

# Religion: A Threat to World Peace and Order?

## Abstract

Religion is fast becoming contentious in postmodern times. One of the most important things for postmodern societies to do would be to reconsider the use of the word religion, and replace it with something more profound. The current idea of religion does not take into account, the possibility of human beings who can live in peaceful co-existence, with complete respect for the other, not because of the fear of inviting the wrath of a punishing God, but because they truly believe that it is the right thing to do.

**Keywords:** Religion, Ideology, Religious Disputes, Universal Brotherhood.

## Introduction

The idea of religion as a set of theological doctrines wherein there is a messenger of God sent to this world and a central book recognised as His word, no longer appears to be functional. In fact, it appears to be a gross misconception. In the postmodern period, there is a need to go beyond the idea of religion and take a fresh look at the basis on which a life based on peaceful co-existence can be created.

## Aim of the Study

The aim of this paper is to research the idea that perhaps the traditional ideas related to religion need to be reviewed and recorded in order to promote world peace.

## Hypothesis

It is possible to think beyond the idea of religion and a single Godhead.

Religion comes from religio (Latin) which means to bind, yet the world today is not bound together. Religion, itself divided, has proved a divisive force as well. There seems to be little sense in urging each individual to practise his own particular faith and then expect him to believe in the equality of all faiths and have a tolerant attitude towards all other faiths as well. To expect that there will ever be a fusion of all religious faiths resulting in world brotherhood and unity is a tall order indeed. Religion today is a major issue, almost the root of several evils. It is imperative in the present international context to speak of righteousness as a guiding force for all human beings rather than of religion.

The History of the world bears testimony to the fact that several wars have been fought in the past by people professing different faiths for the cause of religion. The situation seems no different even today. The world is brutally torn apart with incidents of violence and bloodshed stemming from terrorist activities which undoubtedly reek of a distorted view of religion.

The idea of a God attached to a particular religion obsessed with the craving to be followed by one and all and who exhorts his followers to make sure that it is His Will alone that is allowed to prevail over the entire human race has done more harm than good. It is a misconception of almost all religious faiths that if an individual claims to be devoted to his faith, he must work towards the spread of his faith even if it involves meaningless cruelty to others who are not followers of the same faith. The misconception is carried to extremes when people begin to believe that they are perfectly justified in doing so, for it is the command of their God who desires sole custody of all human matters. Such an idea is at the root of many modern maladies.

Unenlightened minds, not understanding the true meaning of things, faithful to the call of their named God and desirous of pandering to His whim of precedence, outdo one another in trying to fulfil what to their minds constitutes His Command. Little wonder then that they wreak vengeance on all such who do not conform to this single Godhead. There is no reference in this to any particular God but only to the eaninglessness of the limited mind which believes that the Will of the One they



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follow should prevail over the will of Others whom others follow.

If one insists on the use of the word religion, what is its purpose and what really does it drive at. It is difficult to accept religion as a passport to human life which ensures a safe conduct through the journey of life. All religions (if one insists on the use of the word) boil down to the same thing. The purpose is to show the path by which one may lead a good life. This good life cannot be different for an individual in one part of the world from another in another part of the world. A good life will essentially be the same no matter who prescribes it and who follows it. Belief in a God does not ensure this good life. What then is this good life. Adherence to a particular god with a particular name does not answer this question because if we agree that the idea of a good life is not changeable how can different Gods prescribe different ingredients for a good life. The ingredients will of necessity be the same, no matter which agency prescribes it and adherence to that, rather than adherence to the prescribing agency is the important thing. Which brings us to the vital question-What constitutes this good life and how can it be followed even without adherence to a named God. Adherence to a named God is optional but adherence to the fundamental prescription of a good life is essential.

The Bhagavad Gita is a celebrated religious and philosophical poem of India which occurs as an episode in the sixth book of The Mahabharata. Although an appeal to its poetic beauty cannot set aside the fact of its being a singularly theistic work, there is no doubt that no other product of Indian religious literature can hold a candle to The Bhagavad Gita in view of the rich and morally elevated nature of thought in many passages. It comprises a body of lofty and ethical teaching. The Gita advocates an attitude of unselfish or motiveless discharge of duty and this idea is put forward at several places in the work in varied ways. Mere discharge of duty however is not enjoined in it. It is the motiveless nature of the deed which is constantly urged which implies duty discharged for its own sake without any expectation of the fruit.

One of the most comprehensive and important terms in the entire range of Sanskrit language and literature is Dharma meaning a sacred duty born of a sense of justice. It has a far wider meaning and application than this, for ideally the whole of human life should be subject to Dharma. Dharma is upheld as the way to final liberation. To the Indian mind, the idea of a good life is embodied in the word Dharma wrongly translated as religion. It is India's greatest misfortune that the word religion has been translated as Dharma because there is and will always be a distinction between religion in its prevalent sense and dharma as it is to be understood. Religion is more a matter of the prescriber while dharma is the essence of the idea prescribed. In Indian Thought Dharma is such an expansive and significant word that no other word or phrase in any language or dialect can successfully capture its entire meaning. The closest approximation would probably

be righteousness but that too would leave certain aspects of the idea untouched.

Dharma is not a word to which any adjective can be applied. There cannot be a hindu dharma, a christian dharma or any other faith specific dharma. Dharma is common to all levels of human existence, although it is true that it is modified to a certain extent by desha(place), kala(time) and patra(the individual in a certain position); meaning that what is dharma in a particular context may not be dharma even for the same individual in a different context. The dharma of a brahmachari is to abstain from sexual relations with a woman, whereas the dharma of a householder is to cohabit with his wife, failing which he is guilty of adharma. The same individual in renouncing the world will be guilty of adharma if he indulges in sexual relations even with his wife.

The Mahabharata speaks of Dharma as the foundation of every human relationship, personal and collective.

Na vei rajyam na rajaaseenna cha danda na dandikaha Dharmeneiv prajaha sarva rakshanti sma parasparam.

**(Shantiparva 59.14)**

There was neither kingdom nor king; neither governance nor governor. People protected each other by means of dharma. It was in dharma that they grew together and were sustained.

**(Translation Mine)**

One of the fascinating questions which gripped the European mind in the nineteenth century was the idea that if there were no God everything would be permissible. Nothing could be further from the truth and nothing illustrates the difference between religion and dharma better. Even if there were no God dharma would yet prevail'. Dharma is merely right action. Following one's Dharma ensures a satisfactory life while fixing the mind on a personal God does not.

If the east has its Dharma the west has the ten Commandments which are again the quintessence of dharma. The only difference is that in the west the good life is given as a commandment the failure to obey which has the velvet suggestion of ,while in the east dharma is advocated as the only sound, fundamental basis of human life. Failure to act in accordance with dharma which will be different in different situations will not invite the wrath of a vengeful God, rather it will obstruct the progress of the human soul which is worse than the punishment any God could inflict. Failure to act in accordance with ones Dharma is an invitation to greater meshes of Karma. The mind which understands only food, sex and sleep is yet to evolve to a stage of spiritual receptivity before it begins to comprehend something as fundamental as Dharma.

As long as the world tries to shift accountability to an external agency, conveniently evading the issue of Dharma or righteousness one will continue to flounder in unknown and miserable waters but once the comprehension of Dharma is there and the individual begins to act in accordance with it in every sphere of life, the answers will automatically

begin to present themselves and life then can be expected to be one of smooth sailing. Then why this insistence on religion rather than a stress on dharma. Why can there not be a common Dharma for the entire world wherein each individual invokes the godly element within him rather than the worldly. The worldly element is mundane while the godly one is supramundane or transcendental.

*Karmannyeva adhikaraste Ma phaleshu kadachana* as an attitude prescribed in The Bhagavata Gita is far deeper than it appears. What is expected of human beings is to do just what they believe is right, meaning doing that which they would like others to do to them in the same situation.

It is possible to argue on grounds of Karma and Rebirth that there is no such thing as accountability since things are preordained and so an individual does not really possess free will. Such a person who continues to act out of ignorance, transferring the question of accountability to preordination will continue to remain enmeshed in deeper tangles of Karma. On the other hand, an enlightened mind will put a distance between his own self and the world at large and act only out of a sense of righteousness without bothering about matters like preordination and without consideration of their results. That is in reality the meaning of *Karmannyeva Adhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana* which is reiterated in the text of The Bhagavata Gita in several ways.

Dwau bhootasargau lokesminadeivaasura eva chadaivo vistarashaha prokta aasuram partha me shrunu

**(Gita Verse 6 Chapter16)**

There are only two types of men in the world Arjuna the one having a divine nature and the other a demoniac nature. While the former type has been dealt with in detail hear of the latter from me in detail.

**(Translation Mine)**

There is really then no point in shutting ones eye to the question of the purpose of human existence and the means to make human life worthwhile in the true sense. While it is the instinct of the animal world to indulge in mere enjoyment without the perception of the higher reality embedded within, it is mans supreme purpose in life, being endowed with intellect and the power to reason for himself in order to lift himself up from the grossness of life and really inquire into the meaning of it. Rather than clothing one's ignorance with the idea of God's will one should rather reason logically and accept that which seems to answer most questions. Every political thought and practice as also every form of governance should be subject to dharma or righteousness.

**Conclusion**

The stubborn refusal to accept a logical explanation simply because it has not come from one's particular Godhead is as good as cutting one's nose to spite one's face. It is high time the world recognized that human existence cannot be viewed in isolation, nor can it be understood in parts. Varying conditions and unreasoned disparities in human life can only be explained by the idea that we have done something to either merit what we are enjoying at present or we have done something to deserve what we are now suffering. No God need be recognized or worshipped in preference to others but a good life irrespective of who or what we are and an earnest desire to do only that which is right or in other words that which we would want for ourselves can really help us to improve the present state which will automatically go a long way in setting things right in a distant future.

**References**

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