



A BRIEF HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

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ABSTRACT:

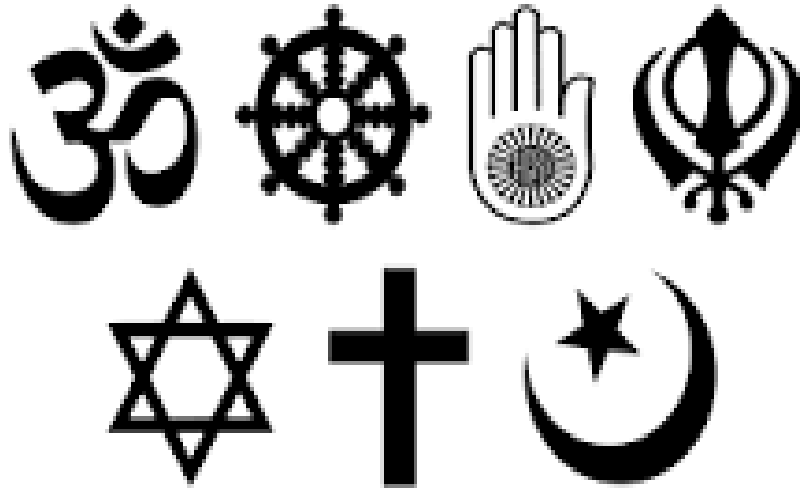
What is religion? Pioneering sociologist Émile Durkheim claimed that it consists of “things that surpass the limits of our knowledge” (1915). He defined religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them” (1915). Some people associate religion with places of worship (a synagogue or church), others with a practice (confession or meditation), and still others with a concept that guides their daily lives (like dharma or sin). All these people can agree that religion is a system of beliefs, values, and practices concerning what a person holds sacred or considers to be spiritually significant. From the Latin religio (respect for what is sacred) and religare (to bind, in the sense of an obligation), the term religion describes systems of belief and practice that define what people consider to be sacred or spiritual (Fasching and deChant 2001; Durkheim 1915). Throughout history, and in societies across the world, leaders have used religious narratives, symbols, and traditions in an attempt to give more meaning to life and to offer a framework for understanding the universe. Some form of religion is found in every known culture, and it is usually practiced in a public way by a recognizable group. The practice of religion can include feasts and festivals, prayer to God or gods, marriage and funeral services, devotional music and art, meditation or initiation, sacrifice or service, and other aspects of ritualized culture.

While some people think of religion as something individual because religious beliefs can be highly personal, religion is also a social institution. Social scientists recognize that religion exists as an organized and integrated set of beliefs, behaviors, and norms centered on basic social needs and values. Moreover, religion is a cultural universal found in all social groups. For instance, in every culture, funeral rites are practiced in some way, although these customs vary between cultures and within religious affiliations. Despite differences, there are common elements in a ceremony marking a person’s death, such as announcement of the death, care of the deceased, disposition (e.g., cremation or burial), and ceremony or ritual. These universals, and the differences in how societies and individuals experience and practice religion, provide rich material for sociological study.

INTRODUCTION:

The concept of "religion" was formed in the 16th and 17th centuries. Sacred texts like the Bible, the Quran, and others did not have a word or even a concept of religion in the original languages and neither did the people or the cultures in which these sacred texts were written. the population in Afro-Eurasia had climbed to over a million. As a result of increasing commercial and cultural interaction between people across this large area, religions were shared. The new religious systems provided foundations of cultural communication, moral expectation, and personal trust among people who were meeting, sharing ideas, and doing business with one another far beyond their local neighborhoods. The historians J.R. and William McNeil call this the development of “portable, congregational religions.” Common features of these religions are the following: there is usually a founding man who receives the word of God; there is a key text or set of texts that defines man’s relationship with God; there are recommended ways of living and worshipping; people come together regularly to have God’s word interpreted for them by an authority; and there is a path to self-trans-formation

and eternal salvation in one way or another. Religion, especially faiths that were shared by large groups of people, actually provided stability in cities. These religions were accepted by thousands of followers because it appealed to many different people from all social classes and occupations. If the texts and tenets of these faiths spoke to such a wide variety of people then the religious beliefs were more likely to spread along trade routes, unlike the earlier village-based religions.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. Where does the term religion come from?
2. What are some of the major religions in this world?
3. What is the history of these religions?
4. Are these religions region centric? If so, what are the major regions in which they are spread out?
5. Who are the followers of this religion?
6. What are the values preached by them?
7. What were the roles played by the religious heads in further dispersal of their believes?
8. What is the current situation of religions across the world today?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

1. Discuss on the major religions across the globe.
2. History of origin of such religions.
3. Countries which follow and particular religion and the reasons behind them
4. Role played by the religion in shaping the political affairs of the state.
5. Misuse of believes for violent intentions.
6. Impact of religious leaders and religious institutions, on the masses.
7. Values and preaching of every religion under discussion.
8. Importance of religion in today's world.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The Evolution of Religion: The History and Religions of Egypt and Harappan India by Sulabh Jain says that History has an unsettling effect on religion. Like science, history is fundamentally nothing more than a range of theories based on objective evidence. Mythology becomes a byword for a traditions history, and history in the objective sense that we understand it today becomes distorted. Thus through time both myth and history blend into an entertaining story of the world around them and their role in that world.

The Origin of Religions: An Open Eyed Journey Through a Mystic World by B. K. KARKRA talks about how As animal, for definite, have no religions and intelligence is the dividing line between man and animal, the religions. have clearly risen out of the intelligence of man. They started germinating as soon as the first spark of intelligence got ignited in the human brain. A conscious being is always keen to know about his past and his future. It is thus the curiosity about. the

Creator and the fear of future that have brought the religions in to being. These are about God alright, but not from God. The book traces the story of religions from the earliest times. The existential anxieties first kept the man tied to his present for quite a while. As the things started getting somewhat under his control, he began thinking about his future and the next life. This was the stage at which religious ideas started blipping on his mental radar. At first the animal and the elements of nature that overawed him or to whom he felt beholden for meeting his needs, got deified. Then it was the turn of some royalties to be seen in the image of gods- for instance, the Egyptian Pharaohs (rulers) got installed as gods after their death and the Chinese emperors were considered just next to the Spirit of Heavens, their highest deity. The belief in after-life also resulted in development of the art of preservation of mummies. The climatic conditions of Egypt helped in the matter. Ultimately, around four millennia back, man became conscious that there was some supreme power managing the affairs of the universe from behind the scenes. Thus, the humankind progressed from gods to God. God remains undiscovered and would remain so. However, the concept of God, as we know today, got first mooted by the Jewish Prophet Abraham (AC 1900). He named God as 'El Shaddai'. This got changed to Yahweh during the time of Prophet Moses in around BC 1500. Near about the same time, the Aryans identified Him as 'Om' on the basis of the primordial humming sound that the galaxies produce during their motion at an unimaginably long distance from us. Accordingly, it was the Jews and the Aryans who must be given credit for introducing God to us. Who went past the post first, could be a matter for an interesting research. Judaism and Hinduism, are, thus, the parent faiths. Two major religions, Christianity and Islam, have their origin in Judaism. These three Semitic religions together command the faith of over half the humanity today. The major off-shoots of Hinduism are the Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Confucianism and Taoism are the indigenous faiths of China and Shinto that of Japan. Interestingly, all these religions are of Asiatic origin. There are numerous smaller religions like Zoroastrianism, Baha'ism and various tribal faiths. Besides, all religions stand divided in to a number of cults. All these belief systems have been discussed in the book in a brutally objective manner, but with a deeply reverent attitude. There is neither an attempt to flatter nor to malign any faith. After all, behind all the religions stands the faith and wisdom of man. An attempt has been made to get to the inner core of every religion and present what they really stand for in essence. It is true that the religions turn in to business like ventures in no time. Still they keep on getting periodic course corrections to maintain their majesty. Their sacredness and high station in mind of man can never be denied. Moreover, their 'Sufi' strains greatly help them to stay spiritually relevant.

How Religion Evolved: And Why It Endures by Robin Dunbar says that every society in the history of humanity has lived with religion. In How Religion Evolved, evolutionary psychologist Professor Robin Dunbar tracks its origins back to what he terms the 'mystical stance' - the aspect of human psychology that predisposes us to believe in a transcendent world, and which makes an encounter with the spiritual possible. As he explores world religions and their many derivatives, as well as religions of experience practised by hunter-gatherer societies since time immemorial, Dunbar argues that this instinct is not a peculiar human quirk, an aberration on our otherwise efficient evolutionary journey. Rather, religion confers an advantage: it can benefit our individual health and wellbeing, but, more importantly, it fosters social bonding at large scale, helping hold fractious societies together. Dunbar suggests these dimensions might provide the basis for an overarching theory for why and how humans are religious, and so help unify the myriad strands that currently populate this field.

The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins is another exceptional work on religion. The God Delusion caused a sensation when it was published in 2006. Within weeks it became the most hotly debated topic, with Dawkins himself branded as either saint or sinner for presenting his hard-hitting, impassioned rebuttal of religion of all types. His argument could hardly be more topical. While Europe is becoming increasingly secularized, the rise of religious fundamentalism, whether in the Middle East or Middle America, is dramatically and dangerously dividing opinion around the world. In America, and elsewhere, a vigorous dispute between 'intelligent design' and Darwinism is seriously undermining and restricting the teaching of science.

Religious Processes (Oip) by Kunal Chakrabarti talks about the traces the evolution of a process of interaction between Brahmanism and the indigenous social groups of Bengal during the early medieval period. Addressing two significant methodological issues—the reading of didactic Sanskrit texts for the reconstruction of early Indian history and the

application of contemporary anthropological concepts to such texts to help elucidate cultural contestations—Chakraborty examines a civilizational process fundamental to the unfolding of Indian history. The Bengal Puranas adopted the cult of the goddess as the medium of assimilation of local cultural forms and it was on the shared understanding of this common cult that the earliest foundation of Bengal's regional tradition was laid. The book argues that the Puranic synthesis in Bengal generated for the first time the necessary cultural resource that enabled the diverse communities to acquire a regional cultural identity.

Comparative Religion by KEDAR NATH TIWARI is primarily meant for the use of Honours and Post-graduate students of Philosophy and Religion of the Indian Universities. Most of the books that are available on the subject dwell more upon the history of the origin and growth of the different religions rather than upon the basic principles, beliefs and practices that these religions inculcate and emphasize. Instead of going into the history of religions the author deals with certain specific topics relating to the important beliefs and practices of the followers of these religions, making the approach topical rather than historical. To make the study really comparative a separate chapter has been added which compares the religions on the specific topics taken up in the book. Towards the end the author has attempted to assess the possibility of a Universal Religion. The book is written in lucid style and contains much useful and interesting material for students as well as general readers.

Philosophy of Religion the Key Thinkers by Jeffrey J. Jordan, Bloomsbury contains arguments concerning the existence and nature of God have been a staple of western philosophy for over 2,000 years. Philosophy of Religion: The Key Thinkers offers a comprehensive historical overview of this fascinating field. Nine specially commissioned essays introduce and explore the contributions of those philosophers who have shaped the subject and the central issues and arguments therein. The book reconstructs the history of the philosophy of religion, clearly illustrating the most important attempts to address such crucial issues as the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the problem of evil, miracles, the moral argument, the design argument, religious experience and the idea of god. Thinkers covered include Anselm, Aquinas, Pascal, Hume, Kant, Paley and James. Crucially the book demonstrates why the ideas and arguments these key thinkers developed are still relevant in contemporary thought. Ideal for undergraduate students, the book lays the necessary foundations for a complete and thorough understanding of this fascinating subject.

Why I Am A Hindu by Shashi Tharoor is another important work on one of the biggest religion in the world , Hinduism. In Why I Am a Hindu, one of India's finest public intellectuals gives us a profound book about one of the world's oldest and greatest religions. Starting with a close examination of his own belief in Hinduism, he ranges far and wide in his study of the faith. He talks about the Great Souls of Hinduism, Adi Shankara, Patanjali, Ramanuja, Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and many others who made major contributions to the essence of Hinduism. He delves deep into Hinduism's most important schools of thought (such as the Advaita Vedanta). He explains, in easily accessible language, important aspects and concepts of Hindu philosophy like the Purusharthas and Bhakti, masterfully summarizes the lessons of the Gita and Vivekananda's ecumenism, and explores with sympathy the 'Hinduism of habit' practised by ordinary believers. He looks at the myriad manifestations of political Hinduism in the modern era, including violence committed in the name of the faith by right-wing organizations and their adherents. He analyzes Hindutva, explains its rise and dwells at length on the philosophy of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, its most significant ideologue. He is unsparing in his criticism of extremist 'bhakts', and unequivocal in his belief that everything that makes India a great and distinctive culture and country will be imperiled if religious 'fundamentalists' are allowed to take the upper hand. However, he also makes the point that it is precisely because Hindus form the majority that India has survived as a plural, secular democracy.

ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY:

HINDUISM:

The term Hinduism became familiar as a designator of religious ideas and practices distinctive to India with the publication of books such as *Hinduism* (1877) by Sir Monier Monier-Williams, the notable Oxford scholar and author of an influential Sanskrit dictionary. Initially it was an outsiders' term, building on centuries-old usages of the word Hindu. Early travelers to the Indus valley, beginning with the Greeks and Persians, spoke of its inhabitants as "Hindu" (Greek: 'indoi), and, in the 16th century, residents of India themselves began very slowly to employ the term to distinguish themselves from the Turks. Gradually the distinction became primarily religious rather than ethnic, geographic, or cultural. Since the late 19th century, Hindus have reacted to the term Hinduism in several ways. Some have rejected it in favour of indigenous formulations. Others have preferred "Vedic religion," using the term Vedic to refer not only to the ancient religious texts known as the Vedas but also to a fluid corpus of sacred works in multiple languages and an orthoprax (traditionally sanctioned) way of life. Still others have chosen to call the religion sanatana dharma ("eternal law"), a formulation made popular in the 19th century and emphasizing the timeless elements of the tradition that are perceived to transcend local interpretations and practice. Finally, others, perhaps the majority, have simply accepted the term Hinduism or its analogues, especially hindu dharma (Hindu moral and religious law), in various Indic languages. Since the early 20th century, textbooks on Hinduism have been written by Hindus themselves, often under the rubric of sanatana dharma. These efforts at self-explanation add a new layer to an elaborate tradition of explaining practice and doctrine that dates to the 1st millennium BCE. The roots of Hinduism can be traced back much farther—both textually, to the schools of commentary and debate preserved in epic and Vedic writings from the 2nd millennium BCE, and visually, through artistic representations of yakshas (luminous spirits associated with specific locales and natural phenomena) and nagas (cobralike divinities), which were worshipped from about 400 BCE. The roots of the tradition are also sometimes traced back to the female terra-cotta figurines found ubiquitously in excavations of sites associated with the Indus valley civilization and sometimes interpreted as goddesses.

Doctrine of HINDUISM:

The first of the five strands of Hinduism is doctrine, as expressed in a vast textual tradition anchored to the Veda ("Knowledge"), the oldest core of Hindu religious utterance, and organized through the centuries primarily by members of the learned Brahman class. Here several characteristic tensions appear. One concerns the relationship between the divine and the world. Another tension concerns the disparity between the world-preserving ideal of dharma and that of moksha (release from an inherently flawed world). A third tension exists between individual destiny, as shaped by karma (the influence of one's actions on one's present and future lives), and the individual's deep bonds to family, society, and the divinities associated with these concepts.

Most Hindus believe in brahman, an uncreated, eternal, infinite, transcendent, and all-embracing principle. Brahman contains in itself both being and nonbeing, and it is the sole reality—the ultimate cause, foundation, source, and goal of all existence. As the All, brahman either causes the universe and all beings to emanate from itself, transforms itself into the universe, or assumes the appearance of the universe. Brahman is in all things and is the self (atman) of all living beings. Brahman is the creator, preserver, or transformer and reabsorber of everything. Hindus differ, however, as to whether this ultimate reality is best conceived as lacking attributes and qualities—the impersonal brahman—or as a personal God, especially Vishnu, Shiva, or Shakti (these being the preferences of adherents called Vaishnavas, Shaivas, and Shaktas, respectively). Belief in the importance of the search for a One that is the All has been a characteristic feature of India's spiritual life for more than 3,000 years. Hindus acknowledge the validity of several paths (margas) toward such release. The *Bhagavadgita* ("Song of God"; c. 100 CE), an extremely influential Hindu text, presents three paths to salvation: the karma-marga ("path of ritual action" or "path of duties"), the disinterested discharge of ritual and social obligations; the jnana-marga ("path of knowledge"), the use of meditative concentration preceded by long and systematic ethical and contemplative training (Yoga) to gain a supraintellectual insight into one's identity with brahman; and the bhakti-marga ("path of devotion"), love for a personal God. These ways are regarded as suited to various types of people, but they are interactive and potentially available to all. Although the pursuit of moksha is institutionalized in Hindu life through ascetic practice and the ideal of withdrawing from the world at the conclusion of one's life, many Hindus ignore such practices. The *Bhagavadgita* states that because action is inescapable, the three paths are better

thought of as simultaneously achieving the goals of world maintenance (dharma) and world release (moksha). Through the suspension of desire and ambition and through detachment from the fruits (phala) of one's actions, one is enabled to float free of life while engaging it fully. This matches the actual goals of most Hindus, which include executing properly one's social and ritual duties; supporting one's caste, family, and profession; and working to achieve a broader stability in the cosmos, nature, and society. The designation of Hinduism as sanatana dharma emphasizes this goal of maintaining personal and universal equilibrium, while at the same time calling attention to the important role played by the performance of traditional religious practices in achieving that goal. Because no one person can occupy all the social, occupational, and age-defined roles that are requisite to maintaining the health of the life-organism as a whole, universal maxims (e.g., ahimsa, the desire not to harm) are qualified by the more-particular dharmas that are appropriate to each of the four major varnas: Brahmans (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors and nobles), Vaishyas (commoners), and Shudras (servants). These four categories are superseded by the more practically applicable dharmas appropriate to each of the thousands of particular castes (jatis). And these, in turn, are crosscut by the obligations appropriate to one's gender and stage of life (ashrama). In principle then, Hindu ethics is exquisitely context-sensitive, and Hindus expect and celebrate a wide variety of individual behaviours.



ISLAM:

From the very beginning of Islam, Muhammad had inculcated a sense of brotherhood and a bond of faith among his followers, both of which helped to develop among them a feeling of close relationship that was accentuated by their experiences of persecution as a nascent community in Mecca. The strong attachment to the tenets of the Qur'anic revelation and the conspicuous socioeconomic content of Islamic religious practices cemented this bond of faith. In 622 CE, when the Prophet migrated to Medina, his preaching was soon accepted, and the community-state of Islam emerged. During this early period, Islam acquired its characteristic ethos as a religion uniting in itself both the spiritual and temporal aspects of life and seeking to regulate not only the individual's relationship to God (through conscience) but human relationships in a social setting as well. Thus, there is not only an Islamic religious institution but also an Islamic law, state, and other institutions governing society. Not until the 20th century were the religious (private) and the secular (public) distinguished by some Muslim thinkers and separated formally in certain places such as Turkey. This dual religious and social character of Islam, expressing itself in one way as a religious community commissioned by God to bring its own value system to the world through the jihād ("exertion," commonly translated as "holy war" or "holy struggle"), explains the astonishing success of the early generations of Muslims. Within a century after the Prophet's death in 632 CE, they had brought a large part of the globe—from Spain across Central Asia to India—under a new Arab Muslim empire.

The vast variety of races and cultures embraced by Islam (an estimated total of more than 1.5 billion persons worldwide in the early 21st century) has produced important internal differences. All segments of Muslim society, however, are bound by a common faith and a sense of belonging to a single community. With the loss of political power during the period of Western colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries, the concept of the Islamic community (ummah), instead of weakening, became stronger. The faith of Islam helped various Muslim peoples in their struggle to gain political freedom in the mid-20th century, and the unity of Islam contributed to later political solidarity.

Doctrine of ISLAM:

Islamic doctrine, law, and thinking in general are based upon four sources, or fundamental principles (uṣūl): (1) the Qurʾān, (2) the Sunnah (“Traditions”), (3) ijmāʿ (“consensus”), and (4) ijtihād (“individual thought”).

The Qurʾān (literally, “reading” or “recitation”) is regarded as the verbatim word, or speech, of God delivered to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel. Divided into 114 suras (chapters) of unequal length, it is the fundamental source of Islamic teaching. The suras revealed at Mecca during the earliest part of Muhammad’s career are concerned mostly with ethical and spiritual teachings and the Day of Judgment. The suras revealed at Medina at a later period in the career of the Prophet are concerned for the most part with social legislation and the politico-moral principles for constituting and ordering the community.

Sunnah (“a well-trodden path”) was used by pre-Islamic Arabs to denote their tribal or common law. In Islam it came to mean the example of the Prophet—i.e., his words and deeds as recorded in compilations known as Hadith (in Arabic, Ḥadīth: literally, “report”; a collection of sayings attributed to the Prophet). Hadith provide the written documentation of the Prophet’s words and deeds. Six of these collections, compiled in the 3rd century AH (9th century CE), came to be regarded as especially authoritative by the largest group in Islam, the Sunnis. Another large group, the Shiʿah, has its own Hadith contained in four canonical collections.

The doctrine of ijmāʿ, or consensus, was introduced in the 2nd century AH (8th century CE) in order to standardize legal theory and practice and to overcome individual and regional differences of opinion. Though conceived as a “consensus of scholars,” ijmāʿ was in actual practice a more fundamental operative factor. From the 3rd century AH ijmāʿ has amounted to a principle of stability in thinking; points on which consensus was reached in practice were considered closed and further substantial questioning of them prohibited. Accepted interpretations of the Qurʾān and the actual content of the Sunnah (i.e., Hadith and theology) all rest finally on the ijmāʿ in the sense of the acceptance of the authority of their community.

Ijtihād, meaning “to endeavour” or “to exert effort,” was required to find the legal or doctrinal solution to a new problem. In the early period of Islam, because ijtihād took the form of individual opinion (raʾy), there was a wealth of conflicting and chaotic opinions. In the 2nd century AH ijtihād was replaced by qiyās (reasoning by strict analogy), a formal procedure of deduction based on the texts of the Qurʾān and the Hadith. The transformation of ijmāʿ into a conservative mechanism and the acceptance of a definitive body of Hadith virtually closed the “gate of ijtihād” in Sunni Islam while ijtihād continued in Shiʿism. Nevertheless, certain outstanding Muslim thinkers (e.g., al-Ghazālī in the 11th–12th century) continued to claim the right of new ijtihād for themselves, and reformers in the 18th–20th centuries, because of modern influences, caused this principle once more to receive wider acceptance.

**CHRISTIANITY:**

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with 2.8 billion adherents. It is categorized as one of the three Abrahamic or monotheistic religions of the Western tradition along with Judaism and Islam. 'Christian' is derived from the Greek christos for the Hebrew messiah (“anointed one”). Christianoi, “followers of the Christ,” became the name of a group who followed the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth in 1st-century Israel and proclaimed him the predicted messiah of the prophets.

Christianity merged the beliefs of ancient Judaism with elements from the dominant culture of the Roman Empire. The sacred texts are combined in the Christian Bible: the Jewish Scriptures (now deemed the Old Testament) and the New Testament (the gospels, the letters of Paul, and the Book of Revelation). This article surveys the origins of the movement that ultimately became an independent religion.

Doctrine of Christianity:

The election of clergy – Borrowing an administrative level from the provincial Roman government, bishops (overseers in a diocese) were elected by the communities. Deacons were also elected to help serve bishops in the distribution of charity. Deacons eventually became priests, and together, the two levels constituted Christian clergy.

The Spirit of God – The spirit of God had imbued Christ with the ability to forgive sins on earth. It was understood to have been granted first to his disciple, Peter, and then to the others. They passed the spirit to the elders they appointed, and the Christian clergy was granted the unique power to forgive sins on earth.

Christian philosophy – Philosophers shared a common belief in the existence of a higher god, an ethereal first being who emanated the various powers in the universe. God then emanated a concept known as logos (often translated as "word") to organize matter in the universe. Christian writers claimed the higher god was the God of Israel, who emanated Christ in the form of the logos.

Celibacy for the clergy – Applying analogies of athletic discipline, asceticism (not indulging the body) became an important Christian ideal. Christian clergy were urged to remain celibate (no marriage) and chaste (no intercourse), which elevated them above the community as living martyrs who sacrificed a normal life for the sake of the Church.

Orthodoxy/Heresy – Another major innovation emerged in the twin concepts of orthodoxy ("correct belief") and heresy (from the Greek *haeresis*, a school of philosophy). In the middle of the 2nd century CE, Christian communities categorized under the umbrella term 'Gnostics' emerged. Gnostics claimed to have secret knowledge about the nature of God, the universe, and Christ. Their ideas challenged mainstream Christian teaching on the salvation found in the crucifixion and the resurrection of the body. The reaction against the Gnostics was the production of an enormous body of literature, outlining correct beliefs (orthodoxy) as opposed to the incorrect beliefs of these groups (heresy). These teachings became the later basis for the Christian Creeds. Declaring the Gnostic gospels heretical saw the beginning of the eventual canonization of only four gospels in the New Testament: Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John.

The separation of Christianity from Judaism – In 135 CE, the Jews revolted against Rome, and when the Bar-Kokhba Revolt failed, Christian leaders were anxious to convince Rome that Christians were patriotic citizens who obeyed the Roman law. In their appeals to stop Christian persecution, Christian leaders petitioned emperors to recognize the antiquity of Christians, as versus Israel, the true Jews of God's original covenant. To prove the antiquity of Christians, the philosophical literary device of allegory was applied to the Jewish Scriptures. The testament of the Jews and the prophets of Israel had all pointed to Christ. Everywhere that God appeared in the Scriptures was as a pre-existent Christ.

Christianity was now a religious system that was no longer ethnically Jewish, and no longer aligned with the dominant culture, but a unique system with elements from both.

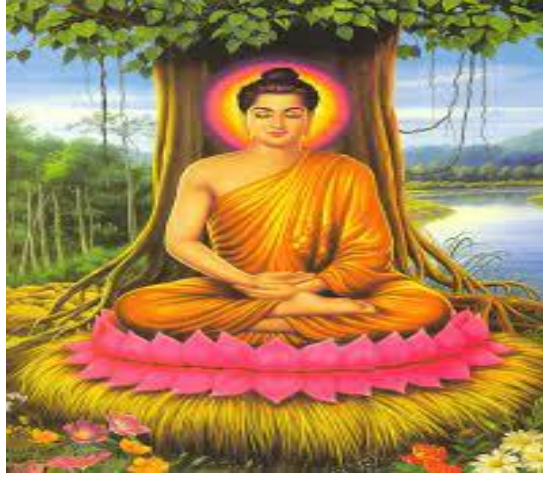


BUDDHISM:

Buddhism is a non-theistic religion (no belief in a creator god), also considered a philosophy and a moral discipline, originating in India in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE. It was founded by the sage Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha I. c. 563 - c. 483 BCE) who, according to legend, had been a Hindu prince. Before abandoning his position and wealth to become a spiritual ascetic, Siddhartha lived comfortably as a noble with his wife and family but once he became aware of human suffering he felt he had to find some way of easing people's pain. He pursued strict spiritual disciplines to become an enlightened being who taught others the means by which they could escape samsara, the cycle of suffering, rebirth, and death. The Buddha developed the belief system at a time when India was in the midst of significant religious and philosophical reform. Buddhism was, initially, only one of many schools of thought which developed in response to what was perceived as the failure of orthodox Hinduism to address the needs of the people. It remained a relatively minor school until the reign of Ashoka the Great (268-232 BCE) of the Mauryan Empire (322-185 BCE) who embraced and spread the belief, not only throughout India, but through Central and Southeast Asia.

Doctrine of BUDDHISM:

Buddhism has a strong individualistic component: everyone has responsibility for their own happiness in life. Buddha presented the Four Noble Truths as guiding principles: there is suffering in life; the cause of suffering is desire; ending desire means ending suffering; and following a controlled and moderate lifestyle will end desire, and therefore end suffering. In order to achieve these goals, the Buddha presented the Noble Eightfold Path: right belief, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right occupation, right effort, right mindfulness, and right samadhi—or meditation. According to Buddhist practice, following the Noble Eightfold Path will ultimately result in being liberated from samsara, the cycle of rebirth and suffering. Many followers of this path to enlightenment participated in an emerging Buddhist monastic tradition. Monasticism is a religious way of life which involves leaving behind worldly pursuits and devoting oneself to spiritual activity. Buddhism's individual outlook and disregard for the caste system in attaining enlightenment were appealing to people in lower castes. Buddhism suggested that individual people might be able to attain enlightenment in this life and held that caste was not a punishment for deeds committed in a past life. Women also had some opportunities within Buddhism that they wouldn't have had access to otherwise, such as the ability to become Buddhist monks. Buddhism gave them an option for work outside the traditional sphere of family and home. Buddhism was less popular with people in the vaishya—merchant—or shudra—servant—classes who could not devote all of their time and mental energy to pursuing these challenging goals. Partly in response, Mahayana Buddhism arose. Mahayana Buddhism is a form of Buddhism in which people could still attain enlightenment by performing acts of devotion or performing the duties of their jobs. This alternative approach made Buddhism more acceptable for a greater number of people. Mahayana means the greater vehicle and refers to the opportunity for more people to gain salvation. Buddhism also received support from the state. In 260 BCE, King Ashoka adopted Buddhism after a violent war against the feudal state of Kalinga. He wanted to renounce violence and publicly turned to Buddhism in order to achieve this. He may have also turned to Buddhism as a way of uniting people of many castes and cultures under a similar religion, which might have made his empire easier to govern.



JUDAISM:

Judaism, monotheistic religion developed among the ancient Hebrews. Judaism is characterized by a belief in one transcendent God who revealed himself to Abraham, Moses, and the Hebrew prophets and by a religious life in accordance with Scriptures and rabbinic traditions. Judaism is the complex phenomenon of a total way of life for the Jewish people, comprising theology, law, and innumerable cultural traditions. It is history that provides the key to an understanding of Judaism, for its primal affirmations appear in early historical narratives. Thus, the Bible reports contemporary events and activities for essentially religious reasons. The biblical authors believed that the divine presence is encountered primarily within history. God's presence is also experienced within the natural realm, but the more immediate or intimate disclosure occurs in human actions. Although other ancient communities also perceived a divine presence in history, the understanding of the ancient Israelites proved to be the most lasting and influential. It is this particular claim—to have experienced God's presence in human events—and its subsequent development that is the differentiating factor in Jewish thought. Moreover, the ancient Israelites' entire mode of existence was affected by their belief that throughout history they stood in a unique relationship with the divine. The people of Israel believed that their response to the divine presence in history was central not only for themselves but for all humankind. Furthermore, God—as person—had revealed in a particular encounter the pattern and structure of communal and individual life to this people. Claiming sovereignty over the people because of his continuing action in history on their behalf, he had established a covenant (berit) with them and required from them obedience to his teaching, or law (Torah). This obedience was a further means by which the divine presence was made manifest—expressed in concrete human existence. The corporate life of the chosen community was thus a summons to the rest of humankind to recognize God's presence, sovereignty, and purpose—the establishment of peace and well-being in the universe and in humankind.

History, moreover, disclosed not only God's purpose but also humankind's inability to live in accord with it. Even the chosen community failed in its obligation and had to be summoned back, time and again, to its responsibility by the prophets—the divinely called spokespersons who warned of retribution within history and argued and reargued the case for affirmative human response. Israel's role in the divine economy and thus Israel's particular culpability were dominant themes sounded against the motif of fulfillment, the ultimate triumph of the divine purpose, and the establishment of divine sovereignty over all humankind.

Doctrine of JUDAISM:

Judaism is more than an abstract intellectual system, though there have been many efforts to view it systematically. It affirms divine sovereignty disclosed in creation (nature) and in history, without necessarily insisting upon—but at the same time not rejecting—metaphysical speculation about the divine. It insists that the community has been confronted by the divine not as an abstraction but as a person with whom the community and its members have entered into a relationship. It is, as the concept of Torah indicates, a program of human action, rooted in this personal confrontation. Further, the response of this particular people to its encounter with God is viewed as significant for all humankind. The community is called upon to express its loyalty to God and the covenant by exhibiting solidarity within its corporate life

on every level, including every aspect of human behaviour, from the most public to the most private. Thus, even Jewish worship is a communal celebration of the meetings with God in history and in nature. Yet the particular existence of the covenant people is thought of not as contradicting but rather as enhancing human solidarity. This people, together with all humanity, is called upon to institute political, economic, and social forms that will affirm divine sovereignty. This task is carried out in the belief not that humans will succeed in these endeavours solely by their own efforts but that these sought-after human relationships have their source and their goal in God, who assures their actualization. Within the community, each Jew is called upon to realize the covenant in his or her personal intention and behaviour. In considering the basic affirmations of Judaism from this point of view, it is best to allow indigenous formulations rather than systematic statements borrowed from other traditions to govern the presentation.

The Judaic affirmations about God have not always been given the same emphasis, nor have they been understood in the same way. This was true in the Middle Ages, among both philosophers and mystics, as well as in modern times. In the 19th century, western European Jewish thinkers attempted to express and transform these affirmations in terms of German philosophical idealism. Later thinkers turned to philosophical naturalism, supplemented with the traditional God language, as the suitable expression of Judaism. In the first half of the 20th century the meaningfulness of the whole body of such affirmations was called into question by the philosophical school of logical positivism. The destruction of six million Jews in the Holocaust raised the issue of the validity of concepts such as God's presence in history, divine redemption, the covenant, and the chosen people.



LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

Over the decade from 2007 to 2017, government restrictions on religion – laws, policies and actions by state officials that restrict religious beliefs and practices – increased markedly around the world. And social hostilities involving religion – including violence and harassment by private individuals, organizations or groups – also have risen since 2007, the year Pew Research Center began tracking the issue. Indeed, the latest data shows that 52 governments – including some in very populous countries like China, Indonesia and Russia – impose either “high” or “very high” levels of restrictions on religion, up from 40 in 2007. And the number of countries where people are experiencing the highest levels of social hostilities involving religion has risen from 39 to 56 over the course of the study. Government restrictions have risen in several different ways. Laws and policies restricting religious freedom (such as requiring that religious groups register in order to operate) and government favoritism of religious groups (through funding for religious education, property and clergy, for example) have consistently been the most prevalent types of restrictions globally and in each of the five regions tracked in the study: Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle East-North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Both types of restrictions have been rising; the global average score in each of these categories increased more than 20% between 2007 and 2017.

Levels of government limits on religious activities and government harassment of religious groups are somewhat lower. But they also have been rising over the past decade – and in some cases, even more steeply. For instance, the average score for government limits on religious activities in Europe (including efforts to restrict proselytizing and male

circumcision) has doubled since 2007, and the average score for government harassment in the Middle East-North Africa region (such as criminal prosecutions of Ahmadis or other minority sects of Islam) has increased by 72%.¹

One of the consistent takeaways from a decade of tracking is the relatively high level of government restrictions on religion in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which has ranked above all other regions each year from 2007 to 2017. The new study shows that the Middle East has high levels of restrictions across all four categories in 2017, but the gap in government favoritism is particularly large: The average country in the MENA region scores nearly twice as high on measures of government favoritism as the average country in any other region.

Indeed, 19 of the 20 countries in the Middle East (all except Lebanon) favor a religion — 17 have an official state religion, and two have a preferred or favored religion.⁷ In all of these countries except Israel, the favored religion is Islam. Additionally, all countries in the region defer in some way to religious authorities or doctrines on legal issues. For example, in family law cases in Egypt, when spouses have the same religion, courts apply that religious group's canonical (i.e., traditional religious) laws. However, when one spouse is Muslim and the other has a different religion (such as Coptic Christianity), or if spouses are members of different Christian denominations, courts defer to Islamic family law.⁸ However, government favoritism has barely increased in the Middle East over the course of the study, partly because it started at such a high level that there was not much room for growth on the scale. In the other four major geographic regions, meanwhile, there have been notable increases in the levels of government favoritism of religious groups. Some of the largest increases occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in 2009, Comoros passed a constitutional referendum that declared Islam the state religion.⁹ And, in 2014, a concordat between the island nation of Cabo Verde and the Vatican granted privileges to the Catholic Church that were not available to other groups. The agreement allowed for "Catholic educational institutions, charitable activities, and pastoral work in military, hospitals, and penal institutions, as well as Catholic teaching in public schools." It also provided tax exemptions for Catholic properties and places of worship.¹⁰ In the Asia-Pacific region, government favoritism of particular religious groups also has increased since 2007. In Thailand, a new constitution came into force in 2017 with a provision that elevates the status of Theravada Buddhism by mandating "special promotion" through "education, propagation of its principles, and the establishment of measures and mechanisms 'to prevent the desecration of Buddhism in any form.'" ¹¹ There also has been an increase in Asian governments deferring to religious authorities, texts and doctrines since 2007. For instance, in Turkey, the government passed a law in 2017 giving Muslim religious authorities at the province and district level the authority to register marriages and officiate at weddings on behalf of the state.¹² The government contended that this would make the registration process more efficient, while critics argued that it violated principles of secularism in the country's constitution and did not meet the needs of other (non-Muslim) religious groups.¹³ The countries with the highest scores in the category of laws and policies restricting religious freedom are spread across Asia, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. In China, for example, only certain religious groups are allowed to register with the government and hold worship services. In order to do this, they must belong to one of five state-sponsored "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant). However, there were reports that the Chinese government arrested, tortured and physically abused members of both registered and unregistered religious groups.²²

In Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, a new counterterrorism law published in November 2017 criminalizes "anyone who challenges, either directly or indirectly, the religion or justice of the King or Crown Prince," and prohibits "the promotion of atheistic ideologies in any form," "any attempt to cast doubt on the fundamentals of Islam" and publications that "contradict the provisions of Islamic law." Indeed, public practice of all non-Muslim religions is illegal in the country, including public worship, proselytization and display of religious symbols. It is also illegal for Muslims to convert to another religion.²³

Since 2007, Hungary has experienced a large increase in its score in this category. A new law in 2012 changed the registration process for religious groups and effectively deregistered more than 350 groups, adversely affecting their finances and ability to offer charitable social services

The share of countries with "high" or "very high" levels of social hostilities involving religion — that is, acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations or groups in society — ticked up from 27% in 2016 to 28% in 2017. This is the largest percentage of countries to have high or very high levels of social hostilities since 2013, but falls well below the 10-year peak of 33% in 2012.

CONCLUSION:

Making the leap from mountains to cultures, this chapter invites readers to consider not just religion as an aspect of wider cultural practices, but the very fact that we think such things as religions exist – that some of us even use the word ‘religion’ – itself to be a cultural artifact. We therefore begin by acquainting ourselves with the history of the very concept ‘religion’, keeping in mind that knowing the history, development, and limitations of our concepts may come in handy when we try to use them to name, organize, and move around within our worlds.

Like all items of culture, words and the concepts they are thought to convey have a history (such as the classification of, and the various associations and value judgments that we make when we hear, the name ‘Mount Everest’); not only spelling and pronunciation but meanings and usages change (sometimes dramatically) over time and place. So too, ‘religion’, and the assumption that the world is neatly divided between religious and nonreligious spheres (i.e., Church and State), can be understood as a product of historical development and not a brute fact of social life. Today, long after the modern usage of the word ‘religion’ was first coined, it is no longer obvious how it was understood in the past or how we ought to use it today. In fact, it is not altogether clear that scholars should continue to use it when studying human behavior.

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