

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

Religion, the most fundamental as well as universal aspect of human life, has been co-terminus with human history. It has been expressed in different traditions in different ways. Comparative as well as recent study of religion reveals that, philosophy behind religion rests on its influence on society. It is a binding force of society. It is certainly true that religion has been used to justify social, economic, political and other concerns. In the history of religious studies, religion has been interpreted from different perspectives. But these perspectives of religious studies culminate in social good. Society is the ultimate concern of religion though the heart of religion is divinity. History of religion reveals that religion has many stages and forms, and its message varies when we pass from age to age and race to race. But it is a continuous presence among man, and whether in rude and stammering tones or in refined speech; it expresses man's answer to the problem of his existence and his destiny. Religion grows just because it is the expression of human spirit which is involved in the process of growth. The course of development, however brings with it expansion and articulation of the structure of society. Religion being an element of social life must interact with the other factor involved in the process of development of society. Galloway observed " Through the various forms of culture man can promote the growth and fullness of his life : in religion he finds the meaning and purpose of life itself"¹ Religion being a factor of culture, is a continuous growth, and

influences from the past to present, give form and colour to the spiritual consciousness.

Modern societies have by nature a corrosive effect on traditional forms of religious life and lead to decline in the scope and influence of religious institutions and in the popularity of religious beliefs. But these prophecies of traditional secularization theory failed to predict the future of religion in the contemporary world. Although modernity caused a degree of rupture between religion and society, there has also been a global revival of religion in the last two or three decades. Current developments and recent social and cultural transformations under the forces of globalization indicate that the prophecy of traditional secularization thesis seems to have failed to capture the ongoing influence of religion. Proponents of secularization theory such as Bryan Wilson, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann and Karel Dobbledare established an unavoidable and casual connection between the beginning of modernity and the decline of traditional forms of religious life. Generally speaking theorists of secularization process argued that religion would lose its influence on social and political life once the society absorbs the values and institutions of modernization. For Wilson² for example "secularization relates to the diminution in the social significance of religion". Shiner³ on the other hand, identifies six types or areas of secularization with several predictions about the future of religions. Shiner's first type of secularization is the decline of religion, which pointed out that "the previously accepted symbols, doctrines and institutions lose prestige and influence. The culmination of secularization would be a religion-less society"⁴. The second type of secularization - "conformity with this world"

predicted that "the religious groups or the religiously informed society turns its attention from the supernatural and becomes more and more interested in this world"⁵. The third type of secularization - "disengagement of society from religion" - claimed that "society separates itself from religious understanding which has previously informed it in order to constitute itself an autonomous reality and consequently limits religion to the sphere of private life"⁶. The fourth type, described as "transposition of religious beliefs and institutions", prophesized that functions of religious knowledge, behavior and institutions would have a world-based outlook. "Desacralization of the world", as the fifth type of secularization, predicted that the world would gradually be deprived of its sacral character and become an object of rationally explained sphere, rationality replacing supernatural beliefs mysterious approaches. The sixth type of secularization, taking the form of "movements from sacred to a secular society", on the other hand refers to social change, and indicates that they are based on rational and utilitarian considerations rather than religious principles⁷. Contemporary developments on the globe and recent debates in social sciences indicate that such comprehensive claims and predictions of the secularization theory have only limited validity and success, most of them being confined to Western Europe. Although modern societies have by nature a corrosive effect on traditional forms of religious life and lead to decline in the scope and influence of religious institutions and in the popularity of religious beliefs⁸, as Bell⁹ notes, existential questions of culture remain inescapable and "some new efforts to regain a sense of the sacred point to the direction in which our culture or its sentient representatives - will move." After observing the global rise of religion, Peter L. Berger¹⁰, who was once the proponent of secularization theory,

admits "that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today, with some exceptions.... is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever". He argues that the whole body of literature explaining secularization and its repercussions is essentially mistaken. Modernization did not necessarily lead to the decline of religion. Even in highly modernized societies like the European ones, religion succeeded to preserve its presence especially in individual consciousness if not institutionally.

In its elemental meaning the word "secular" stands for "this worldliness" as against the "transcendence". One who is engrossed in the day- to-day works and does not care for the "hereafter" is considered to be secular minded. The elemental meaning of "religion" has a necessary reference to transcendence and therefore to the "spiritual". We have to be alive both to the ultimate significance of religion and the genuineness of the secular demands. The genuine growth and progress of man would consist in a sort of reconciliation of our mundane requirement and spiritual aspirations. The spiritual, in Radhakrishnan's view, is not a denial of secular but a comprehensive continuation of it. Radhakrishnan seeks to maintain a balance between the realistic position and the idealistic philosophy. According to him, man is a finite- infinite being. "He is the earth's child and heaven's heir"¹¹ Radhakrishnan tries to restore faith in the dignity and potentiality of human individuals. This is of special significance in the present context where the world is looked upon as a mechanical whole and the individual is treated as its insignificant unit and is used for the production of material goods at the expense of his spiritual aspirations.

Throughout the history of civilization, religion has played an essential role in many societies. There are many reasons why religions have played such a prominent role in defining the culture of a society, but arguably the most notable of these reasons is that a belief or faith in a spiritual or divine power can add meaning and significance to many people's worldly lives. In cultural system religion is the inspiring spirit which gives meaning and direction to the whole. In themselves the various factors of social life may be regarded as means to the realization of higher values. It is the characteristic of spiritual religion to relate the values realized in human life to an ultimate and supreme value. This final value is not a temporal but a transcendent Good.

Whenever there is life there is society. For life can arise and continue only in its own presence, in the society of like beings. Life (individual) is born and nurtured in society; it finds its degree of fulfilment, its character, its limitation in society. Society is more than our environment; it is our nature. It is within us as well as around us. Aristotle reveals this truth long ago when he defined man as a "social animal"

Society is an infinitely interwoven series of relationships, issuing from the wills and purposes of being who realize their community. Mac Iver says "It is therefore, in the first place a state of mind, not a mere means or agency for the comfort or convenience of the beings so minded. Society is the extension of individuality, the transcendence of self enclosedness, the vehicle of personal identity, the means of the continuation of personality through the generations, the nurse of youth, the arena of manhood and womanhood, the organization of human

conquest of nature and the refuge of the human spirit against its un pitying law, the repository of the gathered customs and filtered traditions of men, the summed experience of life, the sphere of a thousand lesser conflicts and unities within the embracing purpose of one community".¹² Hence it is observed that according to MacIver society is the continuous process of human relationship.

Religion, as an element of culture is inherent in many aspects of society which has balanced the order of human relationship. Religious beliefs inevitably affect areas such as politics, economic, and cultural values. Though many people believe that religion occurs only in church, temple, or other spiritual gathering, a closer look at religion and society reveals that the two are not separate at all, but intricately interconnected and inter-dependent. No religion descends from heaven in a social vacuum nor is it practiced in an ethereal or ideal environment. Every religion comes into existence in a society when it gets corrupted or deviates widely from the acceptable path which can ensure good for the whole society. Hence one has to understand the genesis of religion in the light of the society it is born in.

Since the dawn of history human beings have found themselves drawn towards religion for various reasons. It has always inspired them to attain greater heights in the realm of moral and spiritual life. It has also promoted in an effective way solidarity, peace and harmony in society and has established unity and fellowship among peoples belonging to different races and culture. This constitutes the bright side of religion which brings peace and joy to the people. But there is another aspect of religion, its dark aspect, which brings unhappiness and suffering to people and deprives them of their legitimate freedom. The history of religion bears

ample witness to this dual and rather contradictory role of religion throughout the ages. This is mainly due to persistence of confusion between the deeper aspect of religion which constitutes its truth and its external aspect or structure which ordinarily serves as means to attain that truth. The essence and purpose of religion has to be clearly distinguished from its external structure. Any exclusive stress on the external side of religion often leads to undesirable consequences. It brings in to prominence the radical differences that exist between religions in respect of their doctrines, dogmas, rituals, ceremonies, organizations etc, and ignores their deeper aspect which helps to converge and come closer to each other.

Ever since the dawn of civilization peace and harmony in society have been sought by humanity, yet the whole of human history, from the very earliest time, is replete with wars and violent conflicts from the tribal right up to the international level. Religion has been one of the major sources of violent conflicts down through the centuries, and remains so even today, despite the worldwide growing interfaith movement. Science was supposed to help establish peace and harmony in society, but it has created increasingly deadly weapons of mass destruction. Communism, socialism, capitalism, democracy- all claimed to establish harmony and unity in society, but all invariably waged war.

As against these negative approaches, however, all the great spiritual traditions of the world tell us that there is, deep within our consciousness, a creative power that, if invoked and nurtured, can bring about a benign transformation in our thoughts and behavior which can bring sustenance to society.

Right from the pre-historic time, faith and beliefs have always been part of the texture of human society. It is not possible to find a society in which religious issues have not been raised. It may even be claimed that human endeavour in the realm of religion and beliefs has been more strenuous and long-lasting than his effort in the areas of knowledge and art. In different historical events, religion can be seen to have dominated all kind of human relationships.

In last century, due to the influence of enlightenment, scholars have conceptualized religion as a way of living, rather than merely a belief system or institution. Professional and scientific psychology appears to have rediscovered spirituality and religion during recent years. Towards the end of 20th century psychology has embraced spirituality and religion and used rigorous scientific method to examine important question related to psychology and religion.¹³ They examine in particular, the influence of religious behavior and belief on both mental and physical health of the individual and in general on society.

Religion is inherently a social-psychological phenomenon. Religion is typically expressed in groups or at least influenced by reference groups,¹⁴ and many of the mores and norms of any culture are rooted in religious perspectives that provide an acceptable range of alternatives for normative behavior in any culture¹⁵. Even deviant behavior can be heavily influenced by religious ideals as well as norms¹⁶ Hence it reflects that religion has psychological effect on human mind which can be instrumental in restoring values among the individuals and on the other hand it provides a foundation for social control for sustenance of society.

Human beings have become mute spectators of violence in various parts of the world. War, terrorism, genocides, brutality and crime are terrible realities of present society. It becomes clear that conflicts between human beings can no longer be settled by violence, which is devastating in its character. The conflicts in any field including that of religions has to be reconciled in a larger understanding of human depth and its varied expression. Today, there is a need for the development of world community based on unity and harmony and also there is a necessity for the search of means and methods to control destructive forces. At this juncture human being are looking for some practical insight to change the course of history, to guide it in a more positive direction, to create a universal that works for the welfare of the whole mankind and all sentient beings. World perspective is planned to gain insight into the meaning of life of man, who is not only determined by history but who also determines history. History is to be understood not only in terms of man and this planet but as including also such cosmic influences as interpreted our human world. Radhakrishnan says “The laws of life have their origin beyond their mere physical manifestation and compel us to consider their spiritual source. In fact, the widening of the conceptual frame work has not only served to restore order within the respective branches of knowledge, but has also disclosed analogies in man’s position regarding the analysis and synthesis of experience in apparently separated domains of knowledge suggesting the possibility of an more embracing objective description.”¹⁷ There is in mankind of today a counterforce to the sterility and danger of a quantitative, anonymous mass culture, a new, if imperceptible, spiritual sense of convergence towards world unity on the basis of sacredness of each human person and respect for the plurality of culture. Recently

there is a growing awareness that equality and justice are not to be evaluated in mere numerical terms but that they are proportionate and analogical in their reality. This generation is discovering that history does not conform to the social optimism of modern civilization and that the organization of human communities and establishment of justice, freedom and peace are not only intellectual achievements but spiritual and moral achievements as well, demanding a cherishing of the wholeness of human personality and constituting a never ending challenge to man, emerging the abyss of meaningless suffering, to be renewed and replenished in the totality of his life.¹⁸ The human race is involved in a new age of history in which human life presses forward to actualize new forms. Profound and striking changes are spreading over the world. A great cultural and social transformation is taking place. We are faced with a new vision of man in his organic unity and of history offering a richness and diversity of quality and majesty of scope hitherto unprecedented. In relating the accumulated wisdom of man's spirit to the new reality of the world age, in articulating its thought and belief, world perspectives seek to encourage a renaissance of hope in society and of pride in man's decision as to what his destiny will be.

Man cannot live and work without the hope that humanity is really capable of rising to a higher moral plane; without the dream that, in the end, he and his fellow mortals will be reconciled and will understand one another. Though there exists bonds as well as barriers among the individuals and among the nations, yet mankind's highest destiny is to become more human, more spiritual, and more capable of sympathetic understanding. This hope rises strong in the human heart

recently. We must create common goals that will unite living faiths without permitting any feelings of dominance or inferiority. Belief and behavior go together. Radhakrishnan says “If we believe in blood, race and soil, our world will be filled with Belsens and Buchenwalds. If we behave like wild animals, our society will be a jungle. If we believe in universal spiritual values, peace and understanding will grow.”¹⁹

Religion of ancient India speaks of a universal religion based on solidarity with the earth and all beings. They stressed on an understanding of the intrinsic interdependence of all beings. According to them, such an understanding is essential for grasping the truth of the interconnectivity of all life. The religious thinkers of ancient India are known for accommodation, conciliatory and synthesizing attitude of the mind.

In India religion is known as “Dharma” which means to be or exist, to be maintained or preserved. Dharma has been conceived as that which maintains or sustains human society and the world. Dharma sustains human society in the sense that it governs the conduct and behavior of the people and thus maintains order and balance in society. Society enjoys security, peace, order and harmony when the people act and behave in accordance with the moral and spiritual values laid down by Dharma in their personal, social and professional life and when human relationships are based on them. A society falls in confusion and disorder when the moral and spiritual dimension of Dharma ceases to provide light and life to it.²⁰ Dharma requires a non competitive , non coercive, non-acquisitive society that believes in friendship, sharing and co-operation.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a great Indian religious philosopher emphasized vividly significance of religion in society. In presenting and extending the idealist and vedāntic position, Radhakrishnan effectively draws on the works of Rabindra Nath Tagore and Henri Bergson. Radhakrishnan's first two books, "*The philosophy of Rabindra Nath Tagore*"(1918) and "*The Reign of Religion in contemporary philosophy*"(1920) reveals author's dual commitment to the spiritualism of Tagore's poetic vision, and Bergson's philosophical defense of intuition. Radhakrishnan's major works, *The Idealistic View of Life*, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, *Religion and Society*, and commentaries on the Upanisads and *Brahma- Sutra* consistently emphasize the humanistic character of Vedānta and its cognitive certainty based on intuition. Significantly, in Radhakrishnan system, intuition is equally the source of philosophical and religious insight. The source and goal of both philosophy and religion are the integral experience of the integrated life. Combining the insight of a long line of Indian mystic personalities with Bergson's claims for the role of the religious or integrated personalities in the evolution of consciousness, Radhakrishnan's entire system is based on the ideal of integration within the self, and the integration of universal Self or *Atman*.

According to Radhakrishnan the origin of the word "dharma" is the completion of Vedic Rta. It is conceived as the law that governs not only the cosmos but also the world of gods and men.²¹ "Dharma is right action. In the Rig-Veda Rta is right order of the universe, its stand for both satya or the truth of the things as well as the dharma or the law of evolution. Dharma formed from the root dhr, to hold means that which holds a thing and maintain it in being. Every form of life, every

group of man has its dharma, which is the law of its being.”²². The basic principle of dharma is the realization of the dignity of human spirit which is the dwelling place of the supreme. “The knowledge that the supreme spirit dwells in the heart of every living creature is the abiding root principle of all dharma.”²³

Radhakrishnan considers “Dharma” to be a word of protean significance which explains that it is the concept under which the Hindu brings the forms and activities which shape and sustain human life. Dharma tells us that “while our life is in the first instance for our own satisfaction, it is more essentially for the community, and most of all for that universal self which is in each of us and all beings.”²⁴ He developed a philosophy of religion having spiritual orientation, which can restore the order of society. According to Radhakrishnan the unity of the modern world demands a new cultural basis. But the problem is whether it is to be guided by the economic and the pragmatic mind, which is the most dominant at this moment, or by the spiritual. For him a mechanical world in which humanity is welded into a machine of soulless efficiency is not proper for the human endeavour. We need a spiritual outlook which will include in its intension not only the vast surging life of economics and politics but the profound need of the soul. The real nature of the civilization is to be gathered not so much from its form and institutions, but from the values of the spirit, the furniture of the mind. Radhakrishnan says “Religion is the inside of civilization, the soul as it were of the body of its social organization.”²⁵ Scientific applications, economic alliances, political institutions may bring the world together outwardly; but for a strong and stable unity the invisible but deeper bonds among ideas require to be strengthen. In rebuilding the human household, the role of

religion is no less important than that of science. The human individual consists of mind, body and spirit. Each requires its proper nutriment. The body is kept trim by food and exercise, the mind is informed by science and criticism and the spirit is illuminated by art and literature, philosophy and religion. If the spirit of humanity is to grow it can only be by the exercise of its lovelier energies. Radhakrishnan says “Human unity depends not on past origins but on future goal and direction on what we are becoming and whither we are tending”²⁶

The mandate of religion according to Radhakrishnan is that, man must make the changes in his own nature in order to let the divine in him manifest it. It is an insight to reality. Religion is the awareness of our real nature in God, it makes for a union of all mankind based on communion with the eternal. He says “The different religions take their source in the aspiration of man towards an unseen world, though the forms in which this aspiration is couched are determined by the environment and climate of thought. The unity of religion is to be found in that which is divine or universal in them and not in what is temporary and local.”²⁷ Every religion is growing under the inspiration of the divine spirit of truth in order to meet the moral and spiritual ordeal of the modern mind. This process of growth is securing for our civilization a synthesis on the highest level of the forces of religion and culture and enabling their followers to co-operate as members of one great fellowship. Different religious traditions clothe the one reality in various images and their visions could embrace and fertilize each other so as to give mankind a many sided perfection. There are no fundamental differences among the peoples of the world. They have all the deep human feelings the craving for justice above all class interests, horror of

bloodshed and violence. They are working for a religion which teaches the possibility and the necessity of man's union with himself, with nature, with his fellow-men and with the eternal spirit. According to Radhakrishnan this eternal religion is not irrational or unscientific, is not escapist or a-social. Its acceptance will solve many of our desperate and deep rooted problems of society and will bring peace to man of good will.

Religion, at their best, insists on behaviors more than on belief. Hence Radhakrishnan commented "A stable social order is the ground work of civilized life. Religion is social cement, a way in which men express their aspiration and find solace for their frustration",²⁸

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