

Historical analysis on Religion and Society

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Abstract:

Religion is one of the oldest social institutions of human kind. It has been executing various functions in the Society. Religion is a bond uniting men together. The root meaning of religion is “that which binds”. “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mathew, St. 22: 39) signifies the oneness of human race and a sense of social responsibility of its members to one another. Love of God and love of neighbour are the inward and outward sides of a truly religious life. This research article discussed about relationship between Religion and Society.

Keywords: Human kind, Religion, Society.

Introduction:

Religion helps us to follow the path of rectitude as it propels us to be away from certain activities, which it considers as sinful. For the righteous and upright, religion promises peace of mind in this earthly life itself and heavenly life of rejoice after death. Naturally, everyone aspires to be pleasant and smiling always. Thus, as far as the social aspect is concerned religion controls our conduct in day-to-day life. The “Ten Commandments” given to Moses are a set of behavioural regulations. The commandment to worship one God is religious only; having no direct bearing on pattern of interaction between human beings; but the commandment not to steal is moral as well as religious, since it defines a social pattern, at least in negative terms. This commandment will probably be interpreted to mean “respect the property rights recognized in the society”; thus it will ultimately reinforce the social institution of property; however that may be socially defined. Thus from a sociologist’s perspective it would bring order and harmony to the society and also would allow the society to function in an organised and systematic way. According to Stanley “the consequences of religion are unity among the believers, conformity in behaviour and the legitimation of social structures” (Stanley, 1988: 546).

Main subject matter

According to Robert N Bellah, religion is “an individual quest for meaning rather than a collective act of worship. Modern man has his own freedom than ever before to search for and construct his own ultimate meaning”. (Bellah, 1976: 143). Religion influences our personal life. When the personal life of individual becomes candid and immaculate, the society benefits for its smooth functioning. According to Alfred North Whitehead, “Religion is what the individual does with his solitariness” – (Whitehead, 1926: 47). Each one of us does have a particular significant role in contributing to the richness and variety of the human society. We can mould the society only by making necessary transformation in individual men’s hearts and minds. There can be no conflict in between the individual good and the social good.

A man is what he thinks. The social discipline should be such that it must provide the individual with the atmosphere and circumstances to think uprightly, which will not only help each individual to grow to his utmost but also would ultimately uplift the society. The beliefs and values of the society are often absorbed into the religion and ultimately that may become the

morality of the society. In our traditional society religion occupies an eminent position in every arena of man's life, whether it be political, economic, educational, recreational, family life or social welfare. Thus Ray states, "There is scarcely a sphere of man's life that is left untouched by the conditioning effect of religious ideas" (Ray, 1948: 3). Gandhi says, 'Man without religion is man without roots. Therefore, religion is the basis on which all life structure has to be erected, if life is to be real'. [Gandhi, 1980:137].

The Modern Societies are undergoing a process of secularisation. It means the influence of religion in all areas of social life is steadily diminishing. According to Herberg, religion has become "a way of sociability or belonging rather than a way of reorienting life to God" (Herberg, 1960:137). It is thus frequently religiousness without serious commitment, without inner conviction.

We are facing a great cultural change. When we acquired a spectacular growth in economic prosperity and intellectual advancement by dint of hard work, it has turned to be the harbinger of the ruin of spiritual orientation of humanity. It seems we are at the brink of decay of traditional religion, morality and social order. Disintegration of faith cuts at the root of human unity. Our traditional values are fast disappearing. The crude ways of the fundamentalists bring in more violence, oppression and cruelty. People are in a state of doubts and discord. Disintegration of faith cuts at the root of human unity. Modernism is a reaction against this traditional order. Consequently everything around us is unsteady and contradictory. We cannot deny that man has reached a highly advanced stage of development in most of his faculties, yet he is lacking in the integration of binding together of different elements to keep up an healthy balanced attitude in different spheres of his social life. The Court verdicts and the Legislative acts also play as an impetus in the social change. Legalising abortion, defining the rights of homosexuals, permitting pornography, liberalising divorce through 'no fault' laws, prohibiting prayer in the schools, etc. do have much impact in the cardinal virtues and moral concept in the social life and in the long run may affect the society deleteriously.

The recent Hindu-Muslim Communal conflict in West Bengal State massacring 9 persons on 2nd May 2003 (Manorama, 2003: 1) should be an eye opener to the diabolic and heinous ulterior motive and obverse effect of religion upon the society. On flimsy reasons one kills the other, forgetting they are brothers and sisters of the same Society and Nation. Thus in *Jnana-Yoga* we read as "And thus we find that though there is nothing that has brought man more blessings than religion, at the same time there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion. Nothing has made more peace and love than religion; nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion; nothing has bred more bitter enmity between man and man than religion.

Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion" – (*Jnana-Yoga*, 1989: 375). The Group identification on religious basis constrains persons to take factions in conflicts forgetting the aftermath consequences of it. When people are strongly committed to their religious groups and values communal commotion on religious grounds may be pungent and would be thrashing the peaceful life in the society.

Conclusions:

The significant cause of social disorders is an ultra sensitive and intolerant attitude of each religious faction towards the other. Each religious group considers itself as a separate group and not as a part of the national mainstream. Trivial individual selfish interests gradually take over

the feelings of patriotism and nationalism. Moreover the religious, caste and communal feelings of common people are relentlessly exploited by the politicians for their selfish motives. Party tickets are acquired according to the communal characteristics of the regional constituencies. The religious bogey is moulded to let down the opposing parties. Instead of competing elections on issues such as unemployment, poverty or corruption, the political leaders manage dexterously the religious politics to their selfish ends at the time of election campaign. Indubitably we can infer that it is the disregard for genuine religious beliefs that is mainly responsible for the present mushy and maligned state of the society. All the religions teach tolerance, non-violence, love and universal brotherhood but the very precepts are defeated by the unenlightened bigots and such situations are exploited for political purposes without any compunction for acquiring power and pelf by some heartless elements. Thus we see that religion is the central stage where people are playing both integrative and disintegrative roles. The institution of religion is not scientifically studied with regard to its functions and dysfunctions to present social life based on empirical facts. This study is a humble attempt to find out the functions and dysfunctions of various religious forms of present day society.

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