

RELIGIOUS LIVING: A MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: In the present study, the researcher has tried to look at religion from various perspectives. Religion is a practice that brings man into a relationship with reality. If we neglect reality we cannot comprehend the purpose of our existence. Thinkers and philosophers have been expounding on this aspect ever since man began questioning the purpose of human existence. This article explores religion from the perspectives of its need, origin, different avatars and experiences, medicine and of psychology. It also concludes that religions differ in their concept of God, religion is but a reflection of our finitude and also an urge of the divinity present in human beings, and how it might have been abused by some practitioners.

Keywords: Religion – purpose – existence – philosophers – human existence – questioning – need – origin – different avatars – experiences – medicine – psychology - finitude - urge of the divinity.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is personal and changeable. Religions are many – scriptures based and primal. Primal religions are generally the traditions of nonliterate people as tribes that do not depend on scriptures or written teachings as do most other religions. Dharma is universal and applicable to any religion for all time. Demand for God proves the reality of deity in the same way as hunger is a proof of the existence of food. Religious fundamentals are self-sacrifice and compassion. The teaching of religion is neither demolition of a temple/church nor is it forcible conversion.

Religion is the art of living happily in all circumstances by a proper training of the mind. It provides the essential requirements to humanity. It teaches self reliance and self control and gives solace to suffering.[3]

Edward B Tylor in “Primitive Culture” defines Religion as “the belief in Spiritual Beings”. James George Frazer says in “The Golden Bough”, “By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life”

Psychologist William James while delivering a speech on “The Varieties of Religious Experience”, delineates Religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.” Émile Durkeim in “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life”, tries to explain a religion “as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them”. Religion is also termed as “the self-validation of a society by means of myth and ritual.”[2]

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THE NEED FOR RELIGION

In order to understand the need for religion, we need to understand the difference between religion and spirituality first. We are undoubtedly spiritual beings. When we die, the so-called spirit goes out of our body. As long as we live, we are connected to the people, to trees, to birds, to animals and to all non-living things of the universe through our emotions, our senses and our thoughts. If we try, we can feel connected to the universe. In order to reach a higher level of that realization of connectedness to the universe, we need to train our mind. Religion provides that training through rituals, rites, beliefs and practices.

Om Shri Paramatmane Namaha explained the difference between religion and spirituality as the following: “The real difference between religion and spirituality is that a religion is a system of belief in a higher, unseen, controlling power along with certain rites for worship. Spirituality is an awakening to the inner reality of one’s being, Spirit or Self, and a longing to be in communion and union with it through experience. This means a total transformation of the whole being of the individual. Spirituality emphasises that you can experience your own spirit. To be spiritual means to rise above the temptations of the body and the senses and to realise the final Truth. To be religious means to observe rituals and rites. All religions have their specific rituals and rites.”[5]

THE BIRTH OF RELIGION

The origin of religion can be traced to the days when man was a hunter and gatherer even before civilization started. His life was led by the whims and fancies of nature. He was awed by the forces of nature such as rain, thunder, lightning, fire, storm and the Sun. Because his life was so controlled by these forces and he found himself helpless at the wrath of nature, he began praying to the natural forces so that they would not harm him. He began appeasing these forces of God with rituals and rites.

To Charles Darwin, the origin of religious belief was no mystery. “As soon as the important faculties of the imagination, wonder, and curiosity, together with some power of reasoning, had become partially developed, man would naturally crave to understand what was passing around him, and would have vaguely speculated on his own existence,” he wrote in “The Descent of Man”. [6]

Barrett and others see the roots of religion in our sophisticated social cognition. Humans, they say, have a tendency to see signs of “agents”—minds like our own—at work in the world. “We have a tremendous capacity to imbue even inanimate things with beliefs, desires, emotions, and consciousness, . . . and this is at the core of many religious beliefs,” says a Yale University psychologist.[6]

When did religious beliefs begin? A likely place to find out is the archaeological record, but inferring “religion” from ancient objects and practices can be a tall

order. Many researchers take the use of symbols as a clue to budding spirituality. As far back as 100,000 years ago, people at the South African site of Blombos Cave incised pieces of ochre with geometric designs, creating the first widely recognized signs of symbolic behavior (Science, 30 January, p. 569). Although it's difficult to equate enigmatic lines on a chunk of ochre with a belief system, researchers agree that such use of symbols is a prerequisite for religion, and some argue that religious beliefs must have existed by this time.[6]

DIFFERENT RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

The subject of religion has as many beliefs, feelings, and perceptions around it as there are people on the planet. In a way, everyone has their own religion, even if they subscribe to a religion that many others do. This is because everyone has their own interpretations of the religion they subscribe to. If you were to ask followers of any given religion what their beliefs are, or what parts of the religion they agree or disagree with, they would all say something a little different from each other. Many people adopt the things they like in a particular religion, and ignore the things they don't believe in, even if this is done on an unconscious level.[7]

Because individual interpretations differ, Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad, both of Jewish roots, preached ideas that appealed to some section of population and their followers founded religions Christianity and Islam respectively. Similarly, Jainism and Buddhism originated in India, probably offshoots of the Hindu ideologies. Sikhism was another religion from India. It was founded by Guru Nanak, belonging to a Hindu warrior clan. When there were no interactions between people of different regions, they developed their own religions, depending on their perceptions and perspectives about the nature of world and life.

Other important religions of the world are Atheism, Bahai faith, Chinese Religion, Confucianism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism among many others.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

William James was not a theologian but a psychologist. He presents religious experience from his perspective. A psychologist looks at various mental aspects of human life hence he considered it appropriate to look at the religious aspects that drive a man to do what he does. He is convinced that the right place to the religious constitution of human is religious literature produced by articulate and finally self-conscious men. One such work cited by him as instructive as well as easily understandable is called the "documents humains" (James, 1902).

There is a great distinction between the religious propensities and their philosophic significance. In books on logic, distinction is made between two orders of inquiry concerning anything. First, what is the nature of it? How did it come about? What is its constitution, origin and history? And second, what is its importance,

meaning or significance, now that it is here? The answer to the one question is given in an “existential judgement” or proposition of value what the Germans call a *Werthurtheil*, or what we may, if we like, denominate a “spiritual judgement”. Neither judgement can be deduced immediately from the other (James 1902: 13). They proceed from diverse intellectual preoccupations and the mind combines them only by making them first separately and then adding them together.

We may not find spiritual judgement as scientific as it supposes that the holy scripture has been composed automatically and not by the free will of the writer. Whereas when we look at a religious scripture - that is a record of the inner experience of great - souled persons wrestling with the crises of their fate and it can be termed as existential judgement - that we might find more palatable. Dissecting a religious experience purely on biological and psychological experience may sound as if one were treating such a sublime subject in a simple and straight forward manner. But to arrive at a cogent view of religion that would be a good starting point.

The religion of a person has been decided for him by others, communicated to him by tradition, determined to fix forms by imitation and retain by habit. In order for us to be handed over a religion, there must have been some point in time before us it should have originated. We must make a search rather for the original experiences which were the pattern-setters to all this mass of suggested feeling and imitated conduct. These experiences we can only find in individual for whom religion exists not as a dull habit but as an acute fever . But such individuals are ‘geniuses’ in the religious line; and like many other geniuses who have brought forth fruits effective enough for commemoration in the pages of biography, such religious geniuses have often shown symptoms of nerves in stability. Even more perhaps than other kinds of genius; religious leaders have been subject to abnormal psychical visitations. Invariably they have been creatures of exalted emotional sensibility. Often they have led a discordant inner life, and suffered from melancholy during a part of their career. They have known no measures, been liable to obsessions and fixed ideas and frequently they have fallen into trances, heard voices, seen visions, and presented all sorts of peculiarities which are ordinarily classed as pathological features in their career which in turn have helped to give them their religious authority and influences.[2]

MEDICAL EXPERTS VIEW ON RELIGION

Medical materialists approach is to prove their predecessors wrong by using the criterion of origin in a destructive instead of an accreditive way. Dr. Maudsley rebutter of the notion of a supernatural religion on grounds of origin says “not its origin, but “*the way in which it works on the whole*”[4]. How it originated is not important. Roots of the origin is inaccessible. Practice is the only sure evidence. He intended to deal it with scientifically.

A growing body of scientific research suggests connections between religion, spirituality, and both mental and physical health. The findings are particularly strong in patients with severe or chronic illnesses who have stressful psychologic and social changes, as well as existential struggles related to meaning and purpose. Recent studies indicate that religious beliefs influence medical decisions, such as the use of chemotherapy and other life-saving treatments, and at times may conflict with medical care. Spirituality is an area that makes many physicians uncomfortable, since training in medical schools and continuing medical education programs are limited. Not only do most physicians lack the necessary training, they worry about spending additional time with patients and overstepping ethical boundaries. While these concerns are valid, each can be addressed in a sensible way. Taking a spiritual history, supporting the patient's beliefs, and orchestrating the fulfillment of spiritual needs are necessary for physicians to provide medical care that is sensitive to the way many patients understand and cope with medical illness.[8]

A PSYCHOLOGIST'S PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGION

Religious expressions are in essence human's inner feelings. Religious or non religious expression has their origin in organic dysfunction. Conclusion drawn from medical materialism is easy but drawing a spiritual judgement from psychophysical is illogical and inconsistent. We do certain things as it gives pleasure immediately or it promises to give pleasure in the future. Whatever serves us better is the truth for us. Serviceability and inner experience may not agree. Spiritual judgment will not come to everybody in the same degree at all times.[2]

Religion can not be defined in a single dimension. It is very complex. The possible causes of religious sentiment – it could be dependence, fear, sexual life and feeling of the infinite and so on. Books talk of religion as a single entity (feeling) but it is not like that. Like all other emotions religious emotion is separate and distinguishable from others.[2]

Personal religion is a fundamental thing. In the more personal branch of religion it is, on the contrary, the inner experiences of man himself which forms the center of interest, his conscience, his deserts, his helplessness, his incompleteness. The relation goes direct from heart to heart, from soul to soul, between man and his maker. Worship and sacrifice, procedures for working on the dispositions of the deity, theology and ceremony and ecclesiastical organization are the essentials of the religion in the institutional branch_“Fetishism and magic that preceded religion”.[2]

Feelings, acts and experiences in relation to God when man in his solitude that is called “divine”. The relation may be either moral, physical or ritual, it is that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow. For Buddhist, Buddha is a God

but their system is atheistic. Emerson talks about being perfect (ideal). He does not need laws. If he is pure in heart then he is religious. The Emersonian idea is that he is more literary than philosophic. He says that if we do good, we can not escape from remuneration. If we don't call the inner experiences as religious experiences it will be absurd. According to the William James Buddhistic ideas are pessimistic and Emersonian ideas are optimistic. Whatever he considers the divine is that which comes from his experience.[2]

ABUSE OF RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS

While religions might have originated for finding a path to that sacred union with the Supreme power, or for helping people seek and find truth, individuals of rigid mindsets and those with a hunger for power and money abused it to meet their own personal ends

From the outset, we must recognize that 'there is an extreme variation in religious experience'. Therefore, how people experience God will impact how they understand war and violence. John Crossan, one of the world's leading authorities on Christianity, concludes that our understanding of war and violence is dependant upon the 'character' of our God. But there is room to doubt that, at the end of the day, the difference in the tendency of states to go to war depends on which religious tradition primarily influences them. The better indicators may be the prominence of religion in the life of the state or armed opposition group and the existence of just war doctrines.[9]

In approaching this complex subject, it is important to understand where it sits in our social and political order. First, we must recognize that armed conflict is rarely, if ever, solely about religion or religious differences. Although armed conflicts may take on religious overtones, their genesis is found in a complex matrix of crisscrossing and mutually exacerbating factors such as economics, politics, resources, ethnicity and identity, power struggles, inequality, oppression, and other historical grievances. Rabbi Marc Gopin, a faculty member at Tufts' Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, asserts, 'disputes that appear to be religious in nature are also rooted in a tangle of local and national struggles over power, land poverty and jobs'.[9]

Moreover, religion 'always contributes to conflicts, but it's too simplistic to say that they're either about religion or not about religion'. Second, whether or not armed conflict is inspired by political (or religious) motivations, war always has moral consequences. Its perpetrators do not just use religion to manipulate opinion or action of others. In most cases, the choice of resort to large scale deadly violence is based on the religious convictions, no matter how distorted these may be, of the leaders and the followers. It may be impossible to separate religion from politics, or vice versa. Neither is isolated from the other, and therefore, neither goes

unaffected by the other. There is no gainsaying the fact that the many crusades fought by the Spanish and modern day religious terrorisms have their own political intentions.[9]

CONCLUSION

What is a God like quality? The “godlike” quality make us a religious person. God is the primary being and he is the power and from him there is no escape. Separate reaction is not a religion. Total reaction upon life is a religion. Total reactions (religious reactions) are different from casual reactions and religious attitudes are different from usual or professional attitudes. There are two different reactions like strenuous or careless, devout or blasphemous, gloomy or exultant, about life. The totalities of these reactions are called religion. Some reactions are non-religious. But we have to look at the totality of it.[2]

Voltaire had good spirit. His attitude seems to be ‘who cares?’ and the other word is “all is vanity”. If we surrender to the feelings we shall be with the truth. Don’t be serious, treat everything with a smile. For ordinary men ‘religion’ means a serious state of mind. It favors gravity, not rudeness; it says “hush” to all vain chatter and smart wit. Religion is sometimes hostile to light irony and it is also against heavy grumbling and complaint. In many religions they suffer and that feeling is religion. Suffering is religion and it will lead to purging. Snicking and screaming is not a religion. It is a little about seriousness. One should not complain about life. Divine is all about solemnity. Feelings can be divine and what can be religious? The state of mind can be religious and so the reactions can be total but the boundaries are always vague.

“I accept the universe” motto ,understood that some people accept it happily but some accept it half-heartedly. Dull submission is left far behind, and a mood of welcome, which may fill any place between cheerful serenity and enthusiastic gladness takes prominence. Some people lead an active life and some lead a passive life. This is the difference between stoicism and the passionate happiness. Actions happen gradually. Everything is gradual whatever the action or reaction. That critical point will be embraced by religion. Marcus Aurelius a great philosopher and emperor said “If gods care not for me or my children, here is a reason for it”. Accept everything and nothing is strange. God may be displeased with the world but don’t do anything that is disagreeable.

Ascetics renounce the pleasure and they will be free because they don’t have any desires. Religious experience should be distinct. We have on the one hand philosophical minds and on another, religious minds and the moralist. For religious people effort is not required. But being moralistic takes effort of volition. Religion is as illogical as love, hope, ambition, jealous, like every other instinctive eagerness and impulse. Religious feeling is an extreme addition to the range of life. Morality is

a religious part. Religious people are moral. But moral people need not be religious. Man has worshipped everything on earth, including himself stones, hills, flowers, trees, wells, ocean and animals. He has worshiped everything between earth and heaven. The Supreme being is one, learned people call him by different names (Rig Ved)[1].

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