CrossMark

Is Synthesis of World Religions Possible?

U. A. Vinay Kumar[1] · Henrique Antonio D'Souza[2]

Abstract

Introduction All major religions appear to follow a pattern of social contract with an additional feature of 'termination of the contract' and its 'aftermath', for the soul. This way, religion is known as 'dissolution mechanism' (DM). It contains both social and metaphysical terms, where the former is subsidiary to the latter. The metaphysical term is represented by the mokṣa. A given DM not only explicates the state of soul after the termination of contract, but also it endeavours to point out the nature of the ultimate reality it conceives.

Method DM provides a geometrical/mathematical picture of the universe to locate the ultimate reality and the individual souls in it; three views of the universe—destruction, creation and sustenance—are obtained for three basic religions or thoughts. Buddhist 'Nothingness' forms the psychological background for these views of universe. Architectural designs of worship places, yantras or maṇḍalas, etc., show both the nature of universe and the location of the ultimate in it. Understanding these figures is the key method to be employed for arriving at synthesis.

Conclusion Synthesis consists in noting the identical common metaphysical generic essence as running through all the religions, and identifying the unique specific root-essence on such a generic essence. Specific root-essence of a given DM consists in the way the unification of cognitions of the universe is carried out. When the unification of

✉ U. A. Vinay Kumar
    udank26@gmail.com

    Henrique Antonio D'Souza
    hesoza@gmail.com

[1] Department of Philosophy, Goa University, Taleigão, Goa 403206, India

[2] Department of Philosophy, Sv Caculo College, Mapusa, Goa 403 507, India

⚛ Springer

all the specific root-essences on the generic essence is carried out with a further psychological background of Buddhism, we get a specimen of metaphysical synthesis of world religions. Thus, synthesis is a distinct and sure possibility.

Introduction

In asking the captioned question, the expectation is an affirmative answer, which many may find difficult to accept. Of course, prior to committing to an answer, some might like to seek a few clarifications regarding the intended meaning/s of certain phrases in the question. For example, what is the meaning of the term *synthesis*? Or, which religions are to be included in the scope of the term 'world religions'? As regards the former, there could be several ways of understanding the term 'synthesis'—of which one is, to find at least one 'identical' (metaphysical-) characteristic that runs through all the members of a group of religions chosen for synthesis even if its 'form' (as given in relation to 'specific root-essence' yielded through unification of cognitions of the Universe) of appearance may vary. In this view, the 'identical characteristic' has to be of fundamental nature (without being reducible further) as, for example, in terms of a metaphysical entity, like 'Subject Consciousness'. This is absolutely unlike social feature/s (etc.)—even if some of such features maybe common or identical, and appear on certain uniform background in a social synthesis. This is because these social features—whether or not 'fundamental'—are derivative and secondary, as they (or most of the originally ordained ones) are dependent primarily on the metaphysical scheme. Hence, *these* social features cannot lay a claim for an enduring and foundational synthesis of religions. As regards the second question, the 'world religions' will include both the Eastern and the Western religions, like Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and so forth. It is for the author desirous of synthesizing to make an appropriate choice of religions that s/he wishes to synthesize.

This article aims at discussing the *possibility* of metaphysical synthesis—in the above sense of identifying an 'identical characteristic' with its 'form', where the synthesis visualized is of Buddhism, Hinduism (three Vedānta schools), Judaism, Christianity and Islam. However, we reiterate that the articulation of our concern herein is not exhaustive but only suggestive and indicative.

Some Doubts Against Synthesis and Counter-Doubts

Some may doubt the very existence of metaphysics in religions, as in Judaism, or Islam or Christianity. Alternatively, many may find it preposterous to assume Vedāntic schools as giving out distinct religions, especially so with respect to Advaita Vedānta. This is because we know that in Advaita the God (Saguṇa Brahman) is an inferior reality (*apara*) in relation to the ultimate, Nirguṇa Brahman

(*para*). A religious 'God' cannot be an inferior reality. Hesitation to construe religions as having metaphysics, especially within Semitic tradition, is due mainly to a lopsided approach to religions as mostly from theological (or other) points of view with scant regard for comprehensive view of different religions and their logical location in such a view. Similarly, 'religions' involved in the Eastern philosophies such as Vedānta have been side-lined. Most importantly, the idea of logical continuity in religions (Semitic) or in philosophical thoughts (Eastern)—either in the same tradition or in different traditions—has been hardly searched for. This has led to construe each religion, or philosophical thought (such as Schools of Vedānta and Buddhism) as separate and isolated island without *positive* transaction whatsoever either among themselves or with others, from the same or different traditions, respectively. However, no dearth is seen in criticizing the others' views; some of which are glaringly superficial and misplaced. Obviously, never has been a logical continuity traced, especially in a modern endeavour with respect to the classical literature. Also, the modern mindset in research on religions has generally exposed the hidden bias through their covert claims of superiority to a particular religion or philosophical thought. Such non-objective research has not even realized the rudimentary need to grasp the basic reasons for the differences and/or commonality in religions or philosophies, before making such a claim for superiority. Then, in this context, *metaphysically speaking*, nobody seems to have asked the question why Jesus had to incarnate at all, if Moses (Judaism) had already provided the final word to *all* the questions of God and the like. Likewise, why Muhammad Paigambar's advent at all after Jesus. The same holds true in Vedāntic tradition—why Rāmānuja after Śaṅkāra, or Madhva after Rāmānuja? Or, is it that succeeding Ācāryas were of lesser intellectual calibre so as to miss the point/s made by the previous Ācāryas?

Many a time, the enterprise of synthesizing ends up with identifying, at the most, some common features; especially so in the non-metaphysical domains such as social life, customs and traditions, and so forth. Of course, there is nothing wrong in this kind of an enterprise as an ordinary philosophical programme. However, such an enterprise does not provide lasting logical solutions either for assimilation of the core metaphysical concepts of God and soul that are indispensable for any religion or for the derivability of the postulated social concepts themselves.

Misleading Pseudo Definition of a Religion

One of the major—but undesirable—definitions of religion has been to identify a religion through the characteristic of One book (scripture), One prophet and One God (OOOGod). In other words, the emphasis has been on One God—the monotheism—as preached by a single book and a Prophet. With this deadly stroke, Hinduism gets eliminated outright as a religion of the same kind as an Abrahamic religion is. Obviously, in this scheme, Hinduism does not fit as a 'monotheistic' religion. Without disregarding the immensity of plurality of Gods in Hinduism, we can say that this mindless characterization at once has dissuaded one and all from treating the Western and the Eastern traditions on par in any way whatsoever. The differential treatment meted out, in turn, has created an unbridgeable psychological

chasm between the Eastern and the Western religions, as if the twain would never meet. More importantly, the OOOGod permanently shuts the door off on the face of metaphysics both in the Western and Indian traditions, in favour of theology since scriptures are held to belong to exclusively theological (spiritual or mystical) and liturgical domains. In such a state of affairs, there is some sort of unwritten claim for superiority to monotheism hidden in the OOOGod of Semitic tradition, despite the problem of Trinity—a perennial puzzle in Christianity, for example; also, despite the riddle of how two or three different monotheistic Gods of Judaism, Christianity and Islam could all be true at the same time. If monotheism alone is superior-most theory, then, obviously, all non-monotheistic religions must be inferior. Add to this, the possibility of superiority–inferiority among different monotheisms of the Semitic religions themselves! Same points hold true of all monotheistic claims in the Vedānta or Eastern religions as well. Of course, there are some good exceptions to the above OOOGod characterization about Hinduism that speak of transaction of ideas between India and the West.[1]

Hinduism as Religion: Vedānta its Metaphysical Core

Generally, in Hinduism, there are more than one God and one Text, and so on. Similarly, Hinduism does not have a monolithic metaphysics in the same sense as a given Western religion might be said to have. As such, OOOGod is a Western conception and appears to have been forced on Hinduism. Can 'Hinduism' be considered as a religion at all even if we reject Western characterization? We think that to understand the situation in Hinduism, we should configure the conceptual categories with the delineation between the metaphysical and non-metaphysical. This would at once yield us Vedānta as the religio-metaphysical core of Hinduism. How do we go about with Vedānta itself in order to see the 'religions' in it?

Definition of Religion Through Continuity of Two Absolutes—Impersonal and Personal

From the strict metaphysical context of Vedānta, the most fundamental categories of a religion are the 'worshipper' and the 'Worshipped'. This idea can be clearly seen when we juxtapose Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita, for example. In Advaita, there is the subject-alone as the ultimate (Impersonal Positive Absolute), which is not an object, hence cannot be worshipped. In the latter, the ultimate reality is 'God' the highest object (Personal Absolute) that is capable and worthy of being worshipped by a subject. This hints at the logical continuity, from Advaita to Viśiṣṭādvaita and later, to the Dvaita. Buddhism (especially Vijñānavāda) forms the psychological backdrop for the logical exposition of Advaita itself. As such, Buddhism provides the Impersonal Negative Absolute.

No one can truly 'worship' oneself by himself, if one's self itself is the ultimate, except perhaps as a metamorphosed Narcissus. If so, in a strict metaphysical sense, neither Advaita nor Buddhism fits in as a religion. Buddhism has its logical

---

[1] See for example Elst (2011).

continuity in Advaita. In other words, there is transformation of Impersonal Negative Absolute to Impersonal Positive Absolute, and later from Impersonal Positive Absolute to Personal Absolute, from Buddhism, to Advaita and to Viśiṣṭādvaita, respectively. Finally, the Personal Absolute undergoes a transformation to make it almost look like 'one among the humans'. Precisely in Viśiṣṭādvaita, the distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped has been made in logical continuity of the Advaita. The requirement of the two categories of worshipper and the worshipped for a religion *qua* religion could be applied even on Semitic religions successfully and unravel their deeply hidden metaphysics.

In a religious context, neither of the two categories of worshipper and the worshipped could be of unreal nature. The ontology of Advaita has put forward the unreal nature of the Universe. This had to be modified to establish a 'real Universe', and a 'real individual soul', in the context of Viśiṣṭādvaita. As such, religion of Viśiṣṭādvaita and its Personal Absolute are logical consequences of establishing 'reality' to the Universe. Thus, a 'real object of worship, God', and 'real worshipper' come into being. This is unlike the Advaitic 'Object-totality', viz., illusory world [including dreams, (etc.).] Viśiṣṭādvaita, disagrees with Māyā of Advaita and establishes real Universe and real individuals, and a God as an object of worship.

Further, when the categories of 'worshipper' and the 'Worshipped' are retained as defining characteristic of religions, the Western OOOGod, *more or less*, comes true of Hinduism as well. This is clearly so *within* the different schools of Vedānta as each school has one founding Ācārya, one book as foundational source (*prasthānatraya*) and one God. In that case, the Vedāntic philosophies, viz., Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita, could be considered as three distinct monotheistic religions/philosophies or religio-philosophies. Cumulatively, they indeed are representors of Hinduism as a religion and philosophy. When we trace these Vedāntic thoughts to the Vedas as a comprehensive repository of Hindu thought, it is possible to consider Hinduism as a special sort of synthesis of all the schools of Vedānta at the core. Buddhism, in this view, may be considered as sprouting from the very seeds of the Vedas, in order to provide the most fundamental counter-perspective—the ultimate as a Śūnya, which, however, is a distinct psychological possibility, rather than ontological reality. For an effective and meaningful branching of the Vedānta schools into three distinct religions, one has to observe certain conditions, for example; one has to stop tracing these three Vedāntic systems to their purported common source, the Vedas (or *prasthānatraya*, the foundation-trio, viz., the Brahma Sūtras, the BhagavadGītā and the Upaniṣads). In this view, the specific bhāṣya will act as the 'One Book'. In other words, one should not think of oneness of the three systems via *media* the common source, viz., the foundation-trio, or the Vedas, if one wishes to retain their distinctness. Then, this will yield three *apparently* unconnected *Weltanschauungen each*—all of which can at once be construed as both religionistic and philosophical/metaphysical at their core.

Of course, in the case of Advaita, we will have to effect certain further conceptual modifications in order to fit it well into the schema of religions. This is necessitated because Advaita's ultimate reality is an Impersonal Absolute, which is the pure subject itself (where the individual self is identical with the ultimate reality,

Brahman.) In order to accomplish conversion of Advaita into religion, at a slightly lower level from the pure subject, a cosmic subject, who is attributed with the functions of God, is conceptualized in Advaita. At this stage, the individual subject is still maintaining its distinction from the ultimate. Therefore, the individual subject could treat the cosmic subject as the God.

Apparently, Christianity had sought to encompass within it all the three views of Universe—Sustenance, Destruction and Creation—corresponding to Dvaita, Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita, respectively. It is while dealing with Destruction view, Christianity appears to face an Advaita-like situation, where religion appears to take a back-seat. In order to grasp the actual situation, contents of Apocalypse or the Book of Revelation must be read with the leads provided by pyramid formation. The construction of pyramid itself calls for a preknowledge of the construction of both the cubes of Ālayavijñāna and Advaita. In fact, it is the Advaitic cube (or the resulting dimensionless point [DP])—*with slight conceptual modification*—is what is conceived at the apex of the pyramid, known as capstone, or the first cube (FC).

The distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped being '*completely*' erased out during the destruction of the Universe, due to the 'merger' of the individual subject with the Ultimate Nirguṇa Brahman (merger in the sense of Advaitic identity, i.e. x = x, and no room for 'y', the material Universe), no religion truly obtains, at that stage. However, from Christianity/Viśiṣṭādvaita perspective of real creation, the singularity of Advaitic Brahman in the first cube cannot be accepted, as it will defeat the idea of religion and the idea of the reality of the Universe. Thus, the Brahman required for creation cannot be Nirguṇa, nor can it be a 'Singular entity' like the Advaitic one. Here, we find the conceptual seeds for creating a real Universe, unlike the illusory Universe of Advaita. Thus, the ultimate FC (or DP) or the Saguṇa Brahman, contains two elements, consciousness and matter (potentially). This idea of 'two-in-one' is represented through the use of a vertical line drawn over '0' (zero) and is commonly known as ɸ (phi) to represent religion.

Christianity, however, is not blind to the Advaitic Subject. Such a subject appears to be hinted at in its Apocalypse. In any case, the overarching dominance of creation orientation for Christianity cannot be denied. Thus, the first book of Genesis gives out the philosophy of creation. A pyramid is visualized for this creation philosophy. At the belly of the pyramid, we have the incarnation of Jesus, as almost in the sustenance mode of the Universe, but up to four dimensions instead of 24D. This gives out the sustenance philosophy. In this way, all three views of the Universe seem to have been dealt with by Christianity.

The non- or under-representation of Advaitic strand in an overt manner in Christianity seems to have ended up in getting itself ticked away as a true synthesis of three views of the Universe. Another reason seems to be the absence of representation of Buddhism, which is the most fundamental and essential psychological background for every successive philosophy.

However, the absolute supremacy of Impersonal Absolute as ultimate reality and the illusoriness of the Jagat (Universe) including the God in Advaita are all logical consequences of unification of cognitions of the changing Universe in a particular manner. While the individual self is absolutely identified with the unchanging

Universal self (which is completely real), the Universe through unification of cognitions is held to be of *lesser reality* (rather than no reality of Buddhism). Thus, the Universe in Advaita is *sadasadvilakṣaṇa*. However, the Universe in Advaita exists eternally in the form of a ghost. This is equivalent to saying that Universe exists as a permanently destroyed entity for the Brahman, yet appears to keep moving in its different modes—creation, sustenance and destruction—within the body of the ultimate reality perennially for the unrealized. In any case, the Advaitic ultimate reality itself is unconnected to such a Universe. Universe, considered as 'matter' is, therefore, an illusion, as it does not have a locus of its own, other than being 'dependent' upon some other thing, the consciousness, the subject.

As hinted above, it is possible to have a smooth logical movement between Impersonal and Personal Absolute/s and vice versa. In fact, similar 'Impersonal' and 'Personal' Absolutes play crucial role even in the Semitic religions including the synthetic religion, Islam.

Buddhism

As regards Buddhism, it is a unique case and has already the well-known distinction of being both a religion and a philosophy in a completely acknowledged sense in the academic circles. In Buddhism, a similar situation akin to Advaita occurs with regard to its own Absolute. Hence, in its strictest sense, Buddhism *cannot* be a religion, since at the ultimate level there is neither the 'worshipper' nor the 'Worshipped' in it. However, the Buddha himself being the discoverer of the Buddhist ultimate, and which ultimate is logically identical to the Buddha, the Buddha has been kept on the pedestal of God by the followers. In this way, personification of what is essentially non-personifiable—the ultimate of Buddhism, the Śūnya, has been successfully carried out by identifying it with the Buddha himself. Hence, Buddhism as a religion has Buddha (or some such entity that is assigned to represent the ultimate Śūnya of Buddhism) at the central place as an object of worship, even though the whole affair is *ad hoc* and provisional, i.e. it lasts only till the worshipper himself realizes the inner core of himself as Buddha, the Absolute Nothing, Śūnya.

Buddhism, with its Absolute Nothing, actually constitutes a logical and an indispensable background for Advaita. The main difference between the two, however, is that there is no reality to anything, including both to the Universe (Object) and the Self (Subject), in Buddhism, while it is not so in Advaita. Buddhism conceives something like 'ontological barrenness' everywhere—a sort of 'Barren Impersonal Absolute'. Such an Absolute has—and can have—no self-reflexive knowledge of itself, nay it does not even have any sort of existence as such. This is entirely unlike Advaita.

Yet this so-called barren Absolute of Buddhism finds its inclusion in Semitic synthesis, by an ingenious stroke of modification of such barrenness into one's own self as a metaphorical Śūnya, i.e. infinitesimally small entity, tending to zero. After all, a really Absolute Nothing that is supposed to include one's own self's negation can only be psychological and never logical. This is because the denier of the self is himself the self. And this psychologism may be removed only by ontologizing the

psychological 'Absolute Nothing' as 'an infinitesimally small logico-ontological something'. Thus, there is *never* an absolute zero of oneself, rather there can only be an infinitesimally small entity *tending* to zero.

Semitic Religions

Semitic religions indeed contain deeper metaphysics in them than what meets the eye. This fact will become clear when we examine the leading symbols—such as for example, Christian Cross, Pyramid, Kaaba, Judaist Sephirot, and so forth—of these religions from a metaphysical point of view. It is a fact that so far no philosophico-mathematical analysis of leading symbols in Semitic Tradition has been carried out with a metaphysical eye.

Due to the two aspects of religion and philosophy being in them, they are *religio-philosophical thoughts* containing in them deeper metaphysical elements. Metaphysics or ontology is a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the fundamental question of what there is and includes both the physical and beyond, where the latter is generally the domain of consciousness. Thus, both the physical and the metaphysical are elements that ontologically 'exist'.

'Dissolution Mechanism/s' (DMs)

This is a term which may be interchangeably used for religions, because in essence, the religio-philosophical thoughts are understood basically as mechanisms designed to secure dissolution (or termination) of social contract, with explicit metaphysical statements regarding the aftermath of such dissolution with regard to the state of the individual soul. The design of the Universe, cognitions of the 'changing' Universe, ultimate consciousness (or its absence), and so forth, are all logical products of the engagement with the termination of social contract.

Each religion would deal with dissolution and its aftermath as the *parama-puruṣārtha* (the supreme goal—the *summum bonum*). To articulate one's own view of what logically follows when the dissolution occurs, one offers a full-fledged metaphysics. And in consonance with it the author modifies the meaning/s of the three terms of normal (General) Social Contract in order to facilitate the ultimate dissolution of the contract. The explanation of the state of termination itself will constitute the fourth term of the social contract. Thus, a view of the Universe and the goal of life, etc., are obtained in a DM. In this scheme, more specifically, the viśeṣadharmas are dealt with and re-stated by it. A Social Contract without metaphysics is a general one. Alternatively, the one which has the provision for liberation, etc., is a DM or specific Social Contract. Our understanding that a religion is essentially a DM or specific Social Contract would also facilitate sketching the metaphysical commonality and continuity among religions, along with social commonality and its derivability. More of Social Contract will be discussed a little later.

Inclusivity/Synthesis, Apparent Synthesis, Common Ground, Views of Universe

Inclusivity and Synthesis

In fact, in the West, Islam itself is a result of synthesis. This has been under cloud for a long time now. This point demonstrates the classical existence of synthesis. Modern and contemporary craving for synthesis requires hardly any argument. Before moving further, let us note that there are two types of religions—(1) non-synthetic, and (2) synthetic. Islam is a synthetic religion. Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism (Vedānta schools, when taken separately) are non-synthetic. The main external physical feature that distinguishes a synthetic religion from that of non-synthetic is the two distinct types of worship places. For example, Islam's mosque is for daily worship and the Kaaba is the *final place* for pilgrimage. This feature of Islam clearly shows that it is a synthetic religion. This feature of two worship places occurs even in Sikhism and Baha'I, and hence they too are synthetic religions. These features constitute the formal symbols and hence, call for a deeper philosophico-mathematical analysis. These three synthetic religions have accomplished their synthesis, with three distinct foci regarding the processes of the Universe—Creation, Destruction and Sustenance, respectively.

And as a matter of fact, in some sense, each chronologically succeeding religio-philosophical thought could be considered as synthesis, provided the crucial metaphysical elements of relevant preceding thought/s could be found in it in an 'inclusive' manner *with distinct designs of Universe being actually expressed in its exposition*. However, more often than not, we come across the absence of *such* inclusivity as to provide *all* distinct designs of Universe of previous systems, in the non-synthetic religions mentioned above, as for example, in Christianity. Christianity may be called as a semi-synthetic or non-synthetic religion as it attempts at mere inclusivity without the respective designs of the views purportedly included in its synthesis.

Although inclusivity, in the sense of including designs of Universe, is an important feature of synthesis, by itself it *cannot* present a synthetic view. Rather, a true synthesis must contain in it, first, an identical common ground of all its constituent religions. Generally, this common ground itself is embedded in the Buddhist psychological Nothing. In synthesis, different designs of Universe, which are the results of 'unification of cognitions' of the Universe must be well connected. All this happens *on* the 'Common Ground'. Usually the 'Common Ground' is ultimate Lord, the personal God, or Impersonal Absolute, as the case may be.

The Eastern religio-philosophical thoughts are no exception to mere 'inclusivity' *without* actual synthesis in the manner sketched above. Thus, the credit goes to Islam as the first serious, successful and explicit metaphysical synthesis involving *apparently* disparate DMs. Islam, comprehends all views of Universe, in physical terms, backed by appropriate logic and mathematics. As of today, the intuition *per se* in this direction in the minds of scholars—however vague—cannot be denied;

after all such an intuition cannot occur without reason.[2]Usually, these intuitions manifest in lectures, talks, articles, etc., by scholars belonging to different religions.

Common Ground

No one can dispute that even for a meaningful disagreement—be it in the domain of social customs or metaphysical arena or elsewhere—there must be some or the other *common ground*. A succeeding system in a domain will, in all likelihood, go the full length of its logical predecessor and will branch away only when it (predecessor) fails to provide a 'satisfactory' answer to its (successor's) own questions and concerns. In this view, therefore, a succeeding system need not entirely subsume under it each and every concept provided by the predecessor system. Rather it has the freedom to make choice of concepts from its predecessor and leave out the rest in accordance with its own requirement. This freedom holds true of both a synthetic and non-synthetic systems. The fundamental agreements between any two systems would—when appropriate abstraction is made—provide the generic feature of the tradition. Conversely, when the generic feature undergoes specific transformation in a given system, the emerging difference becomes the unique identity of the system. When such difference is of an extremely fundamental nature it is known as the specific root-essence of a system. In the metaphysics of religions, the specific root-essences are the designs of the Universe.

Views of Universe—East and West

The directions of growth in the Eastern and the Western traditions, in the perceived metaphysical continuity, historically, are in some sense, opposite to each other. More precisely, in the West, the progress is from Judaism to Christianity to Islam; i. e. from what can be characterized as inside view (of the Universe) to middle view (of the Universe) (moderate outside view and inside view seem to be implicit in Christianity) to all comprehensive synthetic view (Islam).[3] In the Eastern Tradition, the movement is from Buddhism to Advaita to Viśiṣṭādvaita to Dvaita. Thus, it is from 'Extreme Outside' to 'Moderate Outside' to 'Middle' to 'Inside' view of the Universe. Perhaps, one could find numerous intervening shades of thought. The intervening systems would obtain some prominence only if either their view of Universe is distinct or they cause deep dent in the views of existing systems through unassailable logical argumentation. In the Semitic tradition, Islamic 'all-comprehensive' view may be considered as the three + one of Destruction, Creation and Sustenance with no Universe (and Soul) views.

---

[2] See Acharya (2011) Zakir Naik's intuition in Islam is the culmination of Vedānta. Acharya says: "Zakir Naik's claim that Muslims are the culmination of Vedāntic teachings of non-idolatry is ridiculous to say the least." If Acharya has represented Zakir Naik correctly, then, it clearly shows that Zakir Naik did have some sort of intuition about Islam as synthesis of metaphysical teachings of Vedānta or other religions. Thus, in spite of the possible incompleteness of these articulations of the common ground in these intuitions, the existence of common ground *per se* cannot be denied.

[3] See Kumar (2015) for the explanation of Time as constituting the 4th Dimension, which needs to be taken into account in all the three views of Universe.

The two terms, viz., 'outside' and 'inside' with respect to the Universe frequently occur in our present and future entailing analyses, in both the categories of Western and Eastern religio-philosophical thoughts. So, one could ask—of what, it is the outside? And, of what it is the inside? When the primordial singularity (PS) of matter has a conscious space inside, the subject (consciousness) can be said to be inside it. When no such consciousness exists inside a PS, the subject can be said to exist outside of such a PS, in which case 'outside view' of Universe will obtain. 'Middle View' holds that the border line between the pure consciousness and the matter will constitute the observer consciousness for cognition of the object. The knowledge obtained from such cognitions will be transported to the domain of pure consciousness. In any case, it is the Super-soul, and the ultimate Cognizer's location for viewing the Universe will determine whether a religion has the 'inside' or 'outside' view.

The general Indian intellectual mind, as of today, seems to be fastened to the Advaitic 'Moderate Outside View' of the Universe—the Advaita. This view when translated into philosophical language will mean 'Subject-Consciousness alone' in the form of *I am Brahman* or *Aham Brahmāsmi* with the reality status of jagat (Universe) as *Māyā* or (*mithyā*)—illusion. Unfortunately, this stagnation of mind appears to have impeded progressive movement even an inch outside of this domain of self-imposed intellectual exile. On the other hand, the general Indian devotional mind (*bhakti*) seems to go with the 'Middle' and/or 'Inside' view of the Universe, where a distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped is explicitly made. However, the moderate outside view, i.e. the Advaita, has a theistic side to it, which becomes clear when one restricts the doctrine to its I-Factor[4] (the same as specific root-essence), the mark of Saguṇa Brahman, which in theistic terms is known as Īśvara or Śiva. Thus, the theistic mind of India is also with Advaita in some sense. If Śaṅkara's *bhāṣya* (commentary) on *Viṣṇusahasranāma*[5], and his lesser known work *Prabodhasudhākara*[6] are any indication, then Śaṅkara may be said to have been aware of the middle view and even the inside view, as well, even though he was perhaps completely convinced of the non-theistic part—the Absolute, the Nirguṇa Brahman, of the Moderate Outside View.

Two Domains

Mix-Up of Concepts

Generally, we come across attempts at synthesis that have illogically combined different categories of concepts, such as the concepts from social/sociological domain with concepts from other domains like ethics or metaphysics. That it is

---

[4] Individuating Factor (I-Factor) is a particular design of the Universe conceived by each system uniquely on the background of generic essence. This design is geometrical in nature and is derived through the method of unifying the cognitions of the Universe specific to the system. The difference in the conception of I-Factors is itself a result of answering certain questions not answered or not-satisfactorily answered by the system's predecessor. See Kumar (2015).

[5] Sastry (1980) In this work, Viṣṇu, the Viśiṣṭādvaitic Lord is praised by Śaṅkara.

[6] Samvid (1987) In this book, Śaṅkara begins with salutations to ŚrīKṛṣṇa, the Dvaita Supreme Reality.

entirely illogical follows from the cumulative effect of the mixing up of following aspects:

(a) Essential concepts from every sub-domain (which is social, etc.) of a particular religion have a distinct and basic metaphysical framework at the background from where they follow. The nomenclature 'sub-domain' is used only to refer to their ultimate dependency on derivability from some other domain. Metaphysics constitutes the main domain of any religion. Thus, there are at least two conceptually distinct domains for a religion—the metaphysical and the social. And **(b)** there is a sort of logical incommensurability between any two metaphysical backgrounds of any two religions, which can be bridged in some sense only by identifying 'logical continuity' between them. However, the assumed incommensurability *per se* will yield distinct domains, two each in given religions.

Since, in this way, all religio-philosophical thoughts have two basic domains—(1) the social and (2) the metaphysical—the total number of distinct domains one has to deal within a proposed synthesis is two multiplied by N, where N is the number of distinct religio-philosophical thoughts taken for synthesis. Thus, if three religio-philosophical thoughts are the candidates for synthesis, then the number of distinct domains will be 6 [$2 \times 3 = 6$].

In addition to this, synthesizer has to contend with *apparent* synthesis that attempts to pre-empt hegemony to other systems by *apparently* synthesizing the predecessor system and/or (imagined) successor systems, or both. apparent synthesis is the same as inclusivity without the involvement of required 'specific root-essences', etc. Similarly, one has to actually identify a genuine synthetic religion and must make appropriate provision to deal with its own two distinct domains. This task will become more complex when an actual synthetic religion is taken for synthesis since it itself has dealt with a huge number of distinct domains. If the total number of systems taken up for synthesis in a synthetic religion is 4 (=N), then this has to be multiplied by 2, which will yield eight domains. And to this one has to add the two domains each for every non-synthetic religion taken for synthesis. Moreover, qualitatively the whole thing will become inconceivably complex, since there would be difference in emphasis laid by a synthetic or non-synthetic religion on different domains and sub-domains.

The distinctness—of two social domains of two different religio-philosophical thoughts—follows from the fact that social domain of every religio-philosophical thought has a distinct metaphysical-domain as its unique logical background. Since each DM permits at least a portion of its metaphysics to remain distinctive even on the face of possible synthesis, the social deductions following from such distinctive features—with or without the synthetic features—will necessarily be distinct in nature.

Therefore, inasmuch as the logic of relation varies between a social-domain and the metaphysical-domain of one, with these respective domains of the other, there will result distinctness for each of the domains in all the religio-philosophical thought/s. And when such relation remains unarticulated in the relevant comparable system/s in an endeavour of synthesis, the purported comparison and/or contrast ends up as an illogical mix-up of concepts. An important consequence of this is that

we lose the real connotations and significance of the relevant concepts/domains in different religions/thoughts at least partially, if not entirely.

Thus, a synthesis based on surface-similarity—rather than on the fundamental metaphysical affinity and continuity—will necessarily be unsteady, and hence prone for misrepresentation. Therefore, correctness and accuracy of such synthesis, in part or whole, if any, will only be accidental and will be without any support from concrete logico-metaphysical foundation of the religions themselves.

Essences for Synthesis

Alternatively, a genuine universal synthesis can not only ill-afford to jumble-up concepts, but also will identify and fully engage with the essences of the concerned domains of synthesis, with a clear comprehension of the framework of metaphysics. Metaphysics explicates the generic essence, and also explains how the specific root-essence, that is the way 'unification of cognitions' is accomplished, in a system. By and large, the nature of social concepts (etc.) is necessarily a logico-psychological consequence of such metaphysics, as they are compatible with the corresponding metaphysical conceptions. The *generic essence* acts as a canvass or background for the *specific root-essence.* Identical generic essence runs through all chosen systems, like the suture that runs through all the chosen beads—*sūtre maṇigaṇa iva.* Yet the propositional construal of generic essence in each system may vary, this depends on the conclusions that are intended to be derived.

Since the syntheses of the 'restricted' sort fundamentally lack engagement with either generic essence, and/or specific root-essence, they *cannot* really be called metaphysical synthesis at all. At the most they may be called as sanctimonious socially inclusive statements, since they display some sort of inclusivity imparting logically camouflaged soothing touch; but then, we know, mere inclusivity without metaphysical foundation is *not* the hallmark of synthesis. In fact, contemporary works do not even engage in apparent syntheses or inclusivity i.e. metaphysical synthesis of the second order, such as the ones done by some classical systems like Advaita or Christianity, for example, as illustrated above.

In the books edited by Peter Koslowski,[7] one comes across papers on synthesis of world religions—which explicitly claim that the synthesis concerned is from such and such religion's perspective.[8] Besides being a self-proclaimed restricted

---

[7] See Koslowski (2001a, b).

[8] Such as, see for example, by Armin Kreiner, and Johannes Laube. See Koslowski (ed.) (2001a). See Adnan Aslan in Koslowski (2001b). But each one of these syntheses has been carried out from a restricted perspective of a particular religion, such as Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, respectively. See papers— *The Concept of God, the Origin of the World, and the Image of the Human in the World Religions: An Attempt at a Synthesis from a Christian Perspective*, (Kreiner) pp. 127–143;—*On the Conceptions of God, the World and the Human Person in Five World Religions: An Attempt at a Synthesis from Buddhist Perspective* (Laube), pp. 115–126;—*The Propositions of World Religions about the Origin and Overcoming of Evil—An Attempt at a Synthesis from an Islamic Perspective (Aslan)* 118–131]. Also see, Koslowski (2003). It should be noted that their synthesis is not merely restricted in the sense expressed in their respective title itself, but also restricted within the metaphysical understanding, since each one of them speaks about the metaphysical entity—God, covertly or overtly. See also Birnbaum (1988). Birnbaum appears to take Jewish Perspective for Synthesis.

synthesis, such works reveal even for a casual reader that these syntheses lack engagement with the generic essence—as in the metaphysics—of the system/s. Therefore, the proclaimed synthesis cannot be considered as universal even remotely. And some of them even proceed to combine the concepts from different domains without express or even covert reference to the logic of relations, already explained above.

Similarly, one finds in Madame Blavatsky's splendid work *The Secret Doctrine* the restricted Hindu perspective as its viewpoint for an apparent synthesis[9] without expressing the logic of relations between different domains of different religions. Thus, despite its immense psychological appeal, Blavatsky's work, quite unfortunately, fails to be a genuinely universal metaphysical synthesis.

It should be clearly noted that as such there is nothing intrinsically wrong in making a particular religion a viewpoint to look at other religion/s for synthesis, as long as they fulfill three important conditions: (1) identification of common metaphysical frame—i.e. generic essence of all the systems taken up for synthesis, (2) statement of aspecific root-essence, i.e. the unique feature of each one of the systems, (3) statement of relation between the generic essence and the specific root-essence in each system, and also in the purported synthesis as running through all of the constituent systems. The whole result must cohere well even when synthesis is carried out from different viewpoints.

However, it is not at all easy—nays impossible—to convert any sundry religion into a metaphysically synthetic religion arbitrarily. This is because the specific root-essence or I-Factors of different preceding religions are the already fixed distinguishing marks, and no violence can be afflicted on them. Therefore, in order to show the nature of chosen religion to be truly synthetic, the I-Factors of its constituent religions must be authentically shown to exist in it in a cohesive manner. Such incorporation of I-Factors cannot be arbitrary and must have the sanction from the original scriptures and sources. Hence, actually available or possible syntheses are finite in number. This being the case, contemporary authors should concentrate more on exposition of the already existing classical attempts at synthesis rather than creating arbitrary 'synthesis of the restricted sort'.

To the question whether or not there can be more than one result for a metaphysical synthesis, the answer is: 'yes'. For example, as stated already, Sikhism (Golden Temple

---

[9] See Blavatsky (1888) Blavatsky's synthesis mostly urges us to consider thoughts of other religions in the light of Hindu view, though the Preface says that: But it is perhaps desirable to state unequivocally that the teachings, however, fragmentary and incomplete, contained in these volumes, belong neither to the Hindu, the Zoroastrian, the Chaldean, nor the Egyptian religion, neither to Buddhism, Islam, Judaism nor Christianity exclusively. The Secret Doctrine is the essence of all these. Sprung from it in their origins, the various religious schemes are now made to merge back into their original element, out of which every mystery and dogma has grown, developed, and become materialized. [Vol. 1; p. viii] Even if this essence 'is not to be understood as a claim for synthesis', the essence *per se* mainly pertains to practices drawn from Hindu ethos, and does not appear to be directly connected to the metaphysical structures. The only justification for her covert claim for synthesis, if any, lies in the fact that the different religious schemes are said to have been made to merge back in their original element. While it could be true that an original element itself exists, the work does not appear to succeed either in explaining the original element as synthesis or in explaining the emergence of different religions with different metaphysical structures as taking place from the said essence, or in explaining how the original element represents any metaphysical commonality running through the avowed religions.

and Gurudwāra) and Baha'I seem to have arrived at different instantiations for synthesis, which seem to have been carried out from the viewpoints of 'Moderate Outside View' (Advaitic) and 'Inside View' (Dvaitic-Judaist), respectively. We shall not enter into a discussion about them in the present work. As noted already, by and large a synthetic religion/DM makes provision for two types of places of worship—one for normal day-to-day place of worship [like Mosque, Gurudwāra, and Mašriqu-l-ʿaḏkār (Dawning-place of the remembrances of God)] and the other, the final place—Kaaba, Golden Temple and a Nonagon, nine-sided circular shaped Temple. This provision is made to show the normal day-to-day location (normally, the space of 3D with time as the fourth dimension) of the faithful (generally, the structure of sustenance mode of Universe), i.e. where all the individual souls are existing at present, in relation to the Lord (the Ultimate), and the final abode one has to reach (like, Kaaba, Golden Temple or the Nonagon) as per the 'focus-philosophy' adopted by the Synthesis.

Essence and Synthesis

The concepts of 'essence' and 'synthesis' have a difference as well as affinity between them. Affinity is the overlap of certain features of a system on another system's features, where the overlapping features could both be construed as 'essential feature' and 'synthetic feature'. But since the two sets of features belong to two distinct systems with different background formations, they will be necessarily different from a broader perspective. In this way, essence is what *basically* refers to an element that runs through each and every 'object' of a class without which the class of objects 'cannot belong to a class'. To identify a generic essence, one needs to examine various objects/systems, minutely. The specific root-essence constitutes the distinguishing mark of a given system.

When essential feature, as generic essence is common to all systems incorporated in a synthesis, it is called a synthetic feature. But to arrive at a full-fledged 'synthesis', it takes more than this generic essence. This is because the so-called generic essence itself 'metamorphoses' in view of the appearance of specific root-essence on it. Thus, generic essence needs to be logically universalized first. This can be done by looking at the content of the essence without *any* distinguishing mark. In the next step of synthesis, all the different specific root-essences are sketched on the universalized generic essence in a logical continuity. In this way, synthesis becomes a sort of essence (universal generic essence with all specific root-essences, cohesively) of essences (different specific root-essences existing on generic essence of various systems).

Schleiermacher has succinctly expressed the idea of essence, in the context of Christianity of different shades thus:

> "(T)he only pertinent way of discovering the peculiar essence of any particular faith and reducing it as far as possible to a formula is by showing the element which remains constant throughout the most diverse religious affections within this same communion, while it is absent from analogous affections within other communions."[10]

---

[10] Cf. Christianity: an Overview, by Jaroslav Pelikan in Eliade (1987), p. 354, vol. 3, pp. 348–362.

The term 'Christianity' denotes a class name with respect to different shades of Christianity. So, every member of the said communion of Christianity is attributed with the name Christianity or—being Christian or—having Christian-ness, only when some element is identified as constant and runs through most (if not all) diverse religious affections [but] within the same communion of Christianity, and which, however, is absent within other analogous communions, such as for example, Judaism or Islam. Alternatively, Christianity is a member in the class of religions, where it has to have the common element that runs through all members of the class of religions.

Dissolution Mechanism/s (DM/s)

The term 'Social Contract' is a convenient theoretical construct, the origin of which can be sought in the Roman Stoicism of Cicero. Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke and lately John Rawls can be considered as chief architects of this theory.[11] However, it should be noted that there are some fundamental differences between the said Western notion, and its unarticulated Indian counter part as envisaged in the concept of puruṣārthas or in Puruṣa Sūkta. This is important because it is hypothesized that it is the Indian understanding that is pervasive in both the Eastern and Western DMs, unlike the modern notions of Social Contract. Although the idea of 'withdrawal from' or 'termination of' Contract exists in both Indian and Western theories of Social Contract, the nature and domain of action regarding such withdrawal/termination significantly vary.

1. First of all, while the Western notion allows withdrawal from contract, because of 'conflict' within the social domain, the Indian notion provides for a voluntary withdrawal from contract, the reason for which is one's realization of the need to know (and subsequent experiencing of) the transcendental, even though disillusionment through conflict or such other events within the social domain could trigger this realization.
2. Similarly, the idea of state of nature as a sort of anarchy with human-being as a 'noble savage' was never existent in Indian notion, but which is organic to the Western notion, in one way or the other. The term noble 'savage' as such appears to be an oxymoron. After all, in the Indian context, the Dharma cannot emerge from adharma, nor can adharma from dharma, inasmuch as they are logical opposites.

General Social Contract (GSC)

Primarily, General Social Contract means a group or community's life plan, which ensures each individual member's peaceful existence and ensures the gratification of basic needs of artha and kāma. This gratification takes into account all members of the society, and hence the contractual terms take care of both survival of all

---

[11] See the article—Social Contract by Peter Laslett in Edwards (1967), vol. 5, pp. 465–467.

members and its facilitation of gratification of the needs—including provisions to deal with possible violations of terms. Hence, the social contract—which states this life plan and its obligations, *without containing in it the ways and means* to terminate such a contract by an individual, is called GSC. Although it could be socially comprehensive, it cannot be called a logically comprehensive plan for this reason. In a GSC, the main thrust is *not* on the individual, but on the group. Consequently, the individual, in a sense, is lost, or at least side-lined, since it does not permit him the freedom to evolve independently of the social organism at any stage of his life. This is because the terms of GSC are largely determined by the elements of group-dynamics. In a way, the individual is utterly missed out in the group, and he appears to irredeemably surrender his identity, will and individuality to a faceless community, in an absolute measure. It is clear from this account that the conceived Social Contract is *not* between two separate parties, as is normally understood of a contract; rather the contract is by declaration by All—starting with the words, 'WE, the members of the Group, hereby…'. The individual/s, group or even the state are all subordinate to *this* WE and are emergent concepts as only subsequent to the said WE. The independent locus for the existence of these subordinate concepts also emerges only subsequently, because of differentiation. In this way, the initial contract is always a unilateral declaration by a single entity. Of course, this unilateral declaration as in GSC continues even in its transformed state of DM, to the extent of social domain of three terms. However, the individual's autonomy would be restored in its full bloom within a DM.

Emergence of DM

General Social Contract should not—and indeed cannot—suppress the individual, since it is he who had been instrumental in the GSC-formation. After all, without the individuals, the group has no existence. Further, each individual member of the GSC has his own inerasable identity, which cannot be wished off by mere generality of the GSC. Therefore, if an individual wishes to move out of GSC, it is his inalienable right and freedom to do so.

In accord with this, when the provisions of dissolution or termination of the Social Contract and its aftermath 'existence' for an individual 'if any', are incorporated into the GSC, the GSC will transform itself into a logically comprehensive life plan without forgoing social comprehensiveness, which it had possessed earlier. The GSC as a whole transforms in accordance with the world view propounded by the specific DM. This transformed GSC is the same as DM. In this transformed GSC, the individual's identity is always kept on a high pedestal without negating concern for collective social good. In some sense, the social domain prepares an individual for the transcendental (mokṣa) domain. It prepares the individual for the next journey through positive feelings of contentment or through the negative feelings of ultimate dejection created by the conflict situations. However, since an individual has the freedom to terminate the contract—as it is now a part of the terms of transformed GSC, the DM—an individual can call off the contract anytime, anywhere, and completely at his will.

The Aftermath

The aftermath of the termination is the state of an individual, in which he will find himself as ordained by a DM. The transformation of an ordinary GSC requires elaborate argumentation employed to provide both rationale for the termination, and its aftermath. Most such argumentation primarily—and necessarily—involves metaphysics. The transformed GSC, in this way is therefore called as a dissolution mechanism, to include both the states of before and after the dissolution. The actual physical insertion of mokṣa into the scheme of puruṣārthas by the śramaṇa tradition at a later date historically points to this very scheme.[12]

In the final statement of contract, as in a DM, the subtle provision of dissolution takes away the steam out of the GSC where the Group had become the faceless, but an all powerful Super-soul. In a DM, the erstwhile elements of GSC become only a subdued sub-domain/s of metaphysics of mokṣa. The full-fledged DM, the final frame of reference for everything, which is the metaphysics of dissolution, performs two major tasks—(1) to state the exact nature of the soul at the aftermath of the dissolution and (2) to state a logically smooth way of entering the ontological arena (of its own conception) when dissolution of contract occurs, by averting the possible violent logical conflict between the GSC domain and Dissolution domain.

Extraneous Factors

In a sociological endeavour, we must be aware of the social terms and their relation with a particular DM, and the non-metaphysical factors that go to shape the social terms.

> *"Religious teachings differ owing to difference in circumstances… I hold that from a historical standpoint, from time to time, the exigencies and requirements of the situation are responsible for the actual form which any kind of preaching or teaching takes."*[13]

However, in this quote, the Swāmīji seems to include both metaphysical and Social Contract terms, as being affected by the circumstances. While this may be true to some extent, we must note the subtle differences. In the case of metaphysics, the views are logically 'stable' and do not depend on circumstances once the same are put forward theoretically in clear terms. The terms of social contract, on the contrary—and especially, some of the secondary terms (viśeṣadharma, excepting those that are essential for the welfare of a society (as against mere sustenance), like varṇadharma)—are basically the products of different circumstances and will vanish (and must vanish) or continue, if the causal conditions so warrant—i.e. cease or continue, as the case may be. Thus, the social matter is more or less dependent on the prevailing time and circumstances. The difference between Śruti and Smṛti reflects this very difference in metaphysics and sociology, respectively. One should

---

[12] See Krishna (1997), p. 43 "…As is well-known, only three puruṣārthas were accepted in the beginning and the fourth puruṣārtha…. Mokṣa came to be added only later under the influence of śramaṇa tradition."

[13] Tīrtha (1983), p. 159.

note that the nature of geographical region or historical events/incidents, making inroads into the DM, etc., is generally the extraneous factors and are essentially contingent. By and large, they do not and cannot have any direct bearing on the metaphysics of a DM except that the DMs need to maintain logical conformity and consistency between the concerned metaphysical view and its own restated GSC domain. Exceptions to these contingent social formations are those which are directly derived from metaphysical conceptions. It is for these reasons there is 'stability of a DM' in both social and metaphysical domains. In the social domain, a DM has freedom to inject new terms and modify the existing ones, and in metaphysical it is a statement made once and for all times.

In a modern sociological study of religions, the extraneous factors need to be carefully segregated from the metaphysical core of a DM, in order to extract the core metaphysical presuppositions and premises on which the sociological propositions rest. This task, by no means, is easy, since any DM in its general totality encompasses the restated GSC terms, *which are the statements as at the historical times of DMs*, which in the flow of time can occupy the central place *as metaphysics* does, even while the original metaphysics might itself have gotten erased out of the memory. In other words, what was important could become subsidiary and what was subsidiary could become central! Then, the unfortunate consequence is that since a follower of a specific DM is strictly ordained to follow the core terms of the contract in the social domain, he may end up following even those terms which may have nothing to do with the originally intended core metaphysical Weltanschauung, leading to a massive build-up of superstitious and credulous practices. At worse, the follower may end up practicing something exactly opposite to what is commanded.

Content of the Soul

Content of the soul assumes enormous significance in a DM, both in the states before and after the dissolution. Another term that assumes immense significance in the theistic DMs is God. The term 'content of the soul' has many different characterizations in different DMs including its contentlessness as in Buddhism, to ontological Infinity as in Advaita. Similarly, the term God includes in its connotation many different metaphysical notions such as, (Saguṇa) Brahman, or Embodied Śūnya (the Buddha), or Father along with the Son and the Holy Ghost in identity in the Trinity, in different DMs. One has to be completely clear about the connotation/s of these terms.

The Generic Mokṣa

The concept of 'liberation' is a common and central theme of all DMs. Liberation is one of the conventional terminologies for mokṣa, the +1 term of the puruṣārthas. Basically, all the terms in puruṣārtha are of generic nature. Sometimes the concept of liberation is veiled in obscure terminologies that conceal the real metaphysical state and significance of soul after dissolution of Social Contract as in a given DM.

Some of the terms used for the concept of liberation in specific sense are salvation, *nirvāṇa*, *najat*,[14] *niḥśreyasa*, emancipation, etc.

Physical Universe

Each DM *necessarily* locates the physical Universe after conceiving its structure on the body of the generic essence, so that it can locate the liberated state of the individual soul and can trace the goal point and the path for the soul to move into, after the termination of social contract. From a philosophical point of view, the location and/or structure of Universe through unique characteristic, enables individuation of the ultimate (the generic essence, or its specific transformation, to suit a particular DM's own philosophy), and also it enables facilitation of the individual mind for an understanding of—the ultimate principles of a DM itself. Theoretically, this structure of Universe will also enable articulation of the nature of the ultimate in clearer terms, in the absence of explicit and comprehensive statements of a given DM to that effect. This will also enable comparison and contrast between any two DMs, especially those that closely resemble such as Advaita and Buddhism, where the respective ultimate becomes almost indiscernible from the other in the absence of respective I-Factor.

Main Stream of the DMs

A metaphysical synthesizer has to take up the main metaphysical position having general acceptance without deflecting into different shades of the relevant DM. This is called here in this context as the 'main stream' of a DM. For example, the Advaitic DM, in the proposed endeavour, will be dealt without reference to distinct internal shades of Advaita such as that of Bhāmatī or Vivaraṇa. Externally, Gauḍapāda's Advaita, etc., for example, does not concern in its specificities, even if certain essentials of Advaita might be found there too. As such, it needs to be stated that different shades of a system are basically a product of verbalization process regarding the essential metaphysical quality, which base their distinctness of approach on the degree of emphasis and/or perspective and such other adventitious—but nevertheless mostly logical—elements cropping up in the process of understanding the essential core concept. We believe that these shades can be successfully incorporated within the visualized synthesis by further elaboration and explanation, *in principle*.

Sources of Interpretation

The main sources which consist of—or themselves comprise the data for interpretation—are the major Universe-depicting maṇḍalas, or symbols, or

---

[14] Al Quor'anSuura 40: Verse 41: "*Wayaa-Qawmi ma liii'ad-'uukum'ilan-Najaatiwa tad- 'uunaniii'ilan-Naar*" "And, O my people! What aileth me that I call you unto deliverance when you call me unto the Fire?" Pickthall (1989) The terms 'salvation', or '*najat*' ('*furqaan*' is considered as denoting salvation by some authors) in the context of Christianity or Islam, apparently, do not get rigorous philosophical treatment. Of course, the fact that the term '*najat*' is used only once in Quran has been noted by scholars. See Nickel (1994). 'Naja' means 'to save'.

architecture, etc., and their theoretical counterpart, scriptures. The correspondence between the figures and the theory is intuitively presumed. We shall use the term 'maṇḍala/s' to cover all these cases. In using these things as data for interpretation, we do not enter into debate over their historical authenticity, in as much as there is, currently, general acceptation of them as essential part of the respective DM. The truth and validity of these symbols are also presupposed in the endeavour of synthesis. However, the truth and validity of these data can also be gauged from the degree of success of the interpretation and its cohesion with the accepted tenets of the concerned DM. Thus, for example, despite the controversy surrounding the authorship of Saundaryalaharī, i.e. whether or not Śaṅkara is its author, the said authorship may be more or less decided by the success of our interpretation of the Śrī Cakra itself. (Śrī Cakra is yāntric diagram in Saundaryalaharī). Some may consider this kind of evidence as indirect, yet the method suggested here is sufficiently strong and logically persuasive, especially when we have no other better and direct proof available to decide the same (of the data in question), conclusively.[15] The other sources are originals of different religio-philosophical systems. We could also make use of secondary sources including Wikipedia entries, most of which could be cross-checked and are verifiable on their own for their authenticity. Certain Wikipedia data are used here only for analytical purposes without having a direct bearing upon the metaphysics that we propose to speak about. Such entries need not be taken in a historical manner and for that reason their authenticity is inconsequential to the overall nature of present endeavour, except that they provide wider scope for original thinking.

Conclusions

It is useful here to recall Koslowski's objectives: '(1) The justification of religious truth claims, (2) the critique of the justifications and the praxis of the religions, and (3) communication, in the sense of translation and demonstration of commonalities and differences between religions, are the three tasks of the intellectual entry into religion, regardless of whether this entry is called theological or philosophical'.[16] While the proposed synthesis is expected to satisfy—what it considers most crucial, i.e.—the third objective of Koslowski, of communication in the sense of translation and demonstration of commonalities and differences between religions, the other two objectives appear to be based and dependent on the successful completion of

---

[15] "Most of the commentators …ascribe it to Śrī Śaṅkarācārya. But…the hymn ((Saundaryalaharī)) was ascribed by one tradition to Śiva, by another to Śrī Śaṅkarācārya supposed to have been an incarnation of Śiva, and by a third to the Goddess Lalitā… the author of Sudhāvidyotini, fathers it upon one Pravarasena, a prince of the Dramidas… But the fact that Śrī Śaṅkarācārya was a reformer in his days of Śākta cult as of various others, the very important part played by the Śakti worship in all the Advaita-mutts, the identity of soul and the Goddess spoken of in verse 22, the reference to the Vedānta in verse 4, the peculiar style of the hymn and an impartial reference to and an attempt to unify the peculiar doctrines of the mutually opposed sects of Samaya-mārga, and lastly, the unanimous testimony of such writers as Lakshmidhara and Bhāskararāya—all these incline me to believe that the hymn is genuine work of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya." A. M.—Preface to First Edition, 1896, p. ix Saundaryalaharī, (Ed.) Venkatanathacharya (1969).

[16] Koslowski (2001a) p. 3.

meeting the third objective itself. Therefore, it seems that only if the current synthesis can be in place, the justification of truth claims and the critique of justifications and the praxis of religions can be successfully dealt with, by both distinguishing and synthesizing them without obliteration of facts. In this way, metaphysical synthesis of world religions is definitely a distinct possibility.

References

Acharya, D. R. V. (2011). *D.R.V. Acharya's Notes Blog*. http://drvasu.wordpress.com/.

Birnbaum, D. (1988). *Summa metaphysica, Book 1 and Book 2, [God and Evil (1988)] and [God and Good (2008)]. The infinite extra ordinariation paradigm*. Cambridge: Harvard Yard Press.

Blavatsky, H. P. (1888). *The secret doctrine: The synthesis of science, religion and philosophy*. Theosophical University Press, ASC II Edition, Vols. 1, 2, P.O. Box C, Pasadena, CA 91109-7107, USA.

Edwards, P. (Ed.). (1967). *Encyclopaedia of philosophy*. New York: Crowell Collier and MacMillan Inc.

Eliade, M. (Ed.). (1987). *The encyclopedia of religion*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.

Elst, K. (2011). *Salvation: Hindu influence on Christianity*. New Jersey: Infinity Foundation.

Koslowski, P. (Ed.). (2001a). *The concept of god, the origin of the world, and the image of the human in the world religions*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Koslowski, P. (Ed.). (2001b). *The origin and overcoming of evil and suffering in the world religions*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Koslowski, P. (Ed.). (2003). *Philosophy bridging the world religions*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Krishna, D. (1997). *Three conceptions of Indian philosophy in Indian philosophy—A counter perspective, second impression*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Kumar, U. A. V. (2015). *On the metaphysical meaning of major religious symbols for a globalized world, artificial intelligence and society* (Vol. 30, pp. 147–165). London: Springer.

Nickel, G. (1994). Islam and salvation: Some on-site observations, Direction (Winnipeg), MB, spring, 1994, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 3–16.

Pickthall, M. M. (Tr.) (1989). Holy Qur'an (or The Holy Qur'aan), Published by Abdul Moin for Islamic Book Service, 2241, Kucha Chelan, Darya Ganj, N. Delhi—110 002, First Edition 1989.

Samvid. (1987). Prabodhasudhākara, Samata Books, 10 Kamraj Bhavan, 573, Mount Road, Madras.

Sastry, R. A. (1980). Viṣṇusahasranāma with Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya, The Adyar Library and Research Center, Adyar, Madras-600020.

Tīrtha, B. (1983). Vedic metaphysics. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 110 007, First edition 1965.

Venkatanathacharya, N. S. (Ed.). (1969). *Soundaryalaharī of Śaṅkarācārya with the Commentary of Lakṣmīdhara, Bhāvanopaniṣat with the commentary of Bhāskararāya and Devī Pañcastavi*. Mysore: Oriental Research Institute, University of Mysore.