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## RELIGIONS AND SOCIAL SYSTEM

We believe that the universe functions according to a set of laws. Why then many things are unpredictable? All science is founded on the assumption that the physical world is in complete order whose expression is seen in the laws of physics. We don't know where these laws have come from nor why they apparently operate universally without any lapse. The ordered dependability of nature is not usual. The vagaries of weather, the horrofyiing aftermath of earthquakes or fall of meteorite and similar random phenomenon occur capriciously. Little wonder our ancestors attributed these events to the wrath of the Gods. Some thought that the mood of Gods can be changed if one obeys the right path. And this further led the people to a concept which was righteous, did not harm others and was morally sublime and much more. Difficult, isnt it? Let's go ahead and find out.

Millions of years lapsed since human race began to be 'humane', satrted following the above stated pathway, having passed through various developmental stages, it has now acquired the shape of a modern, well mannered, literate, knowledgeable, industrious, cultured and a hard working entity. It also acquired the trait of and adopted a diagonally diverse if not opposite, philosophical ambience. Time, immortal as it is, linked almost all such philosophoies which are deeply diverse in the core. These philosophies later bacame religios in essence. When thought out with greater indulgence these philosophoies have a strong bondage with religion; strong to the extent that the two are inseparable from eachother. The humans have reached more close to modesty, especially post the period, they acquired the sense of belonging and similar linked traits. What before? It can be agreed upon that ancient human beings completely differed from the present one. Various facets of religion and strong spiritual traditions have played a conspicuous role in this transformation. It appears acceptable that very primitive humans endowed with their qualities and nursed their swottings, learnt from their experience.

The word religion sounds very familiar and appears in proximity of *au fait* on one hand, yet it is equally difficult to define on the other. The activities. deeds, events, manners, conducts, behaviours and accomplishmets which are connected with

belief and trust on God or Gods, subsequently endorsing his existence in any form, may be called as religion. There is no intellectual consensus on what exactly affirms to being religion. There are two aspects that cover the religion and dharma in toto. They are individual and social which are inter-dependent on each other. For individuals it is necessary to lend guidance. It is this element that keeps the individual glued to each other almost in all walks of life. Individuals on acquiring the majority, thus arriving in a commanding position provides the society with its much needed regulatory vision.

It is rather hard to conceive, define and explain what religion is, before some one qualifying as scholarly. Probably due to this very complex reason and ensuing intricate situation, the entire humanity does not follow one religion and apparently no single religion is able to bind the entities and humanity with one thread. All the religions are not necessarily broad enough to encompass a range of various factors stretching from divine, faith, sacredness to supernatural being or beings. We see as we live in the society that there are many religions heralding their own flag on extremely pitiable issues. How do we differentiate *religion* from '*dharma*'? Is really necessary to do it? Are both these words are synonyms of each other? These questions are difficult to answer in a short span of time, in short literary work or even in short debates. It is necessary to differentiate these two words since they are not synonyms of each other. Yes! They are thoroughly different. Dharma is a word in Sanskrit language. In vocabulary assemblage of Sanskrit, the "*Amar Kosh*", the word Dharma carries as many as thirteen meanings. Consequently when we try to find out an English word for each of these meanings, we end up as a complete failure. Word religion epitomises the '*monotheism*', which embodies faith in one God and/or one book. To further clarify Islam, Christianity and Judaism are examples of '*monotheism*' since they all have faith in one God and one book each of their own, On the contrary, there are many who place faith in pantheon or a group of many Gods, mostly wielding power on certain disasters separately like war, harvest, ocean, and wind etc. They are examples of '*polytheism*'. However, the character of faith is common in both. Hinduism and ancient Greeks are live examples of '*polytheism*'. Therefore, the elites talking about '*dharma*' call it '*dharma*' only irrespective of the language they are writing or speaking in. Notably, in general use, often they seem to replace one another. Generally these words are used interchangeably.

One may like to call religion, human beings' relation to that which they regard as divine, holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual and/or worthy of true and sustained reverence. These thoughts have been put to severe testing but have always come out with flying colours. Religion has invariably moved ahead with a scintilla of science. Both are coeval in human history. They are largely progressive and moved continuously, independent of each other, yet intermingled closely. Science has affected humans and so has religion. Religion is human's attitude towards the universe and is considered as a social and ethical force. The present human race hardly knows the feelings of their primitive ancestors towards animate and inanimate forces around them. It was probably due to the fear in humans, their ignorance towards nature and the conspicuous absence of emotional bondage that brought them closer to the religion. But that was the case in the very beginning of human evolution when perhaps the human has hardly learned to walk upright. They banked upon some such abstract entity as 'superhuman'. The savage, poorly civilised human did so with a purely selfish commercial objective, courting or ignoring them as they appear to be useful or useless. A recalcitrant deity is punishable, some times neglected or even less adored by way of punishment. A deity or a saint is valued, respected and sought after in proportion to his anticipated ability of being useful. This stands true to such an extent that sometimes a new deity or God is conceptualised to perform a particular duty. Varuna, the God of oceans, revered as the guardian deity of west direction, established on the coastal belts and the *Indonesian archipelago* and *Moais in Easter Island* are few glaring examples. Fear of superhuman power is a common feeling, seen everywhere all the time in all stages of social and intellectual development. One school of philosophers considers this as the original and essential factors that laid the foundation of thinking on religion. The school which objects to this view point puts forward the view that religion could never have arisen from fear and the religion prominently involves amicable relations between humans and the deities. In fact, a tradition is incorporated in the system in which people are trained from infancy to welcome certain matters, to fear others and consider certain others as thoroughly meaningless. This continues and is passed on from generation to generation as trait. Religious connotations in different part of the world are expressed by means of ceremonies.

The religion is thought to be older than the writing prowess, therefore its antiquity

has always been a matter of uncertainty. The cut off period as to when exactly the thoughts related to religion entered the human life, can not be stated with authority. However, there is no evidence of the existence of religion before the human race reached the behavioural modernity. The evolutionary history of human race provide us with more interesting facts. At some point during their life cycle, the Homo neanderthalensis started making cave art. They started practicing the burial of their dead with respect which is the evidence of mortuary ritual, equalling to a kind of religious activity. The recovery of some artifacts such as Venus figurines, the lion man etc. from upper *Paleolithic era* (50000-13000 BCE) show that the concept behind them was religious. Further the signs of elaborate burial rituals observed during that era have further strengthened the view point. It is thought that the religion grew among physically developed modern humans in Africa which later helped in the spread of human race outside the continent. There is, however, a necessity to absorb the growth of life in other continents, Asia in particular. This stands firm beyond doubt for the simple reason that the geographical boundaries deciphering it had given birth to one of the most revered culture and the religion, the Hinduism. A wide range that shelters factors with great value namely, beliefs, prophecies, morals, ethics and related texts or the organisations which adopt them, who ultimately relate human world to celestial, supernatural, spiritual and transcendental powers.

We do not exactly know either, the time or incidence when and how the religious faith of human society became settled. Although it became consolidated in due course of time to an extent that the religion became one of the most decisive factors in governance. This has been so gradual, consequently strengthening its social status as to make societies lame to a very extent. On tracing the history and lineage of the substantially developed social structure of human societies in different parts of the globe, we are able to work out a reasonable lineage of the process.

It was neolithic community somewhere in south in Asia which started the practices of Agriculture about 5000 BCE or even earlier. They were peasants and stock breeders. By about 3000 to 2500 BCE use of Bronze was much prevalent and Indus valley was blooming. By no standards it had touched the level of a cultured society. The difference from village to village is conspicuously reflected in the pottery recovered and studied by archeologists. Initially it took birth as village culture. By about 2700 to 2500 BCE, the village culture in Indus plains grew into

urban settlements that came to be called as *Indus valley civilisation*. For certain it was not brought to India by invaders as claimed by most of the contemporary occultists. It had developed on the Indian soil. Its main growth centres were some urban establishments, the great cities of *Mohenjo Daro* and *Harappa*, situated about 600 to 800 kilometers apart. Smaller in size but probably more eruditely planned urban establishments included *Dholavira*, *Rakhigarhi* and *Kalibangan*. Some geological changes, rise in sea level south of delta adversely affected Mohenjo daro situated on the right bank of Indus. In the south of Indus delta, sudden rise in sea bed resulted in a drastic slow down of current in Indus river which subsequently caused inundations of its banks and flooding of the plains. There might have been influx of population from adjoining villages overpopulating Mohenjo daro. All this resulted into decline of such a great urban establishment. Badly inundated city was slowly converted into a series of high mounds. Nearly two thousand odd years a Buddhist stup was erected on top of the highest mound. This mound also got abandoned when the Buddhists around the area left their religion to embrace Islam. The fate of Harappa is still unclear and offers a highly confusing scenario. However, the Harappan cult laid emphasis on purity of rituals, maintained by purification with water. Exceptionally well designed establishment like Dholavira faced colossal onslaught of continuous draught. Kalibangan had witnessed growth of greater dimensions in social and religious arena. They all apparently met with similar fate in the form of the environmental disasters which was beyond their control. Together with their doom the religious bent also collapsed.

The script they used has not been deciphered as yet. Without any written records of this great prehistoric civilisation, we know very little about their religion. They practiced later religion of India is conspicuous, as evidenced from various seals, terra-cotta figurines of large women recovered from various sites. The women figurines probably represented the Mother Goddess. The bull for them was a sacred animal which represented the fertility of herds, humans and also probably the crops. Mother Goddess was also probably seen as mother Earth and sacred bull as sky, endowed with power to fertilize. Some pieces of evidence have established that they worshiped God 'Shiv' as 'Rudra', the three eyed Hindu deity much revered as the God of destruction.

Broadly there are five major world religions, viz., Christianity, Islam, Hindism, Judaism and Buddhism. In addition to these there are folk religions also which include, *Confucianism, Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, Bahai's* and *Zoroastrianism*. Thus one might consider that there are as many as twelve religions. However, according one school of social scientists strongly affirms that Sikhism and Jainism are integrated off shoots of Hinduism. They took birth due to the contemporary social situations and flourished separately due to their principled stance and are still doing so. Christianity by number of practitnors is the most prevelant of all four major religions. It came into existance in the first century CE in present day middle east, then known as Judea. Jesus Christ is thought to be the first propogator of Christianity, whose teachings formed the base of this opulent religion. Jesus Christ occupies the echelon of a God for the followers. This was later on taken up as the missionary zeal and writings of Paul of Tarsus. Initilly Christianity was rather small and unorganised but was effectively appealing to the people, probably becuase it propounded the ways for personal salvation after death. *Jesus Christ* was a jewish teacher and preacher. He was crucified in Jerusalem sometimes about 2000 years ago. The initial disciples of Jesus were apocalyptic Jewish Christians. Jesus's life and birth around 6 to 7 BCE is detailed out in the four *Gospels*. Jesus told his desciples to spread all over world and preach the *Gospels*. Later Emperor Constantine got converted from polytheism to christianity and he organised finances thus helping the churches in Europe. Pope is the most revered leader. Presently the 266th bishop of Rome, Pope Francis, elected on the 13th March, 2013 occupies the position till this day. The holy book of christians is Bible which was compiled by many people who came from various desparate cultures and background.

The term Islam is derived from three letters of Arabic root, S, L and M. Nuance the word Islam conveys, is "*submission*" or "*surrender*", "*commitment*" and "*peace*". The surrender to the persona and will of Allah, the God. The Islam, agressive in its basic philosophy, is monotheistic Abrahamic religion. It is guided by their holy book Quran and teachings of *prophet Muhammad*. *Quran* is regarded as verbatim statement of God. It is considered that in about 7<sup>th</sup> century, the revered prophet initiated the Islam. The adherents of this religion are called Muslims who with more than about 2 billion strong population are the second largest religios group after the followers of christianity. Their language is classical arabic while modern Muslim

world frequently adopts Urdu. Muhammad is thought to be the final prophet whose teachings are called *sunnah* which are documented in *Hadith* which virtually occupies the status of a legitimate model for entire Muslim world. *Muhammad* had forerunners also. These prophets and messengers of God included Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus. Islam believes emphatically that God is one and cannot be compared with anything. It preaches that the righteous will be rewarded by being sent to *Jannat* (heaven) whereas the unrighteous to *Jahannum* (hell). Islam does not have any concept whatsoever, of rebirth or reincarnation. The scholars consider that there are at the least five obligatory acts of worship in Islam. They are *Shahada* (doctrine), *Salah* (daily prayer), *Zakat* (almsgiving), *Sawm* (fasting) in the month of *Ramadan* and a *Hajj* (pilgrimage) to *Mecca*, the holy city. Islam advocates its own law known as *Sharia* which attends to almost every aspect of human life but in its own way. The two main righteous festivals for Muslims are *Eid ur-fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. Islam prohibits the idol worship in any form. Islam directs the Muslims to build mosques using honestly earned resources where they must carry out worship four times a day. The worship is intensified particularly during the month of *Ramadan*. Islam preaches to achieve peace, peace within oneself and peace with all creations of the God by completely submitting to Allah and obey his guidance.

The first biblical, Hebrew patriarch Abraham is said to have founded Judaism approximately dating back to about 3600 years. The present day Israel and Palestinian territories, the then *Canaan*, precisely its eastern region, is considered to be the venue of the origin of *Judaism*. It is one of the oldest surviving religions in the world. Judaism is faith tradition and people who practice it are called Jews. It is a lifestyle and the culture. The Jews are highly diverse ethno-religious group. Judaism does neither consider Jesus as a divine being, a messiah nor he occupies any position of intermediary between humans and God. *Yonatan Adler*, a researcher in *Ariel University* in the west bank, based on research propounds that Judaism is older than Islam and Christianity. There are four major beliefs Judaism has faith in. They include, God is formless, God is one, world is created by him, he is eternal and is tirelessly involved in the affairs. It divulges into many streams who differ minutely. Buddhism is the religion that originated in India. It spread over a large part of world. This religion was propagated by the Young prince of *Shakya clan*, *Siddharth Gautam* born to *Shakya king Shuddodhan* and *queen Maya* of state of *Kosala*. It

was a Hindu family. Young Siddharth was very compassionate since early days. He was later married to Yashodhara, the princess of Koliya clan born to *king Suppabuddha* and *queen Amita*, the royal couple of Koliya clan. One school of historians state that *Gautam* and *Yshodhara* were first cousins, a tradition vehemently opposed in Hindu religion. It was probably the royal status of both the families that made it possible. *Shakya* and *Koliya* tribes divulged from Ikvashu dynasty. The kingdom of Shakya tribe was *Kapilvastu*. Guatam Buddha was born in Lumbini, now in Nepal, about 12 kms away from Kapilvastu, the capital of Shakya kingdom. The inscriptions on the pillar erected by great *Mauryan Emperor Asoka* affirm the birth place of Gautma Buddha. At the young age of 29 years one night Gautam left his palace, the sleeping wife and son Rahul silently and began his journey in search of elucidations for suffering humanity. It was almost 2400 years ago when the teachings of Gutam Buddha drew attention of general masses and that laid the foudation and contents of one of the religions. The human life was considered as one of the suffering. Advanced by Gautam Buddha and firmly believed by adherents of Buddhism, that meditation, spiritual and physical labour, coupled with disciplined and good deeds can lead one self to achieve elightment, which they called '*nirvana*'. Buddha dharm is also known as *Dharmavinaya* which when simplified means 'doctirnes and disciplines'. It is a philosophical tradion based on the teachings of Gautam Buddha, who is envisaged as the ninth (9th) incarnation or avatar of Lord Vishnu in Hinduism. Lord Vishnu as Gautam Buddha preaches the message of compassion, non-violence spiritual enlightenment or '*nirvana*'. One of the sect of Hindu religion, Vaishnavism, further elaborates in *Vaishnava Puran* and institutes Guatam Buddha as ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. *Agni Puran* further elaborates that Lord Vishnu assumed this form on the earth to help devas who were repeatedly defeated by demons or daityas. However, one school of historians amid philosophical turmoil finds it viable to state that Buddhism took birth in the form of an offshoot of Hinduism, the later had to get modified to combat the diagonally opposite perspectives. More appropriately Hindu dharm is more of a spiritual way of life and is not an organised religion.