

## Comparative Religion

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**Abstract:-** Religion has an overwhelming deepest impact on humanity. Religion ensures hope, fearlessness, tolerance, morality and spiritual development. Comparative Religion is a systematic, sophisticated and comprehensive studies to yield a deeper understanding of nature, beliefs, ethics, sacredness, metaphysics, practices, mythology, spiritual orientation, deliverance and other fundamental concerns of different religions of the world. In order to enhance inter cultural exchanges, to bring the world together, to facilitate mutual understanding, to sustain diversity and for global peace and cooperation, Comparative Religion plays a crucial role as religions have strong grip on different cultures, human mind sets, lifestyles and beliefs. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Shintoism provides a bird view of religious state of humankind. On comparison we find that the external aspect of religions vary within the religion and from one religion to another religion still the essence of each religion endorses spirituality not exclusivity, oneness not division, love not hate, creativity not destruction. Religions are meant to raise humanity to higher plane, where the realisation of unity amidst diversity takes place.

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### REVIEW PAPER

*"Of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destiny of the human race, none certainly is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call Religion."*

-Swami

Vivekananda

All life forms have survival instincts but the human race, in addition to that, possesses creative and magnificent intellectual faculties of imagination and cognition along with an implicit urge to self transcend. Religion is, subsequently an outcome of these exclusive faculties of human mind. We can find a kind of synchronicity regarding evolution of religion and the evolution of humankind. When human being were evolving from the stage of being a hunter and **food gatherer to the status of food producer** and developed agrarian culture; the religion started taking shape **to encourage cooperation and tolerance** among the members within the human communities and also with the members of other communities. As the emotional and intellectual quotient kept on evolving, the humankind took in notice the **uncertainty of life**, uncertainty in day to day activities, uncertainty of events and the way surroundings respond. The human beings started responding to external stimuli and their experiences of grief, pain, suffering and **fear of death** grew from the physical domain and entered into the emotional and intellectual quotients in an intense manner. At this stage, human emotions could have transformed into faith, belief and a feeling of gratitude to **survive the uncertainties, adversities and fear of death**. This faith, belief, and feeling of gratitude in humankind may have condensed into the institution of Religion, thereby the religion became the prominent part and parcel of human

civilisation as it instilled **hope, positive inclination towards life, faith in the existence of some supernatural omnipotent power and rituals to express their beliefs and gratitude** towards it. Further the vastness of Nature and its majestic phenomena or forces left the humankind **in awe**. Humankind was much surprised to see how the entire creation around them and within them propagating, which made the belief on some Supernatural power or Super Being as the centre of every religion. As the spiritual dimension of humankind started carving out, religion paid the way to sustain and direct the implicit urge of human being to self transcend.

The word religion is derived from Latin word 're-ligare', where 're' means back and 'ligare' means 'to the origin'. Thus religion means – going back to our origins, this very meaning unfolds the essentiality of multiple religions. Since the origin and upbringing of different groups of people took place in different geographies, environment, social set up and other variables; world witnesses multiplicity of religions from major religions to folk religions and totems worship. Some scholars also believe that the word Religion has evolved from the Latin word 'Religo' which stands for right faith or ritual.

Comparative Religion is a systematic, sophisticated and comprehensive studies to yield a deeper understanding of nature, beliefs, ethics, sacredness, metaphysics, practices, mythology, spiritual orientation, deliverance and other fundamental concerns of different religions of the world. Religion has a vast and deep impact on human civilisation and it permeates to every corner of the world. In order to enhance inter cultural exchanges, to bring the world together, to facilitate mutual understanding, to sustain

diversity and for global peace and cooperation, Comparative Religion plays a crucial role as religions have strong grip on different cultures, human mind sets, lifestyles and beliefs. It is not exactly known how many religions exist in this world, still a broad classification of world religions based on Geography can be done as follows:

1. Middle Eastern religions –Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Bahá'í
2. East Asian religion –Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Ch'an Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Caodanism, Korean Shamanism, Falun Gong, Tenriism, Cheondoism.
3. Indian religions –Hinduism, early Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism
4. African religions – Berber, Akon, Yoruba, Oromo, Khoisan, Zulu, Masai.
5. American religions –Wyandot, Tsimshian, Selk'nam, Longhouse, Mapuche, Muisca
6. Oceanic religions – Aboriginal, Aluk Todolo, Balinese Hinduism, Marapu, Pemena, Nauran, Tagalog, Sunda Wiwitan, Māori.
7. Classical religions of ancient Greece and Rome and their Hellenistic descendants like Pythagoreanism, Gallo-Roman religion, Orphism.

The Religious demographics of the world are

1. Christianity – 31.5%
2. Islam –23.2%

3. Irreligious – 16.3%
4. Hinduism – 15.0%
5. Buddhism – 7.1%
6. Folk religions –5.9%
7. Other religions -1.0%

- Monotheistic Religions (Religions that believe in one God or Supreme Being)  
– Bahá'í, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism
- Polytheistic Religions (Religions that believe in multiple Gods, often in some form of hierarchy)  
– Cao Dai, Mormonism, Paganism, Shamanism, Shintoism, Wicca.
- Pantheistic Religions (They believe in the Omnipresence of God in all worldly animate and inanimate things)  
–Hinduism, Jainism, Theosophy, Animism
- Non-theistic religions (They believe God either does not exist or it is unknowable)–  
Agnosticism, Secular Humanism, Scientology, Buddhism, Environmentalism

Taking five prominent religions of the world namely Abrahamic religions comprising Judaism, Christianity and Islam along with Hinduism into account, we can have a general bird view of the state of Religion worldwide.

#### Abrahamic Religions:

	Islam	Judaism	Christianity
Religious law	Sharia	Halakhah	Canon Law
Prophet	Allah	Yahweh Elohim	Yahweh
Belief regarding afterlife	Heaven and Hell	No afterlife	Heaven and Hell
Kind of Theism	Monotheistic	Monotheistic	Monotheistic
Birth of Jesus	Virgin	Normal	Virgin
End of Jesus	Did not die	Death	Death
Jesus coming alive after death	Yes	No	Yes

The Book Of Torah is the authoritative sanctified guidebook of **Judaism**. Judaism is the religion of the Old Testaments and is the – “ The idea and challenge of One. This challenging idea is first the One Thing, the One Thing that alone is the needful, that which is commended, the Good and the Right”. Besides the one God, there is no second. In each man, there is unity or totality that corresponds to the Unity of God. This is same as a vedic expression:

*Poornam, poornamidam*

*Poornatpoornamuduchyate  
Poornasyapoornamadaya  
Poornamevavasishyate.*

In Judaism, they have the ‘Tikun Olam’ that has a story which conveys that God has created the world incompletely with imperfections. Instead of creating bread, he created wheat; instead of bricks he provided clay. Human beings have to harvest wheat, then process it into flour and then have to bake bread. Similarly clay has to be baked into

bricks on our own. In this way, the act of creation is the partnership between God and human beings.

Jesus was a Jew and his faith was Judaism. He reproduced Judaism with his own vision, revelations and claims. After his martyrdom, Christianity evolved as a powerful movement. Christianity claimed to be the complete and legitimate heir to Jewish monotheism and insisted that it cannot remain confined to a particular nation Israel but it was the common world religion for all time.

The belief about virgin birth of Jesus abounds not in only **Christianity** even if we find such beliefs in Hinduism (birth of Karna and Pandavas) and Buddhism (birth of Siddhartha) also. Christianity claims that although the universe was the self-expression of the one Good God, the highest single self expression was to be found in the life of Jesus. It thus comes close to the Vedic, Jain and Buddhist traditions regarding the doctrine of incarnation. Though there were religious wars continued for centuries, other Wars and persecutions of Philosophers, astronomers, scientists and activists, but with the emergence of Copernican astronomy, industrial development and progress of Science and Technology, Christianity recreated itself with new and different interpretations of the Gospel and continued its reformation and progression.

The word **Islam** has its root in an Arabia word '**Slm**' which means 'to be in peace, to be an integral whole'. Thus, the word Islam implies 'to surrender to God's law and thus become an integral whole'. The proper name **Muslim** was assigned by Abraham mentioned in Quran(22:78). Islam believes that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian but a Hanifi, who believed in God without being attached to Judaism or Christianity. Historically, Islam originated in 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Mohammed declared himself as the Messenger of God after he had two visions. According to Quranic teachings, 'The best and most beautiful of my creations is a compassionate man who gives alms. If he does so with his right hand and hides it from left, he is more powerful than all things', 'Anything that will bring a smile on the face of others is a good deed, and is the love of one's neighbours', to honour the memory of one's mother – 'dig a well in her memory and give water to thirsty' – this one is a significant exhortation, as the area was water scarce. Five compulsory pillars or practices of Islam are Kalima, Salat, Fasting, Zakat and Hajj, while a sixth one is added as Jihad later on.

**Zoroastrianism** is an ancient religion, their rituals include libations offered both to apas (water) and atar (fire). These priestly libations were called yasna that can be compared to the yagna of Hinduism. The purifying and disinfectant properties of cattle urine *gomez* play an important part in Zoroastrianism rituals in the same way as *gomutra* plays in

Hindu rituals. We find the Vedic concepts like doctrine of seven consecutive creations of the sky, water, earth, vegetation, animal life, man and fire. Zoroastrianism believes that since the sum total of evil in this world is limited, we can comfort ourselves that there is far less after we are visited by misfortunes, in this way one can progress far towards the path leading to Ahura Mazda, the Supreme Lord.

Regarding the Far Eastern and Chinese religious tradition, **Confucianism** emphasised the importance of ethical behaviour. It says every man possesses four principles – benevolence, justice, propriety and wisdom and that man has only to obey the law by himself in order to get perfect. Parallel to this Lao Tsu established **Taoism** which was essentially mystical in nature. With the advent of Buddhism in China, Taoism principles merged with Zen Buddhism and Chan Buddhism. Eventually a comprehensive system of Philosophy by the fusion of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, evolved as **Chu Tsu**. According to Chu Tsu, **Li** is the supreme ultimate guiding and directing Primordial substance that determines the form of everything that exists and causes it to be.

**Shintoism** is the official religion of Japan which believes that world is the product of copulation between Izanagi and Izanami, from whom was born Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, who is the ancestress of Mikado. Over the last 60 years, the Shintoism has been somewhat diluted into agnosticism due to the progress of Science and technology.

The origin of **Hinduism** is said to have started some eight millennia or more ago, with the emergence of Vedic tradition. The Vedic literature reflects that it believed in an all encompassing spirit that permeated through all material things. The breath of things called *Brahma* expanded itself through the space. It not only diffused itself everywhere, but constituted its own being. Men and God are the manifestation of Brahma. Bhagavad Gitā is the central philosophical scripture of Hinduism that preaches Nishkama karma and considers life to be the complete synthesis of jñāna, bhakti and karma. In Hinduism, everyone is free to choose his path to attain his goal without impinging on the path of others. Hinduism is synonymous to spiritualism and all its preaching, rituals and practices aim at developing the divinity implicit within the humankind. Hence Hinduism refers itself as '**Dharma**' which literally means the essential properties or essence of a substance and **Hinduism aims at developing the very essence of Divinity that is inherent in humanity**.

**Buddhism and Jainism** emerged as great Movements within Hinduism to rectify the chaos or religious and social entropy rising in Hinduism. They became so prominent and spread

throughout Asian continent. These religions are Atheistic and promote self-help, that is, they intend to make humanity so morally strong that it itself attain divinity without depending on some Supreme Being.

On Comparative studies of World major religions, we find that all of them promote selflessness, humanity, charity, responsibility and accountability. They differ in **their external aspects** that include language of prayer, modes of prayer, rituals, customs, etc., but **they all offer moral and emotional support to enhance human lives, satisfies spiritual needs through meditation, prayer, practice patience, strengthening the levels of tolerance to adversity, helps one to understand the nature of people.** Even there is no apparent contradiction between Monotheism and Polytheism. Polytheism is a medium that paves passage to the realisation of Monotheism. Every religion provides the explanation about how living beings originated or evolved, answers the question regarding life and death, provides the purposes of human life. It is always said that there is no completely acceptable, logical and scientific explanation of religion or belief in God, but on the other hand we do have Physical Sciences that too have failed to explain the origin of and Life authentically.

Comparative studies of religion finds that all the religions of the world share the same objectives, viz., well being of humanity and evolution to higher plane where the realisation of unity amidst diversity takes place. Be it Buddha, Mahavira, Jesus or Prophet, they all were one in thinking – humble, with love for entire humanity. It is only the followers of these great men that converted their teachings into religion, thereby starting the process of division in the world. Though religions have bestowed measureless benefits on humanity, still they have casted the negative impacts like discrimination between men and women, intolerance, fundamentalism, extremism, violence and jihad. In the name of Christ and Bible, millions were persecuted in the West. Religions have obstructed humanity to become a united force. Fascism that stood as anti-Judaism resulted in massive genocide. Now, Islam with its jihad is causing killings across the world.

Religion should be restricted to the domain of personal faith and it should not be allowed to become a social activity. People should not be indulged in promoting a specific religion against others this will minimise human conflicts and ensure peace and cooperation. When we meet somebody, we interact not as a Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist but as a human being with civility. This approach should be extended to all our socio-political-economic activities and religions should not interfere with the civil norms. Religions are meant to raise humanity to higher plane, where the realisation of unity amidst diversity takes

place. Primary purpose of all religious belief is to enhance the human cognitive mechanism and basic cognitive process of self control, self discipline and ego depletion. The essence of all religions is same that says- Religion implies spirituality not exclusivity, oneness not division, love not hate, creativity not destruction.

In the words of Rabindranath Tagore – “From the solemn gloom of the temple children run out to sit in the dust, God wishes them play and forgets the priest”.

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