

## **Unity in Diversity of Religions by A.C.Sekhar**

Throughout history, religions played a great force on the life of nations, communities, families and individuals.

Religions have fought wars, crusades, jihads, holy wars etc. Religions have also brought peace, cured ills, and have also wrought miracles. In all these forceful events religions have applied their tremendous influence on human mind which is the epic centre of all human activities. So what exactly is a religion, what is its function in human development, what is meant by a religious faith and what exactly is involved in following a course 'religiously'?

And above all why there are today about 14 major and many minor religions in this world where humans have occupied a predominant position to save this world or destroy it. In the answers to these and similar questions the mechanics of modern religions requires a thorough study and discourse . In this process an interesting blend of materialism and spiritualism becomes evident, so much needed in the modern days of intensive and extensive technological developments through the world. It is not intended to quote relevant articles from each religion and discuss the same now but a general survey as observed by common men are discussed below so as to bring out some unity in all the diverse religions of the world.

Almost all religions had some role to play in Governance, public administration, and politics. How far religion solved the intricate problems of political legitimacy or establish individual identity of nations which include minorities also is a question that occupied the minds of several intelligentsia in the past and present. Perhaps this will continue to remain a problem as long as Religion will be taken consciously or unconsciously as one of the guiding factors for absorbing conflicting and ever changing theories of economic living and political thinking.

Some governments in recent years had also to invoke the concepts of religion in making of laws, in the peaceful co-ordination & conduct of socio-economic levels of life in the nation, willingly or otherwise, within the vaguely defined limits of religious neutrality. Some ruling monarchs, heads of states, and other prominent figures in governments act as defenders and protectors of religious faiths. There are governments which recognise the position of the religion of the majority in their nation for their legal responsibilities.

Therefore a question arises whether or not secularism is only an attitude of the mind guided by the highest concepts of the religion of the majority in the nation or all religions in their ultimate truthful identity preach only the true secularism

All religions seem to have two things in common; a ' God ' and a set of fables or stories guiding human actions. The former which is often referred as Super-human or Super-natural leads to tendencies of 'Worship' in different forms as the concept produces a requisite awe and reverence in the minds of human beings particularly those having strong faith in the entity ' God ' The fables and stories provide a set of guiding principles for human actions to continuously elevate human dignity. While in some cases these guiding principles are enunciated directly, in other cases they are formed on the basis of interpretation of individuals , from the causes and effects of events emerging out of those fables and stories.

Logically GOD in every religion must be an entity of highest and most perfect order that man can conceive or convince. Many thinkers have described GOD in a variety of ways - Atma, Almighty, Akal, Aum (OM) giving a variety of attributes like Omnipresence, Omnipotent, Love, Divinity etc. Surprisingly all the above names begin with the first letter of alphabets 'A'and all the attributes are described with the same emphasis in all religions Many have shown various paths to reach 'Him' and even to become one with Him. The paths of devotion, meditation, concentration, 'Bhakti' prayer, love, righteous living, group singing, group worshipping, are some types of day to

day activities common for all religions also. Many have symbolised His existence through idolatry, through places of sanctity through acts of perfect beauty, and even through the science of Cosmos. In the concepts of Creator and Creation all religions have described the same relationship between them though there may be slight differences in their approaches. All religions have developed various objects and symbols of reverence, the Hindu OM, dharma chakra, fire, cross, crescent, or books like Geetha, Bible, Koran, Guru Granth Sahib, etc. Legendary stories have also been built up with supernatural powers to some creations, supernatural incidents, miracle performances by certain individuals all under the power of God. Every religion produced God-men, Acharyas, Popes, Bishops, Wise men, Sufis, Mullas, Jathedhars and many types of interpreters and religious leaders.

More important of all every religion in this world has spoken of special places of worship. The Hindus have temples, ashrams, mutts; the Christians call them churches or Congregation halls. The Muslims call them Mosques. The Jews have Synagogues and the Sikhs have Gurudwaras. So also the Buddhists, the Jains, the Parsees, and even the tribals have all got special places of worship duly sanctified and conceived as abodes of God. The architectural designs of these places are uniformly symbolic of the historical developments connected with the concerned religion. Many of the teachings conveyed to discipline mankind have emanated only from these places of worship as they are supposed to be very peaceful and fit places for divine messages. The abiding faith in any religion has been sustained only through different rituals that are followed in these places. Sacred articles are stored in these places like idols, books, and even empty spaces which develop the needed awe and reverence to God from whom man seeks many boons for his personal desires. Unlike some views that places of worship are the seats of fanaticism they on the other hand designed and intended to develop and discipline the human mind for righteousness and common good of all.

The common good of all is expected to achieve not only through the philosophies contained in the religions but also through some emotional slogans and sentiments developed in rituals and prayers. For example the Hindus end their prayers with an emotion that everybody should achieve happiness 'Sarvajano Sukhino Bhavanthu' 'Sabko Sammati De Bhagvan' etc. The Christian religion emphasises on 'Love' and 'Forgiveness'. In Islam and Sikhism, 'Faith' in religious literature, like Quran and Granth Sahib and their teachings are emotionalised and emphasised as 'Allahu Akbar' etc. In Buddhism it is 'Buddham Sangham Dharmam, Saranam Gachami' i.e. to take refuge in Buddha, Society, & Religion. Besides these aspects there are some other common elements in the rituals performed in these places of worship.

In every religion water is used in some form or other, a symbolic feature for sustenance of life. Fire is invoked in some forms like Yagnas, Dhoop, Incense sticks, Camphor lights, Candle lights etc. which are symbolic of energy required for human sustenance. In all religions kneeling before God is an essential posture which man observes for his prayers.

Every religion also believes that the Birth of a man is on the Will of God and after Death the Soul reaches the abode of God and the bodies are returned to earth as enunciated 'Dust thou art and unto dust thou returnest' in the Bible. Every religion has some distortions and deviations resulting in evolution of some 'cults' with extreme states of mind. The changing trends in normal perceptions of rituals in all religions, have all moved in the same direction as agro-economic cultures gradually shifted to industrial economies of nations - from one of dependence on Nature to dependence on Science & Technology. From elaborate and time-consuming practices to time-saving and even costly practices.

Thus there are quite a number of common aspects in all religions, historically & spiritually, which require to be properly analysed for understanding the real purpose of religions, for understanding the significance of various spiritual aspects for material advancements in daily life of human

beings irrespective of their religion or caste or creed or nationality This, is the UNITY in the DIVERSITY of Religions of the world.