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## **Role of Religion: The World and the Mind**

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The project of modernity has not been seen to sustain religious beliefs. Rather than being complementary social forces, modernity and religion have generated tension and widened the chasm between faith and daily human existence. Inhabiting a high-risk world that could have catastrophic results if global warming, pandemics, ecological imbalances, chemical toxicity and nuclear accidents actually occurred, people hence become alienated and have a growing unease that intellectually or experientially estranges them from their inner and outer reality. What role does religion play in the globalized and tension – ridden world? Does it signify faith, philosophy or practice?

### **Religion :**

Religion we know vary over a wide range of faiths from animistic beliefs to rarefied mysticism. No human society has ever been known without a religion although there were differences in beliefs and practices, changing over a period of time. Life for the contemporary person is not without turmoil. At a time when mankind so desperately needs some answers and courage to contend with the crises that beset us, has not the shaky and weakening base of religion created more stress and spiritual hollowness? If religion has to have some relevance in the contemporary world, it must target both the individual and the group, and contain a high degree of ability to adapt its teachings and practices to changing times and conditions. One would posit that genuine religious aspiration and practice will, in fact, not result in the powerlessness, irrelevance or an erosion of religious beliefs and practices. Instead, if attentively listened to, the religious voice will enable one to acquire self-knowledge and personal humility that may reinforce the sense of peace and the transcendental reality.

### **Sociological Perspective :**

Sociologists have been content with the ambiguity that surrounds the origin and nature of religion. Even Durkheim and Weber have not provided a clear-cut definition. As Bauman observes, "More often than not, 'defining religion'

amounts to replacing one ineffable by another – to the substitution of the incomprehensible for the unknown...

This is the case with the most popular definitions, which have served mainly to placate the scientific conscience of sociologists eager to declare the embracement of the unembraceable: the definitions pointing to its relation to the sacred, transcendental, enchanted or tremendous". (Zygmunt Bauman: Postmodern Religion 1998)

Whether we view religion as the outcome of human intellectual curiosity (Tylor); human fear as the source of the origin of religion (Spencer); idea of scared as contrasted to that of the profane (Durkheim) ; primal guilt of the human race (Freud) ; or as false consciousness (Marx), it cannot be denied. Religious experience in our world today can be illuminary and resolve contradictions at an emotional level besides approaching 'mind' as a subject of study (Otto and Bellah).

Secularization theory, we all know, brought with it the disappearance of the idea of 'the Supreme' and dealt with matters of here and now rather than those of the sacred or transcendent truths. Search for ultimate reality and meaning of life in this materialistic and chaotic world is resulting from the fragmentation and over-rationalization occurring in societies. Some scholars have claimed that in modern societies there has been a profound process of religious decline as a consequence of the spread of science, cultural pluralism and urbanization. However, others maintain that instead of religion being undermined, it has actually been transformed with the conjunction of the global and the local. Nonetheless, it is being proposed that today the local cultures and the political are not preferences being restricted by the bureaucratic state apparatus but rather the globalized system that actually stifles national autonomy and invades with the weapons of the ideology of consumerism, a world-surveillance system and through the structural requirements of the " free-market".

### **Fundamentalism :**

Contextualizing the process of religious fundamentalism might help us to either escape or reverse this process. It is amply clear that political misuse of ethnic assertions and identity ideologies needs to be viewed as a part of the globalised landscape. Sherif Hetata , for example, aptly describes the post-modern Egyptian and Asian reality of religious revivalism:

"The loss of hope, the failure of movements that represented the chance of a better future or were portrayed as leading to a better future, the deception, the difficulties of the economic situation, the attack launched by a global system on what people may perceive as their interests, their identity, their history, their

culture, their nation, has evoked a reaction. In the absence of perceived perspectives for the future, people often fall back on what they know, cling to the familiar, the reassuring, the things that made them what they are, the things of the past, not the future. Rather than a change forward, the reaction is backward to the closed family, the closed community, the race, or ethnic group, the religion. Back to what is identity. Instead of being open, we close up like an oyster, break off, fight tooth and nail with one another, become divided and the worse the situation, the greater the rivalry and more cruel the fighting.... We revive all the old ways of thinking, the norms and values of intolerance and discrimination. We delink, disconnect, and think in terms of rigidity and fragmentation. For many of us, these are the roots of communal, ethnic, racial, and religious conflicts and confrontations the essence and the message of such movements". (Sherif Hetata in *The Cultures of Globalization* –Pg.281)

Of course, from the historical angle, clearly, possibilities and dilemmas of religion will forever remain with us. Yet, communitization or privatization of religion alone will not facilitate the resolution of issues and remove the spaces of tension. Religious narrow-mindedness is certainly spreading hatred among individuals, communities and nations. Religion manifesting as a cultural threat seems to be informing the developments around the world and the culture of violence has gripped the psyche of nations, eliminating the mutual respect and deeper awareness of each others' traditions, norms and values. Thus, inter-faith dialogues and interactions, and an authentic spiritual/religious quest of individual and groups will probably provide a suitable alternative and a stable basis for peaceful existence.

### **Religious Revivalism :**

Earlier the pertinent questions dealt with the decline of religion or the secularization of society, whereas today religious resurgence is currently preoccupying the sociologists. The shrinking of the world with its immense enlargement of communication and market, and dissolution of boundaries has resulted in the search for identity through a desired dialogue with other nations, cultures, and individuals. Understanding the negative and positive exchanges of religion in this compressed context appears to be relational and multi-leveled phenomena also reflected in the fanatical movements and the contestation of the constantly changing sense of cultural identity. Hence, cultural survival is being regarded the contributory reason for religious revivalism and has far-reaching implications outside the strictly religious domain.

The most significant aspect of it can be seen in the spiritual movements of secularists who have taken up such an open yet committed journey to transform their minds. To substantiate, one would like to present here the case of the

spread of Buddhism in the world today. For Buddhist practitioners mind is their religion.

### **Buddhist Experience :**

Human beings apparently consider sense objects to be of utmost importance and lead a materialistic life devoted to gaining happiness, fame and popularity. Even though mind is the source of all this, still we are preoccupied by the external world and forget to look within to examine and understand the nature of mind and how and why it fluctuates. One imagines oneself to be an independent person, yet one is not free as one's uncontrolled mind and attachment oppresses one. From birth to death, people are continuously under the control of their mental sufferings and to overcome them, all one has to know what one is and how one exists – how mind works, how attachment, desire and ignorance arise.

The basic paradoxical issue confronting us is that mind cannot know itself because the searcher is the mind itself and the object it wants to understand is also the mind. It seems one can look for oneself everywhere, search the world over, without ever finding oneself because one is what one searches for. Thus, for one to understand mind, one requires a method that acts like a mirror in order to enable us to recognize mind.

The two extreme negative views of overestimation and under-estimation functioning in our mind have to be acknowledged so that one's conduct can be corrected. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the negative aspects of one's nature and understand the evolution of one's negative mind from the beginning to the end. In case one fails to pay heed, one will end up thinking that negative actions are indeed positive. Hence, it is in relation to the teachings and one's spiritual guide that the mind will eventually be able to awaken to its true nature. This discovery is brought about by various meditative techniques and practices. As one of the Lamas succinctly puts it, " Each of us can develop an experience of the nature of mind by asking ourselves about what one is doing is observing: the observer, the knower, the subject that experiences thoughts and different sensations. Where exactly can it be found? What is it? It is a question of observing our mind: Where is it? Who am I ? What am I ? Are body and mind the same or different? Do my experiences unfold inside or outside my mind? Are mind and its thoughts distinct, or are they one and the same? If yes, how? If not, how? This search is carried out in meditation, in close connection with a qualified guide. The process can take several months or ever several years."(K. Rinpoche : Luminous Mind,1997).

## **Untamed Mind :**

Since the root cause of suffering is ignorance, suffering stems from one's untamed mind. Training the mind becomes the essential basis for taming one's mind that apprehends objects erroneously, doubts and requires purification. Through meditation practices of calm-abiding and insightful concentration, the correctly assuming consciousness turns into inference, ultimately realizing the direct perception of reality and objects. Needless to say that a real understanding as the nature of mind is liberating because it disengages us from all illusions and consequently from the source of the suffering, fears and challenges that we face in our daily existence. So, the ordinary and enlightened state are distinguished only by the impurity or purity of mind or "dis-illusioning" the mind.

## **Turnings of The Wheel :**

In general, the eighty-four thousand collection of Buddhist teachings or the three progressive turnings of the wheel of the doctrine taught by the Buddha can all be encapsulated into two intentions: to put an end to all types of mental distortion with regard to the "I" or the misconception of self and thereby to familiarize oneself with an altruistic attitude through which we commit ourselves to work for the welfare of others. From this perspective one is convinced of the efficacy of the practice of non-violence. During the first stage one restrains oneself from engaging in activities that will harm others; the second stage makes us implement antidotes to afflictive emotions causing negative actions; and lastly, one makes an effort to overcome even the predispositions previously established by afflictive emotions. This offensive engagement constitutes the training and taming of one's mind. By developing the intention to realize the pure and blissful nature of mind for the welfare of all sentient beings, one can attain the state free from birth, ageing, sickness and death, the eighty-four thousand kinds of disturbing emotions and their creations.

## **Conclusion :**

To conclude, the relative nature of mind perceives and functions in the world, is dualistic and is totally agitated in nature. However, the absolute true nature of mind is beyond dualism and transcends the dualistic domain of 'this and that'. Thus, by reaching beyond one's experiences in this world and mind, one experiences perfect peace. Although pacifists have always remained a minority, the need of the hour is to mobilize nations, mainstream religious institutions and individuals to actively cooperate and put an end to the slaughter of the innocents and the viciousness condoned in the pursuit of victory. Activation of the awakening mind naturally will discourage the appearance of hostile world, transforming unfavorable into the favourable.