal in the nineteenth century. It does not focus only on the doctrine and principles of his neo-Vedanta rather it also emphasizes on socio-historical factors of nineteenth century Bengal that transformed classical *Advaita* Vedanta into neo-Vedanta. It is worth questioning here, why did this transformation take place in the nineteenth century Bengal while Hindus, Muslims and Christian interaction can be noticed even before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? For evaluating the role of the nineteenth century Bengali society the framework of a Karl Mannheim's approach of sociology of knowledge seems helpful. The approach of Karl Mannheim revolves around the central concept that the construction or generation of knowledge is correlated to the social-historical situation of that specific period in which knowledge emerges. Or in other words the comprehension of the knowledge remains ambiguous until one is aware of the specific context of time, place and social conditions of the society in which that knowledge emerges. Karl Mannheim believes that constructed knowledge has imprints of the responses or reaction to the specific prevailing situation in which knowledge emerges and these imprints remain dubious without evaluating those historical factors that give birth to knowledge.

Within the framework of the sociology of knowledge Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta is going to be evaluated as a particular style of knowledge (reform movement) that emerged in response to the western construction of Hinduism in nineteenth century Bengal. In this western construction of Hinduism the contribution of the colonial empire of the late eighteenth century generally and the role of Orientalists particularly are going to be evaluated. Here, the focus is on the questions that how and why did the Westerners feel the need of constructing a particular type of Hinduism? And how this construction had a firm footing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Bengali society? Was there in the nineteenth century Bengal a clear cut demarcation that can be drawn between Orientalists and Christian missionaries' attitudes toward Hinduism? How was Western Hinduism appearing as helping hand to Christian Missionaries to gain mass conversion to Christianity? And how did this whole cooperative scheme of Orientalists and Christian



Missionaries stimulated Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta predecessors to coin neo-Vedanta to maintain and revive their Hindu identity?

The religion of the indigenous inhabitants of India (Hindus) did not attain the name of Hinduism till the nineteenth Century (1830). The Western constructed term of Hinduism consists of two words Hindu and ism. Here the word 'ism' does not denote religion rather an ideology or philosophy that Westerners utilized to categorize the indigenous Indian religion (the manifestation of diversity) by utilizing the Christian concept of religion. In Christianity, the religion is a systematic organization of unchanging beliefs, few sacred books and one God, which is further categorized into three persons (each one is considered equally worthy of devotion and worship). The construction of western Hinduism can be seen in a Christian framework that gave reverence to the Vedas and a few other books like the Bible, the essence of the Hindu society was seen in the caste system and *Brahman* was appointed as the only Supreme God. All other Hindu deities were considered as the differential expression of *Brahman* that appeared to overlap the Christian belief of Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

But what was the relationship between Western constructed Hinduism and neo-Vedanta? And who were responsible for this transformation of Hinduism and why? The historical relationship between the neo-Vedanta and western Hinduism could be traced from the fact that during the transformation process western constructed Hinduism failed to keep connection with pre-colonial Hinduism that manifested unity in diversity. Pre-Colonial Hinduism was comprised of no fixed beliefs; no sacred book rather it embraced the monotheistic and polytheistic concepts of God. Neo-Vedanta shared that Western based outlook due to a mental attitude that was the production of intellectual enlightenment. The Hindu awakening was inculcated and shaped by the late eighteenth century Orientalist's knowledge of Hinduism and Christian Missionaries' education in the nineteenth century. Neo-Vedanta that emerged and resulted in the intellectual arousal of Bengali Hindus ceased its continuation with the past of Hinduism on the footsteps of Western constructed Hinduism.

But how did the Orientalists and Christian missionaries' stimulated the Bengali Hindus to respond in presenting Hinduism as neo-Vedanta? The answer could be explored using Karl Manheim's approach of sociology of knowledge in which he considers the horizontal and

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<sup>1</sup>Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, "'Hindusim' - a Western Construction or an Influence?," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 26(2011): 205-06.

vertical mobility of the Hindu static society the key factors of generating neo-Vedanta. Social mobility of Karl Manheim could be helpful in clarifying the status of neo-Vedanta in the nineteenth century Bengali society as a response to the stimuli that were generated by the Orientalists and Christian missionaries. These stimuli vary in nature and they generated mobility in horizontal and vertical directions and this demand detailed separate explanation of these two mobilities.

Before in- depth study of these two distinct mobilities, let us discuss what do these two terms: vertical and horizontal mobilities mean? The horizontal mobility here denotes the socio-religious encountering of Christianity and Hinduism in the nineteenth century Bengali society in multiple styles. That gave birth to the exclusivist, inclusivist and universalist trends of interaction which ultimately generated in Bengali Hindus the consciousness to reform and revive their identity as a nation. The contribution of the Orientalists and Christian missionaries in this horizontal mobility needs to be discussed one by one.

The reason of this horizontal social mobility can be traced firstly, from policy transformation of Warren Hastings from mercantile to empire builder during his second arrival in Bengal in 1772. His administration further facilitated the constructive cultural contacts between Bengalis and Englishmen, because before this situation the contact between Englishmen and Bengalis were limited to economic and financial gains. Secondly, in 1773, British Parliament passed the regulation Acts to avert Company bankruptcy that Company was facing due to the Bengal famine in the latter part of the eighteenth Century. These Acts seem to resolve the long-needed reform in administration by establishing a link beneficial to the Indian masses. He became the governor-general by termination of the dual system of government (*Nawab* and East India Company) on the order of the court. A change of regime appeared very crucial in the context of horizontal mobility of Bengalis in the social and cultural domain, because as a result of this change Calcutta became the capital of British India. Capitalization of Calcutta gradually changed the old Calcutta (whose southern ground was covered with jungle while other areas were inhabited by the struggling villagers) to an appropriate urban setting. Therefore Calcutta became the seat of channeling the influence of the West in cultivating and exchanging intellectuality between the two cultures.

Warren Hastings was not only proficient in Asian languages, but he believed that establishment of sound administration of the British in India was directly related to understanding of Indian

culture. He preferred to work with the indigenized institutions rather than the imposition of the alien institutions on Indians. He was inclined towards a cultural policy with the aim to create an elite Orientalized component in Indian languages and traditions. His examination of Indian languages and culture with the Orientalists extended the social interaction to the new level of intellectual exchange. He believed that such social interaction would be helpful in filling the gap between the rulers and the ruled. He aimed to attain his goal of translating Muslim and Hindu laws in English for facilitating company representatives. And he also felt the need of translating Company regulations into Indian languages.<sup>1</sup>

The vision of Hasting appeared to remain incomplete without the services of William Johnes and other Company officials who translated Indian works to open the doors of Sanskrit literature in Europe.<sup>2</sup> These Orientalists who were patronized by Hasting had a specific approach towards Oriental literature, culture and civilization. These orientalist:

were classists rather than 'progressive' in their historical outlook, cosmopolitan rather than nationalists in their view of other culture, and rationalist rather than romantic in their quest for those 'constant and universal principles' that express the unity of human nature. What made them an especially fertile field for Hasting's experiments in cultural interaction was the idea of tolerance, the mainspring of their historical and cultural relativism.<sup>3</sup>

The landmark achievement of the patronized Orientalists like William Johnes along with Colebrook can be seen in establishing the Bengal Asiatic Society in 1783. The primary task of the Society was the translation of the Indian classical literature.<sup>4</sup> In their dealing with the Indian literature one can find the reminiscent of Gibbon and Voltaire<sup>5</sup> because these all focused to trace the link between Hinduism and Christianity from Hindu classical texts. Voltaire succeeded in establishing base of Christianity from ancient religion of *Brahma* because he opines that first *Brahmins* placed their religion on universal reason. The religion of these *Brahmins* was monotheism or deism that degenerated to idolatrous religion by replacing reason with

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<sup>1</sup>David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (California: The Regents of University of California, 1969), 14-19.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas T. McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism: Ancient Indian's Rebirth in Modern Germany* (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp, 2009), 28.

<sup>3</sup>Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 22.

<sup>4</sup>Kishore Gandhi, *India Beyond 60* (Mumbai: Allied Publishing Private Limited, 1947), 19.

<sup>5</sup>Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 22.

superstitious beliefs.<sup>1</sup> On the footsteps of Voltaire, William Johnes also believed that the glory of Hinduism resides in its past and placed the present scenario of Hinduism of his time as a degenerated and an abased form of Hinduism. He further added that the reminiscent of the past Hinduism could be traced in the Hinduism of his time in four things; firstly, in Hindus language and letters, secondly, in their religion and philosophy, thirdly, in the actual remains of their sacred texts and fourthly, in their architecture.<sup>2</sup>

Correspondingly, William Johnes appreciated and gave safe side to Hinduism by discovering the common origins of Hinduism and European religions and establishing the link between the Indo-European languages as the offspring of same family in bringing India closer to Europe.”<sup>3</sup> Hence in eighteen century the study of oriental languages and literature was done with the intention to fill the gaps of British administration on India by adopting the approach of rediscovering the classical past of Hinduism as golden age of Hindu religion.<sup>4</sup>

The arrival of the nineteenth century brought a clear cut demarcation regarding the approaches that were employed by the Orientalists of eighteen century and post-Orientalists missionaries of the nineteenth century. But before explaining the differences of approaches it is worth mentioning to highlight those events of the nineteenth century that were the core reason of this methodological change. In the nineteenth century it was realized that the work of the Orientalists was more beneficial to the Indian nation in providing evidence to the glories of the past of Hinduism than to colonial interest. These colonial authorities switched to the Charter Act of 1813 by allowing and patronizing evangelical groups that adopted the approach of anti-thesis of British Orientalists.<sup>5</sup>

The nineteenth century Missionaries upheld the concept of fulfillment that placed Hinduism as inferior and lower religion in the process of evolution series or religions that could be fulfilled by the higher religion. As these missionaries placed Christianity on the apex of this evolving series so they suggested that fulfillment of Hinduism was in Christianity. These Missionaries supported

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<sup>1</sup>Halbfass, *India and Europe :An Essay in Understanding.*, 58.

<sup>2</sup>Jan E. M. Houben, ed. *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language* (Netherland: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publishing Data,1996), 352.

<sup>3</sup>Sharada Sugirtharajah, *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2003), 39.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda, "British Orientalism," <http://sanskrit.org/?p=122>.

their fulfillment concept on the basis of their assumption that each religion received partial revelation from God and this incompleteness is fulfilled by Christianity. In Christianity the mission's movement did not seek the destruction of the individual religions, rather the acceptance of the each revealed a message that attained perfection in Christianity. According to the missionaries, in Indian religion the transitory stage that facilitated the movement of Hinduism in the way of Christianity was the teachings of Upanishad and Vedanta. They considered Vedanta the preparatory phase for the acceptability of Christianity, but they clearly negated the equality of Vedanta and Christianity. They claimed that Vedanta could not be taken as Christianity rather presentiment of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

The selection of the Upanishad and Vedanta philosophy by the missionaries seems to support their mission in two ways. Firstly, Vedanta according to the missionaries was that path through which they could address the Hindu mindset to convert these Hindus to Christianity. Secondly, adoption of the Upanishad would be helpful in providing them an indigenous tool of criticizing Hindu polytheism, idol worship and Vedic rituals that appeared in direct clash with Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

The contribution of the missionaries was not limited to the above written facts rather their role in intellectual awakening of Bengalis through English education should not be ignored.<sup>3</sup> English education was meant to spread Western ideas that were characterized for the cultivation and promotion of the secular and rational thinking in Bengalis.<sup>4</sup> In the nineteenth century the Christian missionaries started many social movements to criticize many social practices of Hinduism. The focus of this criticism could be seen on *sati* prohibition or widow remarriage, child marriage, gender discrimination and caste system. For these missionaries the caste system was constructed and maintained by *Brahmins* as an instrument to achieve their superiority and their interest.<sup>5</sup> These whole polemical attacks of missionaries were designed to achieve their

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<sup>1</sup>Halbfass, *India and Europe :An Essay in Understanding.*, 51.

<sup>2</sup>Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East* (London: Routledge, 1999), 123.

<sup>3</sup>Radhey Shyam Chaurasia, *History of Modern India, 1707 A. D. To 2000 A. D* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002), 309.

<sup>4</sup>Soumyajit Samanta, "The Bengal Renaissance : A Critique," in *20th European Conference of Modern South Asian Studies* (Manchester2008), 2.

<sup>5</sup>Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 73.

motives of expanding the domain of Christ by converting Hindus to Christianity. They translated the Bible and other Christian literature in Bengali language to take the road to the heart of Bengalis.<sup>1</sup>

One can differentiate the approaches of the orientalists and the missionaries towards Indian religion and culture, but it is quite interesting to note that both had powerful effects on the life of Bengalis. As orientalists reminded and awakened Indian pride by rediscovering their past, the missionaries' attack on Hinduism generated the stimulus of reactions and responses to neutralize the abhorrent attitude of the missionaries by reviving their identity. This is how horizontal social mobility of Bengalis and Christianity resulted in the different religious groups among Bengali that Karl Mannheim had mentioned in his approach of sociology of knowledge.

Bengali Hindus of that time can be categorized into three groups; conservatives, radicals and reformers. Among these the conservatives constituted the most abundant group of Bengali Hindus for whom Hinduism had nothing wrong in its religious and social customs. They were satisfied with the religious and social codes of Hinduism, but see the foreign religions, their doctrines and social code with contempt. They conscientiously avoid contacts with non-Hindus. Although these conservatives tried to keep their religion intact, but it did not mean that these conservatives were not invulnerable to changes that resulted from their encountering of Islam and Christianity in Bengal.<sup>2</sup>

As Conservative Hindus abhorred foreign things, then how and why were they inclined towards Western education? The answer of this question is that they could compartmentalize their lives into two distinct chambers. One chamber was occupied by the western secular education, while the other chamber was filled with the doctrines, rituals and practices of conservative Hinduism.<sup>3</sup> It appeared from their attitude that they showed their inclination towards Western education because they wanted to consolidate their position by taking every benefit from the Government without making any compromise on their religion. But with the passage of time these Conservatives realized that with English education Western secular ideas were penetrating in their society. These consequences of the western education created a contradictory situation for conservative Hindus as it was not easy for them to preserve their conservative Hindu beliefs

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<sup>1</sup>Chaurasia, *History of Modern India, 1707 A. D. To 2000 A. D* 309.

<sup>2</sup>A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal 1818-1835* (Netherland: E.J. Brill, 1965), 27.

<sup>3</sup>Manisha Roy, *Bengali Women* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 9.

about the effects of Western secular education. The above mentioned condition of conservative Hindus got reflected from the life of Radhakanta Deb, the great champion of conservative Hinduism and member of *Dharma Sabha*.<sup>1</sup> With the cooperation of other members of *Dharma Sabha*, Radhakanta as a conservative worked hard to limit the penetration of Western culture in Hindu Bengali society. On the other hand, he defended social practices of orthodox Hinduism from the criticism of the missionaries and radical Hindus.<sup>2</sup> Radhakanta bitterly opposed the reform effort of the reformer Hindus who supported the Governmental act of abolition of widow burning. Thus, it can be noticed that these conservative Hindus appeared as social reactionists and religious fanatics at the time when reform Hinduism was heading forward in Bengali society.<sup>3</sup>

The second group consisted of the radical wing of Hinduism, as these radicals were educated at Hindu colleges whose rational and secular education prompted to reject Hinduism. The outlook of these radicals was shaped under Hume's empiricism, Bentham's utilitarianism, Shelley's and Byron's romanticism.<sup>4</sup>

The origins of the third Hindu group can be traced to the beginning of the reform movements in the early nineteenth century and was called the Hindu reform group. The aim of this group appeared to be to neutralize the challenges of the West to Hinduism not by total rejection of Hinduism rather by equipping it with a new interpretation of the old tradition.<sup>5</sup> The reformed group considered the conservative practices of Hinduism like widow burning, *Kulin* and child marriages the distorted form of the pure ancient Hinduism and described these issues as the deviated symbols that were the cause of decay of Hinduism.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, it can be said that encountering of Christianity and Hinduism in the latter part of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century in Bengal at horizontal level catalyzed the penetration of Western secular and rational ideas through Western education. Hindus were enthusiastic for western education to avail opportunities from the Government with the mindset

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<sup>1</sup>Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal 1818-1835*, 27-28.

<sup>2</sup>Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, 29.

<sup>3</sup>Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal 1818-1835*, 29-30.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 27-32.

<sup>6</sup>Ram Puniyani, *Contours of Hindu Rashtra: Hindutva, Sangh Parivar, and Contemporary Politics* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2006), 277.

that their religion would not be affected by these western education and ideas. But later on they realized that this western education was not mere education, but was the tool to program Hindu minds for free thinking, rationality and secular Ideas. And it was unmanageable for them to keep clear cut boundaries between their religious ideas and these western secular ideas to keep their religion intact. The result of this mismanagement appeared evident from the time when horizontal mobility started to move in the realm of vertical mobility.

### **Vertical Mobility in Hindu Society**

Here vertical mobility is going to be taken in terms of the disturbance of social hierarchy that prevails within Hinduism in the form of caste system. According to Karl Mannheim this vertical mobility could be evident in those societies where multiple ways of thinking patterns prevail and in such multiple ways disagreements become more conspicuous than agreements. Such situation intensifies the vertical mobility between the different strata in the form of social ascent and decent and consequently shakes the beliefs and eternal validity of one's own thinking patterns. Mannheim equated the vertical mobility as the decisive factor in inculcating uncertainty and skepticism regarding the traditional views one holds. That further raises the question of the authority and prestige of the social groups (intelligentsia) that constitute the upper stratum due to their monopoly of ecclesiastical interpretation for that society. Vertical mobility here causes the collapsing of intellectual monopoly of this priestly class by creating free intelligentsia.<sup>1</sup>

When one applies the above mentioned pattern of vertical social mobility to the nineteenth century Hindu Bengali society it generates interesting avenues of analysis. For instance, it is quite intriguing to ask if and how did vertical mobility generate the free intelligentsia in the nineteenth century Bengal and what relationship can be seen between this free intelligentsia and the emergence of neo-Vedanta? However, before addressing such questions, let us have a look into the static Hindu society of Bengal before the appearance of the forces of vertical mobility on the scene. The term static is opposite of mobile that denotes the four separated strata of Hindu caste system which had codified the religious and social duties of every Hindu distinctly fixed in each stratum and salvation of each Hindu depended on the fulfillment of specifically assigned

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia an Introduction to the Sociology of Know/Edge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1954), 5-9.



religious duties of each stratum. Hence, there used to be no room for vertical social mobility in Hinduism. Then how was this static stratum of Hinduism shaken in the nineteenth century Bengal or what were the reasons of the disturbance of this static society? The answer of this question can be searched out from the orientalist approaches which they designed and implemented on Hinduism while dealing with Hindu sacred texts and Hindu culture. Before the orientalists' translation of the Hindu sacred scriptures the *Brahmins* were the single custodians of these sacred books and the availability of these sacred books to other castes was not possible. But the orientalists' contribution was not limited to, their provision of the sacred books to all castes of Hindus rather; they made an overemphasis on the authority of sacred texts as the central key to the Hindu religious and social practices by putting into practice Christian model of the authority of the Bible. This execution in Hindu Bengali society generated the waves of agitation because this approach categorized Hinduism into distinct compartments; real Hinduism and popular Hinduism. Real Hinduism comprised those Hindu doctrines which were found and supported by the sacred texts, while the popular Hinduism was based on oral and visual traditions. The latter Hinduism was followed by the illiterates and was dismissed by the orientalists considering these religious and social practices nothings more than superstitions. Beside these, the orientalists highlighted that key parts of prevailing Hinduism had no foundation in the texts like *Brahmanhood*, untouchability<sup>1</sup> and idol worship.

Orientalists' dismissal of the popular Hinduism as the superstitious embodiment of the oral folklore created the dissatisfaction and skepticism among Hindus regarding their religion. That consequently gave rise to the free intelligentsia by destabilizing the authority of *Brahmin*intelligentsia. The situation further aggravated when Western educated Hindus started to re-examine their religious tenets and practices. These Bengali Hindus were on the one hand influenced by the concept of the golden age of Hinduism and on the other hand they were inclined towards western concepts and philosophy. In such circumstances, Hindu socio-religious reform movements emerged in the nineteenth century Bengal, which is termed as Bengal Renaissance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Soherwordi, "'Hindusim' - a Western Construction or an Influence?," 207.

<sup>2</sup>Reinhard Wendt, ed. *An Indian to the Indians?: On the Initial Failure and the Posthumous Success of the Missionary Ferdinand Kittel (1832-1903)* (Wiesbaden: OttoHarrassowitz GmbH & Co, KG.,2006), 167.

These reformers worked hard to redefine, reinterpret and reconstruct Hinduism on orientalist's axiom of Hindu ancient golden age, as the designed Hinduism whose foundation resided in the Hindu sacred texts. And their main objective and focus during reinterpretation of Hinduism was in the vilification of the missionaries' and colonial criticism.<sup>1</sup> The above mentioned Hindu attitude can be called the emerging point of neo-Vedanta.

Ram Mohan Roy is considered the first *neo-Vedantin* because he bore very uncommon reactions to prevailing critical Christian environment. He accepted few Christian moral doctrines but rejected much of its doctrines of faith.<sup>2</sup> While from Hinduism, he rejected idol worship and social practices like caste system, widow burning, child marriage and gender discrimination terming them as *Brahminical* innovations in ancient Hinduism. Although the popular Hinduism of Roy's time was polytheistic, but he formulated the creed of his *Brahmo Samaj* on monotheism. Colebrook was the one who coined the monotheistic concept of Hinduism in the first time for the Bengali intelligentsia, while he was interlinking the golden age of Hinduism with the Vedas by highlighting the social egalitarianism, respect of women and non-idolatrous traditions.<sup>3</sup>

Hence neo-Vedanta that emerged as an ideological movement with clearly defined principles, under the leadership of Roy, appeared as a product of Hinduism and Christianity in the context of the nineteenth century Bengal. Roy dealt with the traditional Hinduism in the framework that he designed to interrelate indigenous doctrines and practices with the foreign elements to enhance the receptivity of Hinduism in the West. He formulated his whole ideology of neo-Vedanta to revive and change popular Hinduism to real Hinduism, but during this revival, he failed to develop the link with the past due to his strong connection with the Western constructed Hinduism. This resulted in the rupture and discontinuity of linkage of neo-Vedanta with traditional Hinduism that became evident from the fact that Roy dismissed many traditional elements of Hinduism by replacing these with Christian beliefs. Or in other words, he made road to give entry to western ideologies and philosophies in traditional Hinduism by utilizing the tool of reinterpretation. In neo-Vedanta of Roy the basic concepts and principles of the traditional

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<sup>1</sup>Sugirtharajah, *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective*, 138.

<sup>2</sup>Bob Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus: An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encountering in India* (UK: Regnum Books International, 2004), 6.

<sup>3</sup>T. Jacob Thomas, "Interaction of the Gospel and Culture in Bengal," *Indian Journal of Theology* 36(1994): 42.

Hinduism attained new meaning and shape due to reinterpretation. His main focus did not appear to find traditional Hinduism rather he selected Western values and orientation to adjust Hindu tradition by reinterpretation. The inspiration of Roy from the Enlightenment and Unitarian Christianity enabled him to propose rationalized monotheistic philosophy by selecting the sacred text of Upanishad and Vedanta.<sup>1</sup>

How neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy can be seen as knowledge (reform movement) generated by the Bengali Hindus in the context of the nineteenth century Bengal? The answer demands to see the emergence of neo-Vedanta against the backdrop of the nineteenth century Bengal where the missionaries, conservative Hindus and radical Hindus played important roles. As a result of missionary criticism of Hinduism, two distinct groups appeared in Bengal regarding acceptance and rejection of traditional Hinduism. Conservative wings constituted the extremely adhesive point of view regarding the authenticity of Hindu beliefs and practices while radical groups took the other extreme road by rejecting Hinduism. One may find the stance of the neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy between these two extreme positions as he accepted and shared the criticism of Christian missionaries on Hindu idolatrous trends and social practices of Hinduism (caste system, widow burning, child marriage and gender discrimination).<sup>2</sup> But he did not accept this criticism to reject Hinduism like radical Hindu wings. Nor did he try to justify Hinduism like the conservatives. Rather, he aimed to make the survival of Hinduism possible, among other monotheistic religions. Firstly, he wanted to prevent the conversion of Hindus to Christianity in search of respect and equality and privileges regarding education.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, he wanted to revive Hinduism as a universal and transcendental religion by amalgamating the monotheism of Vedanta with Islamic Sufism and Christian Unitarianism.<sup>4</sup>

Behind the emergence of neo-Vedanta deep connection of prevailing rational and critical thinking of the nineteenth century Bengal may not be ignored. As Roy's neo-Vedanta rationality was given superiority and preference over faith. Roy's indebtedness to western rational and critical thinking became evident, but here the contribution of the *Mutazilitiesin* inculcating the rational monotheistic ideas of Roy may also not be ignored. That enabled Roy not only to

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<sup>1</sup>Chaurasia, *History of Modern India, 1707 A. D. To 2000 A. D* 39-46.

<sup>2</sup>Houben, ed. *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, 354.

<sup>3</sup>Arvind Sharma, ed. *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity Edited* (Netherland: B. J. Brill,1988), 2.

<sup>4</sup>Wendy Doniger, *On Hinduism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17.

categorize idol worship and other social practices as pretentious religious beliefs and superstitious practices rather he demolished these with the razor of sharp witted rationality.<sup>1</sup>

His utilization of the rational and critical approaches was not limited to the realm of Hinduism, but he also criticized the Christian concept of Trinity and all the miracles of the Bible. He argued that acceptance of the trinity would lead to polytheism. But his rationality assisted him to justify the adoption and incorporation of the ethical and moral code of Christianity in Vedanta society (*Brahmo Samaj*). He believed that these moral and ethical codes would not distort the Hindu metaphysics rather these would facilitate the harmonious relationship by regulating the conduct of the human race.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of the neo-Vedanta's dependence and amalgamation of the western Ideas and philosophy, one can find that Roy coined the idea of superiority of Hinduism over other world religions. He also introduced the notion of Hindu nation to counteract the strong national feelings of Christianity and Islam. His concept of Hindu nation was embedded in assigning Sanskrit the status of the Hindu national language and Sanskrit sources as the national ideology of Hinduism.<sup>3</sup>

This nascent Hindu nationality could be seen in the replacement of many gods of Hindus to one Supreme God by adopting the *Advaita* Vedanta of Shankaracharya. Roy considered the polytheistic idolatrous worships of Hindus responsible for detracting the unity of Hindus through transcendental Supreme God. For binding Hindus into a bond of Hindu nation he preferred the *Brahma jnana* of Shankaracharya, but he amended the Shankaracharya's *Brahma Jnana* by rejecting few central aspects of Vedanta to achieve his motive. Roy firstly, rejected Shankaracharya's maintenance of the caste hierarchy and replaced it with non-hierarchical, democratic sensibilities by giving equal rights to everyone in availing religious education and privileges. Secondly, he rejected Shankaracharya's pre-requisite condition of renunciation of the world for *Brahmajnana* as he connected *Brahmajnana* with the householder. He considered this connection would be helpful in practical implementation of the worship in social and moral

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<sup>1</sup>Sharma, ed. *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity Edited*, 16.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>3</sup>Houben, ed. *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, 354.

manifestation.<sup>1</sup> Thus the emergence of neo-Vedanta in the nineteenth century Bengal described not only the story of the awakening of self-respect, but also gaining respect by re-constructing Hinduism in terms of neo-Vedanta. It is also worth mentioning that Roy's criticism of Christianity contained the spark of anti-colonial and anti-Christian consciousness that was later on ignited by his *neo-Vedantin* successors.

In the nineteenth century, this neo-Vedanta did not remain as a unified system of ideas, rather it consisted of many different currents and each one contributed different segments to neo-Vedanta according to the changing scenario of Bengali society.<sup>2</sup> After the death of Ram Mohan Roy neo-Vedanta which is the creed of *Brahmo Samaj* had to face confrontation from intellectuals of three different camps. The first group was constituted by the Hindu youth, students of Henry Louis Derozio (d. 1831) who showed little patience for religion. These young atheistic, rationalistic and skeptic Bengalis started creating a problem not only with orthodoxies, but also for neo-Vedanta of *Brahmo Samaj*. The activities of these young, educated Bengalis were fueled by the Christian missionary criticism. As in previous decades, Roy's polemical public debates regarding protestant missionaries had made Christians realize that through neo-Vedanta, *he* was not only providing Hindus the way to theism, but also prevented Hindus from converting to Christianity. Therefore missionaries' targeted the neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy with the idolatries and social superstitious practices of Hinduism for rigorous criticism. Instead of these two opponents neo-Vedanta of Roy also faced resistance from the *Dharma Sabha* for his rejection of idol worship and widow burning.<sup>3</sup>

After the death of Ram Mohan Roy neo-Vedanta remained dormant for a decade till Ranbindra Nath became the leader of *the Brahmo Samaj*. At that time Debendra Nath Tagore's *Tattvabodhi Sabha* that was established in 1839 appeared as a barrier to missionaries' activities for conversion of Bengalis to the domain of Christ.<sup>4</sup> It also mobilized Hindu intelligentsia as an organized resistance by publishing the book of the *Brahmo Religion* in 1848 to increase

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<sup>1</sup>Brian A. Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism, or Faith of the Modern Vedantists : Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39-40.

<sup>2</sup>Houben, ed. *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, 368.

<sup>3</sup>Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism, or Faith of the Modern Vedantists : Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal*, 27-29.

<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2004), 51-56.

acceptability of neo-Vedanta of *Brahmo Samaj*. But what were the factors that demanded Tagore to establish *Tattvabodhi Sabah* and Book of *Brahmo* religion? Or how was neo-Vedanta modified by Debendranath Tagore?

The reason of Tagore's inclination towards Upanishad generally and neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy particularly is linked with the contemporary Bengali society. Debendra Nath inherited three distinct trends from his Bengali society regarding Hinduism. The first trend comprised of *neo-Vedantic* religio-intellectual movement of Ram Mohan Roy having an agenda of restoration of Indian confidence and respect for their religion and culture. The second trend consisted the literal movement whose most prominent representative was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee while the third trend was a national movement for political, social and economic relief of Indians.<sup>1</sup> From the above mentioned three trends Tagore's development of the strong bond with *neo-Vedantic* movement of Ram Mohan Roy on one hand appeared due to Tagore's own inclination towards Upanishad and on other hand shaped by the Anglicist policies from 1828 to 1835. With these two factors the contribution of the Alexander Duff in Tagore's neo-Vedanta should not be overlooked.<sup>2</sup>

Tagore's inspiration from the Upanishad can be noticed when he admitted:

To me the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha have ever been things of the spirit, and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them, both in my own life and in my preaching as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others, and awaiting for their confirmation, my own special testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality.<sup>3</sup>

In Bengali society with the progression of the nineteenth century the decline of orientalism appeared hand in hand with the Anglicist policy that set standards of the intellectuality of educated Bengali in western sciences and humanities. The condition attained worst form when these policy holders became more and more ethnocentric to harshly attack the Indian cultures and civilization. James Mill's *History of British India* (1817) witnessed these harsh attacks and criticism on Indians. This policy shift also facilitated missionary activities to adopt aggressive

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<sup>1</sup>S.K. Sharma, *Indian Political Thought* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1996), 201.

<sup>2</sup>Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 56.

<sup>3</sup>Sharma, *Indian Political Thought*, 206.

policy towards Hindu religion which in the language of Kopf appeared with the age of Alexander Duff (1830-1857).<sup>1</sup>

These were the social factors that persuaded Debendra Nath Tagore to establish *Tattvabodhi* in 1839 with the intention to revitalize the neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy and to curb the missionary activities of Alexander Duff. Hence Debendra Nath started *Tattvabodhini* schools and the *Tattvabodhini* Press to counteract Duff's missionary propaganda and to educate the Bengali fellows. The social circumstances of Bengali society motivated Tagore to compose *Brahmo Dharma* and in 1843 *Tattvabhodin Sabah* conjoined with *BrahmoSabah* which Tagore recognized as *Brahmo Samaj*. This development of *Brahmo Samaj* seemed to enhance the missionary and Duff agony and hatred regarding anti-missionary tracts of *Brahmo Samaj*. These missionaries proclaimed that the Upanishadic doctrine of *Brahmo Samaj* inculcated the impersonal monism. Similarly, in 1845 Duff, published in *India and Indian Mission* criticized *Brahmo Samaj* creed of believing the infallibility of the Vedas (primarily the neo-Vedanta) by exposing the inconsistencies of the Vedas.<sup>2</sup>

Debendra Nath Tagore as a mystical Hindu was not ready to accept western scientism and rationality as the basis of his neo-Vedanta ideology rather his focus was to harmonized neo-Vedanta (Hinduism) with science. This compelled him to three doctrinal innovations in neo-Vedanta that distanced his neo-Vedanta from Shankaracharya's *Advaita*. First, innovation of Tagore was his rejection of the Vedas and second innovation was the replacing of authority of the Vedas with the personal epistemology of intuition that he based on the approach of pure heart. The second innovation facilitated him to reinterpret the theory of *karma* and rebirth. In Tagore's third, innovation the contribution of his collaborator Dutt's comparative study of religion should not be disregarded. That enabled him to theorize the establishment of a universalistic natural or scientific religion.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Debendra Nath Tagore appears to be the first who broke the link of neo-Vedanta from Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta because Tagore considered this non-dualism *Brahmajnana* of Shankaracharya unsuitable for his religious and social reforms.<sup>4</sup> Shankaracharya's *Advaita*

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<sup>1</sup>Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 56.

<sup>2</sup>Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, 33-34.

<sup>3</sup>Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 58-59.

<sup>4</sup>Halbfass, *India and Europe :An Essay in Understanding.*, 224.

Vedanta's main doctrine of atman is *Brahma and Brahma is atman* was not acceptable for him. Tagore replaced this *jnana* with intuitive knowledge because he believed that doubting in the authenticity of intuition leads to disconnection with all sorts of reasoning that ultimately results in utter delusion. The seat of his intuitive knowledge was hidden in the heart of all human beings that was dependent in the exploration of the universe that would reveal the glory, grace and majesty of God.<sup>1</sup> Hence his intuitive and experiential approaches gave the neo-Vedanta new dimension of universalism and interaction with other religions. His Universalism was conservative instead of his rejecting the idol worship and the caste system because he was reluctant to reform Hindu social and religious life radically. He felt reluctant in incorporating radical changes in Hinduism because he believed that in doing so it would reduce Hindu component to syncretism or to the status of common denominators with other religions.<sup>2</sup>

While opposite to such claim his rejection of Vedas, idol worships, last rites of his father (according to traditional Hinduism) and his proselyte's activities for *Brahma* faith paved path for many radical innovations.<sup>3</sup> On the other side his conservative stance regarding the ritual of *Brahmin caste* and exclusive leadership of *Brahmo Samaj* by *Brahmins*,<sup>4</sup> inter-caste marriages and widow remarriage created conflict and split of *Brahmo Samaj*.<sup>5</sup>

This split opened the door for Keshab Chandra Sen as leader of *Brahmo Samaj* who constructed neo-Vedanta as the Ideological forerunner of Vivekananda. Or in other words Keshab Chandra Sen appeared as an intermediate link between the Tagore's neo-Vedantic romanticism and Vivekananda's neo-Vedantic occultism. Sen in the very first time introduced devotion of *Vaishnavites* in *Brahmo Samaj*. He inherited the neo-Vedanta of Tagore, but he reinforced it by incorporating American transcendentalism. But his apologetic contents of neo-Vedanta may not be overlooked because his all direct or indirect claims of superior Hindu spirituality were embedded in his apologetic psychology.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*, 22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 224.

<sup>3</sup>Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation* (India Penguin Groups, 2011), 59.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*, 24.

<sup>6</sup>Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 80-81.



What were the social factors of Bengali society that shape neo-Vedanta of Sen? And why his neo-Vedanta placed him as the Ideological forerunner of Vivekananda? The answer of the above mentioned two questions are interwoven with each other. The neo-Vedanta of Sen as a predecessor of Vivekananda can be evaluated from the impact of American transcendentalism in Bengali society in the second half of the nineteenth century. Sen's friendship with Charles Dall, a missionary gave him the chance to read the work of Channing, Emerson and Parker (American transcendentalists). Their writings placed intuition and true reasoning as the valid source of knowledge. These American scholars were also convinced that the comparative study of all religions would bring harmony among these religions that would further facilitate humanity through higher religious synthesis. Among these Emerson emphasized on the concept of Over-Soul that incorporated the approach of self-reliance and self-development of men by attuning them with the Over-Soul. The attunement was considered the source of drawing guidance, support and inspiration. Although Emerson believed that the seat of direct communication and attunement of metaphysical world is individual psyche of man. Sen introduced this concept to his neo-Vedanta. He started emphasizing on the worship of the Deity that was not bound in the historical events rather that Deity which is ever living and ever present. He further rejected the worshipping of this living Deity in the context of his dead letters (revealed books, religious symbols, and lifeless dogmas). He justified his rejection of the traditional standards of religion by emphasizing on direct communication of metaphysical world that would replace the traditional concept of revelation with the living revelation within man. The new concept of transcendental religion of Sen was not only devoid of sectarian dogmatism and prejudice, but it also had expectations of a rising of the human brotherhood through such harmonious religious concepts.<sup>1</sup>

Sen denied the independent nature of theology rather he claimed the dependence of theology on psychology. He considered that the religious doctrines were nothing more than the constitution of human minds. He supported his claim by defining revelation as the past experiences of the great people. In his theory of great men he was conscious of the difference between the terms *avatar* and incarnation because his concept of great people did not revolve around the concept of God embodied as a man rather God in man. Hence his great men were the embodiment of moral code and ethics at the time of ethical and moral crisis of their times. His concept of revelation re-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 81-82.

introduced in neo-Vedanta the Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta* (*atman* is *Brahman* and *Brahman* is *atman*) that was discarded by Debendra Nath Tagore.<sup>1</sup> He reconnected neo-Vedanta with Shankaracharya's experiencing metaphysical communion with God by rejecting Tagore's concept of natural religion. He defined revelation as "direct breathing-in of God's spirit which infuses an altogether new life into the soul, and exalts it above all that is earthly and impure. It is more powerful, being God's direct and immediate action on the human soul, while the revelation made through physical nature and biography is indirect and mediate."<sup>2</sup>

He rejected the revelation in the form of revealed sacred books and replaced it with individual experiencing of God. His modernization of neo-Vedanta was not limited to, his concept of revelation rather he incorporated the concept of scientific evolution in it, in terms of spiritual and ethical revolution.<sup>3</sup> His amalgamation of Hindu (Vedanta) philosophy and western philosophies enabled him to claim that Hinduism was the only way that would lead Christianity towards its universality and perfection. He was the first who introduced the approach of Hindu inclusivism that further shifted the Christianization of India to Hindunization of the West.<sup>4</sup>

His contribution was not limited to, his encounter the West but he had numerous encounters with Ramakrishna. Although Sen and Ramakrishna, both were the flag holders of the religious harmony through *neo-Vedantic* teachings but their harmonious approaches appeared as distance apart from each other. Ramakrishna was the critic of *Brahmo Samaj* because he opined world as *lila* (living play and manifestation) of the goddess that did not require any reform; neither religious nor social. He considered these reforms as a hindrance in the salvation of man because these reforms depicted the attachment of a man in this world. For him *Brahmo Samaj's* reformations were nothing more than an artificial demarcation which was aimed to draw boundaries between one aspect of God and His multiplicity in the world. He also rejected and replaced the western constructed concept of the pristine knowledge with *Sanatana Dharma* (eternal religion) which to him is beyond any corruption and innovations. He believed that Hinduism encountered Christianity and other world religions without introducing these reforms to Hinduism, as Hinduism appeared potential due to its religious experiences and its vastness due

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<sup>1</sup>Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*, 26-27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>3</sup>Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, 83.

<sup>4</sup>Halbfass, *India and Europe :An Essay in Understanding.*, 226.

to its diversity that offered enough space to accommodate other religious experiences and practices within it. Here Ramakrishna introduced the concept that all world religions are the part of his neo-Vedanta when he allowed the worship of Jesus Christ in Hinduism on the basis of his experiential approach. That enabled him to conclude that all religions are the different paths to the same goal to illustrate the unity of God in diverse religious worships and practices.<sup>1</sup>

Among all neo-Vedantists Ramakrishna was unaccompanied in connecting neo-Vedanta with Hindu idol worshipping through the *Sakti bhagti* approach in the framework of *tantric Advaita*. Ramakrishna's neo-Vedanta elaborated by Vivekananda appeared to affirm Ramakrishna's neo-Vedanta to Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta that described the *Brahman* as an evolutionary spirit. Thus, *Brahman* of Ramakrishna appeared as an active God who is manifested in all things and beings of the universe.<sup>2</sup>

In the Karl Mannheim's approach of sociology of religion the above mentioned predecessors of Vivekananda have contributed in the individual genetic makeup of Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta. But it is quite obvious that the journey of neo-Vedanta began with the orientalist's motivating and encouraging findings of the glory of Hinduism in the past. So, it is worth mentioning that at the time of Ram Mohan Roy the position of neo-Vedanta was quite different from Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta. As, neo-Vedanta was coined by Ram Mohan Roy as a theology to replace Idol worship in Hinduism but the doctrines and principles of this neo-Vedanta lacked organization till the time of Vivekananda. While in Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta one finds the accommodation of idol worshipping in his evolutionary categorization of Vedanta which allowed idol worship in *inbhagta marga*. Therefore, neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda appears to be not only the self-awareness of Hindus, but an encoded Vedanta in the practical social life of Hindus in the form of Practical Vedanta.

Although, Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta was not a philosophy rather it comprised of rules that encompass the relationship of man to God and man to man within Hinduism and also with other non-Hindu religions. In the nineteenth century Bengal one single event cannot be considered responsible for Vivekananda's practical derivation of the neo-Vedanta rather on the one hand derivation of practical aspect was embedded in his connection of the metaphysics with the ethical code due to his contemporary Christian missionaries' criticisms that highlighted the ethical and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 227.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, ed. *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*, 95.

social deficiency of the Vedanta. And to some extent his stay in the West added secularization in his neo-Vedanta when he reinterpreted the meaning of *seva* as fulfillment of worldly and social end by separating it from Hindu soteriology.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, the influence of Western evolutionary philosophy on Vivekananda appears in his arrangement of Vedantic schools in spiritually evolutionary realms. That enabled him to update neo-Vedantic status as a universal and missionary religion by merging every world religion in his neo-Vedanta.

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<sup>1</sup>Halbfass, *India and Europe :An Essay in Understanding.*, 240.

## Conclusion

Now, let us take stock of the important findings of this study, draw conclusions, and figure out answers to the questions that have been raised in the beginning. As discussed in the foregoing pages, in this study Karl Mannheim's approach of sociology of knowledge has been relied on to understand the contribution of socio-religious factors in shaping Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta. The first important point has been noted that the presence of British, more especially orientalist scholars and Christian missionaries, proved to be the main stimulus for the emergence of a range of revivalist and reform movements in the nineteenth century Bengal. In the pluralist Bengali society, Muslims and Hindus witnessed waves of the reform movements in response to the stimulus generated by the orientalists' works of the late eighteenth century and the Christian missionary activities of the nineteenth century. These reform movements were sharing the same goal of revival of religion and religious identities, but these movements varied in the adoption and utilization of different approaches and frameworks for their revival. The forerunner of the nineteenth century reform movements in Islam was the *Farā'qī* movement of Hājī Sharī'atullah. He not only tried to revitalize the Muslim Bengali society by curbing what he understood to be the evils of polytheism (*Shirk*) and innovations (*bid'āt*) that had penetrated in the Islamic doctrines and practices, but he also tried to reform and regenerate Muslim society with the Islamic spirit, embedded in the Qur'ānic principles and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). Hājī Sharī'atullah started his mission by promulgating the importance of religious duties that are obligatory on every Muslim that consist of profession of faith, *salāh* (daily prayer), *saum* (fasting), *zakah* and *hajj* (pilgrimage). That is because Sharī'atullah was of the view that reflection of the glorious Muslim society of the Prophet's time could not be attained in Bengali society without reviving and regenerating the spirit of Islam in the individual lives of Muslims and at the level of society simultaneously.

Hājī Sharī'atullah also expressed his dissatisfaction with the contemporary cultic practices of *pīrism* in Bengali society, which he considered to be a synthesis of Muslim Sufism and Hindu tantric mysticism. Hājī Sharī'atullah got the support of his contemporary traditionalists in his rigorous criticism of non-Islamic and innovative practices but he faced opposition of the traditionalists with regard to his view about *pīrism*. Actually, *pīrism* for these traditionalists was not merely a religious institution, rather their financial and economical stabilities were dependent

on it. They saw in Hājī Sharīʿatullah's sharp criticism of *pīrīsm* potential threat to their authority in socio-religious spheres of the Muslim community, and by consequence even to their livelihood. Therefore, these traditionalists severely opposed the reform agenda of Hājī Sharīʿatullah in the context of *pīrīsm*. After the death of Hājī Sharīʿatullah this movement changed its course from the religious to socio-religious reform under the leadership of Dūdū Miyān. To cut the long story short, historical context of the *Farāʿdī* movement should not be ignored because with the arrival of the British along with their modern western cultural patterns and institutional structures, revivalist and reformist tendencies emerged among the Bengali Muslims, which were subsequently replaced by rational and scientific attitudes.

The rise of *Farāʿdī* movement in the Muslim context shows how charged the socio-religious situation in Bengal was during the nineteenth century. Naturally, such developments also affected Hinduism and the Hindu communities of Bengal, and this is the main focus of the present study. As a result of a Hindu encounter with modernity, Christian missionaries, and oriental scholarship, a wave of religious and cultural awakening surfaced out in the form of Hindu reform movements. Among these reformers were *neo-Vedantins* who reinterpreted the Upanishadic monotheistic *Advaita* Vedanta philosophy of Shankaracharya in the light of Western philosophy, rationality and Christian ethics. This new outlook of traditional *Advaita* Vedanta within the realm of Western philosophy and Christian ethics attained the name of neo-Vedanta. Ram Mohan Roy is considered the father of neo-Vedantins in the nineteenth century Bengal because he was the one who wanted to reform Hinduism by rejecting the idol worship, caste system, gender discrimination and widow burning.

In other words, Ram Mohan Roy is called the father of neo-Vedanta because he reinterpreted Hindu religion by borrowing the Christian concept of religion that enabled him to reinterpret Hinduism with reference to a few sacred books and key doctrines. Hence, Roy's particular synthesis of Hinduism and Christian ethics gave an iconism to neo-Vedanta, because Roy was not ready to reject Hinduism completely rather he rejected idol worship, caste system and gender discrimination. Roy's selection of Vedantic philosophy from the six Hindu philosophies for his reform movement was not very obvious. Firstly, he grew up in *Vaishnavas* family where idol worshipping was prevalent and in his childhood he was devoted to Vishnu. Secondly, pre-British

Bengalis were inclined towards love (*Baghti*) of their personal God and goddesses especially Vishnu and *Kali* as compared to *jnana* and *karma*.

Roy's reasons for selection of Vedanta for his socio-religious reform movement may be traced from the eighteenth century orientalist's axiom of pristine Hinduism and Christian missionaries' adoption of indigenous (Vedantic) frame to criticize contemporary Hinduism as a degenerated idolatrous form of ancient monotheistic Hinduism. Among these orientalists the contribution of William Edward and Colebrook are worth mentioning. They interpreted and evaluated Hinduism by categorizing it in pristine ancient Hinduism and present Hinduism as corrupted idolatrous and unethical religion. These orientalists tried to support their viewpoint by authenticating ancient Hinduism as real Hinduism and rejecting popular Hinduism by considering it mere collection of superstitions. It should be clear here that these orientalists' categorization of real and superstitious Hinduism was done in Western model that facilitated them to equate golden age of Hinduism with *Advaita* Vedanta by incorporating Unitarianism and humanistic approaches. On the footsteps of Voltaire these orientalists opined that Christianity is based on Vedanta. While for rejecting superstitious Hinduism that did not match their Western intellectuality, these orientalists show their preferences towards anti-ritualistic and anti-clerical texts of Upanishad and Bhagavad Gita. This appears to be the first reason of Roy's persuasion of Vedanta philosophy.

Secondly, Missionaries emphasized on *Advaita* Vedanta monotheism because they thought that by doing so they could convince Hindus that Vedanta could attain accomplishment in Christianity. In highlighting *Advaita* Vedanta these missionaries satisfied their inclusivist Christian spirit to attain mass conversion of Hindus to Christianity. Beside this, Serampore trio's polemical literature and debates portrayed Vedic religion as a victim of atheism and theological fallacies. These missionaries believed that Hinduism lacked monotheistic belief and social ethical code. Such frame of mind allowed them to place Hinduism on the lower rungs of evolution as a childish religion. Roy found the answer to such missionaries' objections in Vedanta which is one of the six Hindu philosophical schools of thought. It seems that in his view Vedanta qualifies the criteria of theism through its particular philosophy about the relationship of the Creator with creation which culminates in Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta (*atman* is *Brahman* and *Brahman* is *atman*). Therefore, it may be concluded that Roy's selection of

Vedanta was influenced by the orientalist's axiom of the revival of golden age of real Hinduism (Vedanta). His reinterpretation of metaphysical non-duality of *Advaita* Vedanta in an empirical world enabled him to neutralize the missionaries' criticism of idol worship, caste system, gender discrimination and widow burning. Thirdly, in Roy's rejection of idol worship and adoption of monotheism the influence of *Mu'tazilites*, *Muwahiddun* and *Sufis* should not be ignored. Moreover, his appreciation for the Christ and Christian teachings also need to be taken into account.

Ram Mohan Roy claimed to uphold the *Advaita* Vedanta of Shankaracharya, but one can notice the amendments that he had made in his reinterpretations of the original *Advaita* Vedanta. True that Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta revolves around non-dualism (*atman* is *Brahman* and *Brahman* is *atman*) but Shankaracharya had never rejected idol worship and the caste system. Shankaracharya's writings also seem silent on the issues like widow burning. Regarding the status of women he neither equated her to man nor considered her fit for knowledge of *Advaita* Vedanta. On the other hand, neo-Vedanta of Ram Mohan Roy completely rejected idol worship and did not limit membership of *Brahmo Samaj* to any Hindu caste. Its membership was open even for non-Hindus. Roy had further incorporated the Christian style of worship in *Brahmo Samaj* that took his version of neo-Vedanta too far from Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta. During this new course of neo-Vedanta, Roy failed to remain connected with the traditional Hinduism to prevent the mass Hindu conversion to Christianity. The reason of this conversion can be seen in the dissatisfaction that prevailed in the low caste Hindus about sharing equal respect and privileges in the Hindu society. Such low caste Hindus found an escape in conversion from such caste tyranny. Therefore, he rejected caste system but in doing so he appears to have inversed the Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta which seemingly prefers faith over rationality. In neo-Vedanta of Roy rationality was given preference over faith that enabled him to give the title of pretentious beliefs and practices to idol worship and some other social practices of Hinduism. After rejecting such beliefs and social system he not only introduced the idea of superiority of Hinduism and Hindu nationality, but also criticized Christianity as a form of polytheism.

While in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, another *neo-Vedantin* from the nineteenth century Bengal, the implementation and selection of Vedanta for his reform movement relate to factors within



and without Hinduism. In the context of Hinduism, Vedanta enabled him to criticize all socio-religious amendments (except caste system) made by the *Brahmo Samaj* to adjust Hinduism in Western criticism. He believed that *Brahmo Samaj* amendments were nothing more than the artificial boundaries that *Samaj* raised between one aspect of God and His multiplicity in the world. His selection of Vedanta further allowed him to accept idol worship in his neo-Vedantic reform movement by rejecting the orientalist's axiom of pristine monotheistic Hinduism. He opines that *Sanatana Dharma* is so vast and infinite that it can adjust all types of worship that range from idol worship to monotheism. Therefore, he concluded that Hinduism is beyond any corruption and degradation. Although in the case of non-Hindu religions his mystical experience facilitated him to conclude that all religions are but different paths towards the same goal, Ramakrishna's pluralism appears to change into inclusivism when he concluded that every religion is a part of Vedanta.

When neo-Vedanta of Ramakrishna is compared with Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta it appears that the main concern of Ramakrishna was to dissolve the caste system that has no foundation in *Advaita* Vedanta. Ramakrishna suggested dissolving the caste system to interconnect the selfless services of humanity with devotion to God while *Advaita* Vedanta of Shankaracharya emphasized on spiritual transcendence by denouncing the world. In the classical *Advaita* Vedanta salvation from this world is sought through *jnana marga* that is through knowledge. Being a *bhagta* (devotee) of mother *Kali*, Ramakrishna did not adopt the path of liberation through *jnana marga*. He rather opines that in *Kali yuga*, the present era, salvation is impossible without *bhagti*. In fact, he tries to integrate *bhagti marga* and *jnana marga* through the slogan of "work is worship." The amalgamation of these two *margas* further allows Ramakrishna to abolish the caste system because he orates that God dwells in every man and selfless services of a man with love and devotion is equal to the services of God. He further incorporates his idea to fabricate equality of man irrespective of their caste which according to him is the representation of the social dharma not social status of superiority and inferiority. Besides this, he also differs from Shankaracharya's *Advaita* regarding the concept of Brahman and the world. Ramakrishna equates *Brahman* of Shankaracharya with goddess *Kali* and the entire universe as her *lila*. Therefore, it is maintained that in the nineteenth Century Bengal neo-Vedanta appeared in response to the work of British orientalist and Christian missionaries.

The early neo-Vedantists influenced the thinking pattern of Vivekananda. He gave these inherited neo-Vedantic teachings the shape and name of his practical Vedanta. The origins of the practical Vedanta of Vivekananda can be seen in the construction of his master Ramakrishna as an *Advaitin*. And on the other hand, practical Vedanta emerged in response to the missionaries' criticism of Vedanta. Christian missionaries considered this philosophy devoid of ethical implementation in Hindu social framework. Vivekananda tried to implement *Advaita* Vedanta in Hindu social life by bringing the metaphysics of *Advaita* Vedanta within the boundaries of this empirical world. The key concept of Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta resides in his reconciliatory approach that enabled him to arrange three *Vedantic* schools in evolutionary order from *Viviska* (Vedic dharma), through *dvaita* to *Advaita* Vedanta. This sequence placed *Advaita* above other two *Vedantic* schools. However, Vivekananda maintained that the two lower stages must be experienced through to reach the highest stage that is of *Advaita* Vedanta.

Relying on this whole scheme of practical Vedanta, he claims to be an *Advaitin* on the footsteps of Shankaracharya. However, it is doubtful if his practical Vedanta really maintains the link to the Shankaracharya's *Advaita*. It seems that Shankaracharya's *Advaita* is a philosophical theology that cannot be lived through without taking into account the metaphysics that it relies on. In fact, Vivekananda's practical Vedanta follows the scheme of Shankaracharya inversely by insisting on experiencing the metaphysical God in this physical and empirical world. The aim of Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta was to inculcate divinity in man by freeing him from the boundaries of this physical world, while the practical Vedanta of Vivekananda tries to bring that metaphysical God into the realm of this secular world. This distancing of Vivekananda's practical Vedanta from Shankaracharya's *Advaita* Vedanta enabled him to reinterpret the portion of traditional Hinduism that appeared objectionable in the light of Western ideals of religion, culture and rationality. Through this reinterpretation, Vivekananda accepted idol worship at the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder and considered it to be a prerequisite stage for reaching the higher stages of monotheism. Similarly, in the case of caste discrimination he rejects the caste system as a social vice but at the same time accepts it as a natural check on maintaining the distinctness of superior and inferior castes. Vivekananda's standpoint also seems self-contradictory regarding the status of women. In his practical Vedanta, he permitted the admission of women to the ascetic life and thus treats her equal to man in this respect. Then he

finds the salvation of Hindu woman in the obedience of her father, husband and sons, and thus assigns women a subordinate position.

Another important point of Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta is his construction of Hinduism as a missionary religion. He was doing this though he had nothing to support his idea of missionary Hinduism from traditional Hindu texts as they considered the non-Hindus *maleecha* (impure) and unfit. Hindu traditionalists had been more focused and intended to reconvert those Hindus who had converted from Hinduism to Buddhism and Jainism. Therefore, Vivekananda's missionary religion can be seen as a response to the activities of the missionary religions, like Islam and Christianity, to prevent mass conversion of Hindus to these religions. And this missionary Hinduism is connected to his idea of a universal religion in which the individuality of other religions melts in Vedanta. He construes this whole scheme of universal religion by setting a universal standard of realizing God in soul and by negating all apparent differences of religions in their doctrines, principles, sacred books, and religious rituals. He considers these differences of rituals and doctrines as the root cause of religious fanaticism, religious prejudices, and bloody wars in the name of religion. For him the reason of intolerant religious behavior lies in apparent differences of religions, which convinced him to propose the idea of the harmonious universal religion.

His idea of harmonious universal religion consists of three stages: the stage of eternal religion, the phase of co-existence of all religions, and the phase of transcending all limitations. A careful examination of these three phases of Vivekananda's universal religion leaves little doubt that through the idea of universal religion he was in fact preaching Hinduism, or to put it in more clear terms, his understanding of Hinduism. In other words, he believes that Vedanta has its seed in all world religions. If this conclusion is true, as it seems to be the case, his position of a pluralist becomes questionable. At the most he can be termed as an inclusivist who includes all world religions into the fold of Vedanta. His obvious Hindu bent of mind can be seen in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* where he tackles non-Hindu religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. During his treatment of these religions he vehemently refutes their individual beliefs and religious rituals. He criticizes all the beliefs of these religions which are not in conformity with the Vedanta. He does not show any reluctance to reject such beliefs and practices to establish the superiority of Vedantic teachings. Thus, it is concluded here that his

image of a pluralist needs to be reviewed due to his portrayal of Buddha and Christ as Vedantins. In the case of Islam, his descriptions about Muḥammad, (peace be upon him), and his teachings are obviously offending for Muslims. He criticizes the personality of Muḥammad, peace be upon him, calling him as an immature *yogi* who trembled during his religious experiences. He also accuses Muhammad's teachings as the cause of intolerant and fanatic behavior of Muslim. Needless to say, such standpoint is anything but pluralism.

The above mentioned scheme of Hindu awakening is termed as the Bengal renaissance whose seeds were sown by the work of the orientalist of the late eighteenth century and Christian missionary education of the nineteenth century. Differences have been noticed in the approaches of the eighteenth century orientalist and the nineteenth century missionaries regarding Hinduism generally and Hindu sacred texts particularly. The orientalist's works generated in Hindus the spirit of pride and recognition for their past golden age glory while Christian missionaries on the other hand portrayed Hinduism at the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder of religions. The orientalist emphasized on the pristine Upanishadic teachings, while Christian missionaries were utilizing these Upanishadic teachings as nothing more than the reservoir of Christianity. Here, it is worth mentioning that the orientalist and Christian missionaries not only differed in their approaches but also in their objective towards Hinduism. However, both of these groups, knowingly or unknowingly, served Hindu revival and reform purposes equally. Because in the absence of the orientalist's modern construction of the Hinduism and Christian missionaries' education policies the waves of horizontal and vertical mobilities in Bengali Hindus of the nineteenth Century seem improbable. And in such context of the nineteenth century Bengal, neo-Vedanta appears to be a reform movement which is the product of this horizontal mobility of interreligious interactions and the vertical mobility in the static stratum of the Hindu caste system.

These mobilities were very spontaneous and interconnected to each other in shaping Hindu Bengali society of the nineteenth century. The origins of the horizontal mobility could be traced to the Hindus' interaction with Christianity and Islam that seemingly produced vertical mobility by disturbing the static vertical caste stratum of Hinduism. While in the case of horizontal mobility the above mentioned efforts of the orientalist and Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century Bengal cannot be ignored. These developments facilitated the availability of

the sacred Hindu text to Hindus of all castes. Before this Hindu-Christian encountering the *Brahmins* constituted the fixed intelligentsia class, and was considered to be the sole custodians of Hindu sacred texts. Other castes relied completely on *Brahmins* for interpretation and teaching of Hindu sacred books. Among these Hindu castes the *Shudras* could not even hear a single mantra from the Vedas and if any Shudra was found guilty of listening Vedas in punishment his ears were filled with molten lead. In the nineteenth century the socio-religious encountering of Hinduism with Christianity made possible the accessibility of Hindu sacred texts to all castes on the horizontal level that brought a change in static vertical caste stratum of Hinduism by terminating the fixed intelligentsia class of *Brahmins*.

Vertical mobility was not limited in the sphere of caste system; rather it was extended with the creation of the different religious groups in Hindus categorized as conservatives, radicals and reformists. Conservative Hindus were those who considered Hinduism free from any flaws or innovations. These conservatives showed flexibility in attaining Christian education from missionary schools. They believed that this missionary education would enable them to move forward financially and economically by preserving their Hindu belief system. But later on these conservatives felt difficult to keep their western education and their Hindu belief system intact in distinct chambers of mind, because Western education was not mere educational system, it was rather a system that was designed to program Hindus' religious minds rationally and secularly.

The second group consisted of radicals who rejected Hinduism as a system of beliefs. The third group (neo-Vedantins) included all those Hindus who were neither inclined to reject Hinduism completely nor wanted to adopt the Christian belief system. The objectives of these reformers were to construct new fabric of Hinduism by reinterpreting the traditional Hindu texts in terms of Western philosophy and Christian ethical system. Thus, these reformers appeared to accept the criticism of the Christian missionaries about Idol worship and social practices of caste system, gender discrimination and widow burning, because they smelled the threats to Hindu survival among monotheistic religions (Christianity and Islam) who were also challenging the Hindu caste system by their religious slogan; equality of mankind. Among these neo-Vedantins the role of Ram Mohan Roy, Debendra Natha, Keshab Chandra and Ramakrishna cannot be ignored because they provided the genetic makeup of the Vivekananda.

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