

## Social Significance Of Religion: Religion And Social Life

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### ABSTRACT:

Religion in one sense is a matter of individual faith, but its social significance cannot be ignored. Religion manifests itself in society in many ways. It shapes the domestic, economic and political institutions. Throughout the human history, especially in primitive society, religious rites are performed on many occasions as birth, initiation, marriage, death, hunting, agriculture etc. Religion involves thought and activity as well as beliefs and values. Religion is not simply worship or rituals. From the standpoint of social philosophy, religion should be regarded as meaning the 'spirit of devotion to the perfection of human life'. The writers on 'Dharmasastra' meant by dharma or religion is not a creed or religion, but a mode of code of life or a code of conduct, which regulated a man's work and activities as a member of society and as an individual, and was intended to bring about the gradual development of a man to enable him to reach what was deemed to be the goal of human existence.

KEY WORDS: Religion, Faith, Society and Individual, Primitive society etc.

### INTRODUCTION:

No proliferate society has been found to be absolutely without religion. Religion is a universal phenomenon. It is permanently embedded in man's psychology. Thus the question of historical

origin of religion hardly makes any sense. We may only enquire into the subjective origin of religion. To the primitive man the external natural forces were beyond his comprehension and control. He naturally felt helpless. His premature mind had tried to soar in the wings of imagination. He imagined the existence of many deities and thought each of them to be in control over the natural forces. Religious consciousness has its root in the human attempt at understanding and conquering the natural forces.

It is important to note that Religion cannot be exclusively placed on any special faculty. Religion resides in the whole of man's psychological powers oriented towards the Divine. The intimate aspiration of the human heart towards the higher forms of life is the basis of the religion.

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#### **NATURE OF RELIGION:**

The term 'religion' has been derived from the word 'religere' which signifies bond. Etymologically, therefore, religion means a bond which unites the human life as well as the social life. Religion has been variously defined by various thinkers.

The famous philosopher Comte identified religion with humanity. Religion of Humanity is a religion without God. But this supposition goes against the whole tradition of mankind which has always thought of God as the central element of religion. Such movements as the 'Religion of Humanity' of Comte and the early Buddhism may be called ethical or at most crypto-religious movements.

Human life has three main aspects-the vegetative, the animal and the more characteristically human. The human aspect, which is rational, modifies and regulates the other two. In social philosophy, we are concerned with the ways in which man consciously chooses between the impulses and needs. The purely human aim shows itself in the pursuit of what is true, what is beautiful and what is good. Religion mainly consists in the manifestations of truth, beauty and good. We are primarily interested in the manifestations of the ideal of beauty in our social activities, but the other aspects cannot be altogether ignored.

Religion is hardly distinguishable from the morality. Religion is concerned with truth and beauty. Morality in its highest sense is also concerned with truth and beauty. Pursuit of truth and beauty is not simply the manifestation of morality, but the manifestation of religious consciousness also. But this identification of higher morality with religion seems to exclude the worship of nature and the conception of an 'intelligible cosmos' from religion. Morality means the pursuit of everything that is true and beautiful, whereas in religion they are thought of as eternally realized in the nature of things. Morality is, in some degree, conventional. But religion aims more definitely at what is absolute and complete. Religion combines the true, the beautiful and the good in a way in which they are not combined by science or art or by morality.

### **Social significance of Religion: Religion and social life:**

Religion, in one sense, is a matter of individual's faith, but its social significance cannot be ignored. Religion manifests itself in society in many ways. It shapes the domestic, economic and political institutions. All throughout the human history, especially in primitive society, religious rites are performed on many occasions as birth, initiations, marriage death, hunting, agriculture etc.

The famous thinkers Dawson and Toyenbee believe that religion is the central element in the life of civilization whose very existence will be endangered if Religion fails. Dr. Radhakrishnan also opines that regard for spiritual values, the love of truth and beauty, belief in the brotherhood of man are the qualities which will save modern civilization. Mahatma Gandhi also described religion as a force that keeps one true in the face of greatest adversity.

In this context it is difficult to make sense of the Marxist slogan "Religion is the opium of the masses" as a general proposition. It is, of course, true that the powerful influence of religion has been used by some cunning people to keep the masses in subjugation. But for particular cases one cannot make a generalization. If religious feeling has been used as an instrument for subjection, it has more often than not been the decisive factor in social progress, reform and even rebellion.

The religious institutions, viz, churches, temples, mosques etc. play an important part in the social life. Religious institutions. In many

cases, become the guardians of various rituals and formalities, due to which the social role of religious institutions are lost sight of.

Rituals have a great social significance. Many human relations harbor a religious element. The relation of a devoted child to its parents, of an enthusiastic patriot to its country may have a common tone which can be described as religious. The religious rites, through performed individually, inculcate a feeling of brotherhood among the followers, because the same rites are performed in the same manner by all of them. These religious rites are also significant from the individual's standpoint. When the individual feels himself alone and in danger, he derives strength and consolation from his participation in the religious rites. Religious sentiments go a great way in the adjustment of the individuals to the external environments, which makes for the solidarity of the social structure.

Religion will have no place in the socialistic societies. For example if we see that it had not been possible to banish religion even in soviet Russia. The people of Russia used to visit every day the Lenin mausoleum to pay their homage to the departed. The paying of homage is a manifestation of religious consciousness. To these people Lenin was the symbol of God. They have discovered all their values realized or actualized in Lenin. What was this attitude of the Russian people but religion? Instances are not rare where man in the complete luxury of life has been discontent and left behind the luxury in the search of the absolute values of life.

In our society Religion has two main roles- the interest that it satisfies and the regulating influence that it exercises on collective behavior. The deepest craving that religion quenches in man is the wish for cosmic harmony, and the desire that he has of adjusting himself to a more perfect order in which is desire for immortality and union with the Infinite will be fully satisfied.

Besides this, religion satisfies the moral interest. The social aspect of religion unites man to his fellow beings. The bond that unites man to God, strengthens also the bond of unity existing between man and man. This has been aptly described by Gisbert as "the basis of brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God." Moreover religion through its institutions viz, church, temple, mosque etc. establishes a centre of human fellowship. Persons of most diverse categories unite in this religious institutions to pray

and worship. Sometimes, these religious associations collect funds and work for the poor and needy. They also organize various functions for educational and recreational activities. These activities performed by the religious associations are not always of a religious nature. But it cannot be denied that they are directly or indirectly inspired by religious ideals.

### **Religions as a source of Morality:**

Religion is a source of morality. Every society has certain moral ideals and moral ideals are rooted in religion. They give stable form to our social behavior and conduct. Thus, religion is the basis of out of our ideal social conduct. The society needs religion for the maintenance of moral law and order.

Religion has played an important part in the social development. Religion has saved the human society and civilization from evil influences and has been a potent factor in the development of society and civilization. In the preliterate society, religion was the only cementing bond among the members. Their beliefs and activities were regulated by religion. In the medieval period religion was the principal and greatest cohesive force in society. The whole of Europe came to be known as 'christendom' at this period. The various social welfare works were the sacred duties of the religious institutions. The church was mainly responsible for the development of political consciousness in the citizens and for the establishment of national state. The role of the church in making the citizens conscious of their social rights and responsibilities cannot be denied the Reformation /movement, though religion I origin and character, had its political and social significance. In India also the religions preached by chaitanyadeva, Guru Nanak, Kabir, Ramdas and other turned the static society into a dynamic one and helped in the establishment of a unified society by forging a bond between the members of different castes. The face of the modern India to a great extent been shaped by the religious consciousness. The Brahma society, the Arya Society, the Ramakrishna Mission and other like associations contribute to the development of the society through religion. They have helped for the eradication of the evil of society, viz. casteism, early marriage etc. which so long kept the society divided among itself.

There re tinkers who consider religion as a disruptive force rather than cohesive. According to them, religion is the cause of quarrels

and internecine warfare's. Crusades and various other religious warfares as also the communal troubles have been cited as evidence in support of their opinion. But in these cases, it is not religion, which is to blame. Religion is not simply the ceremonies and rituals. Religion is not simply dogmas. When we dispute over dogmas we are divided. But when we take to the life of worship and contemplation, we are brought together. All religions are fundamentally one. The bond between man and man is spiritual. We are all brothers under the fatherhood of one God. "The recognition of this fundamental unity should make possible a certain measure of co-operation on a common basis for the good of mankind as a whole.' Hence, the role of Religion as a social cohesive force cannot be ignored in our society in present day condition.

#### **Proper role of Religion in our present society:**

Religion exercises an important influence on the lives of man in primitive society. Religion and religious institutions occupied a unique place in primitive societies. But in the present society the influence of religion appears to have diminished to a great extent. Religion seems to have practically no hold over the life of the members of the modern society and especially the sectarian religions do not appear, to be of much avail in the present age. We are living in a society which has been molded to new outlook due to the progress of science and industries. Industrial revolution has revolutionized the thoughts and ideas of modern men. The hold of religion has, in this context slackened. Men are led to think of religion not so much as cohesive force but as the source of conflicts and disruptions. Many a social evil has been considered to be the outcome of religion. Religion has, therefore been considered a superfluity, both in the life of individual and in that of society. The allegiance to religion is to be severed if we want to usher in this world a society based on universal brotherhood.

This attitude towards religion springs from our ignorance of the real nature of religion. This misconception is due to the identification of the ceremonies, formalities and dogmas with religion. The religious cults that we find in the modern world have many elements of superstitions, dogmatism, fanaticism, conservatism, hypocrisy and so on. The religious codes are above criticism and they demand unconditional submission on the part of

the individuals. Thus religious institutions have been found to be opposed to the forces working for the development of the society. Thoughtful persons have, therefore, been disgusted with the authoritarian and conservative role of the religious institutions, and consequently been losing faith in religion. Decadence of religion has been made more so by the rapid progress of modern science and growing influence of 'Humanism'.

Whatever may be the forces acting against religion, we believed that the present world needs religion. Science and religion are not opposed to each other. There is so opposition between science and religion. Religion is necessary, if the scientist is to understand more perfectly the nature of man and his universe. True religion must subject its truth to comparison with scientific truth, but it will not surrender its own specific intuition or moral insights. There is also no opposition between humanism and religion. Mere service to humanity and society is not enough. The necessity of morality, sociality and also humanism cannot be accounted for without any reference to divine power pervading the whole universe.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Man does not want to live only, he wants to live nobly. Man finds, in his physical states and in the world around, a mysterious fervor. He wants to probe into this mysterious veil and discover the real meaning of his existence and life. Human life has no meaning if it is not inspired by an unquenchable yearning for contact with the eternal. And this is religion. By changing the face of society one cannot change the nature of man. There must come a change in the nature of man which will change the face of the society. This change in the nature of man can come only when he submits himself to reality. The submission of the self to reality is the practice of Religion.

If religion is to return its position of glory in the modern world, it will have to keep above communalism and intolerance of other faiths. Every religion has ritualistic aspect as well as an ethical aspect. Every religion contains in it the germ of unity and brotherhood which is badly needed by the modern world. Our eyes have become material comforts, but real peace of mind has not yet been found. Every country, today is vying with other countries in the production of material wealth and destructive weapons. This has brought the modern world on the verge of total destruction.

The strife-torn world can be saved only by a religious consciousness. The basis of this religion; be service, brotherhood and love. We must educate men into the nature and responsibility of human brotherhood. It is an education of the heart and the imagination, more than that of the intellect. We must cultivate democracy as a state of mind, a style of life. A world brotherhood can be born only by the achievement of community within ourselves. And this is the task of religion. The decline of religion in modern times should be regarded as the supreme danger to the spiritual social health and even to the material existence of our society.

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