

The Concept of Religion

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ABSTRACT

The proper study of mankind is man. And the study of man can never be complete unless it includes the study of religion. Religion has been with man for thousands of years and has become a social institution. It is a common tie of society to build up the world peace. Religion is a necessary aspect of human life and it regulates one's way of life. Religion builds up spiritual life and it is the ideal ground of morality. No moral progress and spiritual attainment is possible without religion. It helps to unfold all that is best in man. It inspired him, guided him and took him to the light he has reached. The inner aspect of religion is distinguished from the external aspect of religion. The real essence of religion can be discovered from the inner aspect. Religion is a mental quest which helps man to realize the infinite.

Keywords: Religion.

Religion plays a very important role in the history of human civilization. From the earliest times religion has occupied a central place in human life. The true history of man is the history of religion. The religion has a widespread, impressive influence in the life of human being. Religion embraces the whole of existence and the history of religion resumes the entire history of human development.

Religion has manifested itself in a baffling variety of forms, including much that is crude, futile and ignoble, as well as much that is noble, idealistic and conducive to human well-being. Religion is not a static matter. It has passed through a perplexing changes and evolutions in the history of mankind. Religion is a growing and dynamic

thing. Religion is a growth and development and God is a being, nothing greater than him can be conceived. According to E.B. Tylor, Religion is the belief in spiritual beings.¹ According to Max Muller, religion is a mental faculty or disposition which enables man to apprehend the infinite.² Religion is the worship of spiritual beings from a sense of need. G. Galloway states that, religion is man's faith in a power beyond himself whereby he seeks to satisfy emotional needs and gain stability in life, and which he expresses in acts of worship and service.³ According to this definition religion is religious consciousness of human being. This definition states the cognitive, affective and conative level of human mind.

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According to Hegel; religion is the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature as absolute mind. Religion is man's faith in a supernatural power and to satisfy this power or establish a relationship with this power he organizes worship and service.⁴ A religious person identifies this power as 'God' and he believes in the existence of God in this world. But in the present time some people establish different views. According to their opinion, the God of religion does not create mankind but mankind creates the God or the theory of God is created by human imagination. The God is just a belief originated from human imagination, God has no real existence. This human imagination is not eternal and does not exist before the existence of human being. God can persist even as an imagined entity only as long as human beings exist. God is not the creator and the ultimate ruler of the universe. God is a fleeting ripple of imagination of man. The religious consciousness is conferred in the human nature. So, the root of religion exists in the human nature and not in the external source. When man feels helpless and totally distressed, when he feels that it is not possible to lead his life by his own power, only then in that weak moment his life he naturally expects the help of some external power. The primitive people at the time of destruction and devastation in their lives seek the help of some supernatural power to protect him.

The conclusion of the psychologists and anthropologists is that the religion is originated from the basic need of human life – the struggle for existence. The life of the primitive man was disrupted by various ways, e.g. by hostile nature, involved in danger by the attack of some ferocious animal. The primitive man felt that by his limited and small power

it was impossible to win over the calamities of opposite power to protect his life. So, in that helpless moment he expected divine help from the outside world and imagined that a super human power was existed behind the strong natural objects and facts. By worshipping the power he prayed help from the imagined power. By this way the different doctrines have been originated, e.g. fetishism, Animism, Ghost-worship doctrine, Totemism etc. By this process the Tribal Religion was formed. In the process of the development of social-evolution the various tribal groups were correlated with each other and constituted 'Nation' and at a time the Tribal Religion was transformed into National Religion.

In this stage human beings imagined various types of Goddess. In this stage humanity was adopted upon the Goddess. Some National Gods with human virtues are Easter of sumer, Emon of Thebes, Geova of Israel, Osiris of Egypt, Jews of Greece and the Vedic deities like Indra, Varuna, Agni etc

Upto 1000 B.C. to 300 B.C. this scopes of religion is called 'Golden Era'. Karl Jespers called this period as 'Axial Period'.

At that period, different saints were appeared in different countries of the world. They connected morality with the traditional religion. They simplified the righteous religious duties and doctrines and preached these message to the common people. At that period the Ehudi religious preacher like Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah declared that they could hear the God's message and they realized what is good or bad things of human life according to the intension of Gods. These religious preachers related morality with religion and made free the

religion from the existing superstitions. The famous religious preacher of this era were Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Confucius, Buddha, Mahavira etc.

According to G. Galloway, the names by which we know the various 'Religion' today were in fact (with the exception of Islam) invented in the 18th Century. Before that they were imposed by the influence of the west. None had thought of himself belonging to one of the competing systems of belief concerning which it was possible to ask 'which of these systems is the true one'?⁵ But from the age of enlightenment the question arises in the human mind – which is true, Buddhism or Christianity or Islam? But this type of question about religion is derived from the lack of knowledge about religion.

From the above discussion it is clear that the main root of our religious faith is the feeling of helplessness of human beings and his strong wish of struggle for existence. His desire for existence and developed livelihood was hidden in his own nature. From this natural desire he imagined a super natural power around this world. Religion is nothing but religious belief of human being to maintain his life. It may have social value, but it can not be determined as true or false.

Since the time unknown, religion is closely associated with man. So, the question arises: What element exists in the inner level of human mind which has made man associated with religion? What was present in the mental nature of human being for which primitive men feel satisfied through their religious belief, religious behavior in spite of different changes and evolution of human society? According to psychology there are three types of actions – thinking, feeling and willing through which we come to know the mind. Every experience and behavior of

men is determined by these three actions of mind. On the basis of the superiority of these three actions there are three different theories in the field of religious experience and behavior – Cognitive Theory, Affective Theory and Conative Theory.

Cognitive Theory:

According to this theory the main root of the origin and development of religion is the thinking of human beings. There is no contribution of 'feeling' and 'willing' in the field of the origin and development of religion. Religion is purely rational. Religion is evolved out from the pure reason of primitive men and in the later period the wickedness of man deformed the religion. Man is a rational animal. Though he have different types of mental activities by man is mainly thoughtful and all his activities is determined by his thought or intelligence. According to Hegel, religion is the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature as absolute mind. Religion is the divine spirit's knowledge of itself through the mediation of finite spirits.

Affective Theory:

Somebody says that 'feeling' is the most important mental factor in the scope of the origin and development of religion. The primitive men through their direct intention realized a super human power behind this mysterious world. This direct intention is the main basis of religion. The supporters of this theory state that 'feeling' is the main root of religious consciousness. We cannot detach feelings from the highly improved religion, because if religious consciousness is excluded from feeling then we cannot regard this consciousness as 'religious'. If the attitude of human beings towards God is not overwhelmed by emotions and

feelings, if this attitude is not related to peace and satisfaction then it is not acceptable as religious attitude. According to Schleiermacher and W. James, 'Religion' is the absolute dependence on God and 'feeling' is the deeper source of religion.

Conative Theory:

According to Ritschlianism and Pragmatism the conative and behavioural attitude of man is the main basis of religion. 'Will' is the primary and main object of human live. So, religion is elevated from the 'will' or 'desire' of human beings. According to Ritschl religion is raised in order to solve the contradiction between man's impulse to maintain his independence and his sense of limitation as a part of his nature.⁶ Sabatier stated that men only received failure and pain from his struggle for existence with the opposite nature by his limited power and then he took shelter in his religious belief to protect himself by his irrepressible will or desire.⁷ Leuba in his "The Psychological Origin and the Nature of Religion" declared that 'Will' is the primary and primitive activities of human mind. Without 'Will' there is no thinking. Thinking is meaningless without aim or purpose. Thinking is no existence without will and it is a weapon of will. So, 'Will' or 'desire' is the primitive mental activities of men and from these activities of primitive men religion is originated.⁸ From the above discussion it is clear that the origin and development of the religion is not fully explained by any one of these three mental activities. These three mental activities played a vital role to flourish the religion and religious consciousness. So, at the same time the religion and religiousness is cognitive, affective and conative.

Religion is the oldest human pursuit. There are two forms of religion, – 'individual' and 'social'. In

the individual form of religion an individual tries to establish communion with the divine soul. In the social form of religion several people form one religious group and each of them binds together in matter of spiritual beliefs and religious practices, e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam etc. These religions have two common features:

1. Each living religion of the world has some particular faith in regard to the world and life situation as a whole.
2. In the light of such faith of man each living religion gives directions for a specific way of life for its followers

From this point of view every religion of the world is a specific way of life passed on certain specific beliefs in connection with the world and life situation as a whole.

As for example, Buddhism does not believe in God but it has spiritualistic outlook and from this point of view it depicts a specific way of life. On the other hand, Christianity believes in a spiritual reality i.e., God and from this spiritualistic belief it also depicts a specific way of life. This is similar in the case of all other prevailing religion of the world and for this reason all of them are called "religion". The living religions of the world are Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism etc. These religions have some special features as mentioned below:

Hinduism:

- (a) Hinduism is a complex religion. It is polytheistic, monotheistic, monistic and atheistic – all at the same time. There are various kinds of beliefs and practices amongst its followers.
- (b) Hinduism has no one definite religious text. Vedas, Upanisads, Ramayana, Mahābhārata,

Purānas, Bhagavad!itā are sacred texts of Hinduism.

- (c) In Hinduism, both the theist and atheist except the Cārvāka, believe that behind the material world there is a spiritual realm which is eternal.
- (d) Hinduism believes that the essential nature of man is spiritual and his soul is immortal.

Jainism:

- (a) It is an atheistic religion, believing in no God behind the World-order. But the Jains accept the Tirthankaras as their God.
- (b) Man's soul is immortal. The nature of the soul is infinite power, infinite knowledge, infinite faith and infinite bliss.
- (c) Moksa can be attained by right faith, right knowledge and right conduct.

Buddhism:

- (a) Buddhism is a humanistic religion without God. Its main aim is the liberation from the sufferings of mankind.
- (b) Buddhism refute the authority of the Vedas and Vedic ritualism.
- (c) The main essence of Buddhism is the pursuit of the eight fold disciplines and the belief in the four noble truths.

Zoroastrianism:

- (a) Zoroastrianism believes in only one almighty God.
- (b) Zoroastrianism believes in a life after death. The righteous acts of man are sent to heaven and the evil deeds of men are sent to hell.
- (c) Zoroastrianism believes that men must be inculcated good thought, good word and good deed.

Judaism:

- (a) Judaism is an ethical religion giving out moral

rules of conduct and a way of life.

- (b) It believes in the immortality of soul and a life after death.
- (c) It belief in the unity and oneness of the universal creator. Religion promotes righteousness and gives one true happiness, peace and stability.

Christianity:

- (a) Christianity believes in only one God. God is an internal trinity– God the father, God the son and God the holy spirit.
- (b) It believes that the soul is eternal and there is a life after death.
- (c) A sincere moral life of love is sufficient for man's liberation without any rituals and sacrifices.

Islam:

- (a) Islam believes in one and only one God, called 'Allah'. It is a monotheistic religion.
- (b) It believes in a life after death. Heaven and Hell are the permanent home of the righteous and the evil doers – respectively.
- (c) It believes in perfect purity, service of humanity and brotherhood of mankind.

In the above discussion some of the important beliefs and practices of different religions are outlines. It is clear that various differences and similarity are present amongst the religions. The different religions have come out of different traditions and against different backgrounds. So, differences are present in them. But besides this the people of different traditions have some common feelings, ideas and sentiments amongst them. So, there are some similarities between them. Therefore, there is no cause for quarrel on account of the differences. Above all religion in one sense is a means of satisfying the hunger of the soul

attaining liberation from the strives and strains of the material world. The people of different traditions try to satisfy this hunger in their own different ways.

Religion accompanies man for thousands of years and it regulates, in some way or other man's way of life. All moral progress and spiritual attainment is possible through religion. Religion is a principle of unification and harmonization. Religion is the art of living through right action and to lead a life of peace and happiness. It purities one's mind. So much as one can be engaged in good thoughts, words and deeds. Religion is the straight path of truth that takes people ever forward to improvement in their mental, physical, spiritual and material life. Religion is a forward much to eternity and divinity.

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1. D. Miall Edward, The Philosophy of Religion, p.86.
2. *Ibid.*
3. George Galloway, The Philosophy of Religion, p.189.
4. D. Miall Edward, The Philosophy of Religion, p.86.
5. George Galloway, The Philosophy of Religion, p.111.
6. *Ibid.*, p.76.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p.78.

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