

# **Role of Religion in Social Development**

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## **Abstract**

It is very difficult for a man to find out why there is so many different religions and which religion is the true one. Followers of every religion are trying to show the superiority of their religion. Every religion has its own concepts of what is regarded to be the goal of spiritual life. In terms of approaches religious practices may be based on faith, fear, rationality or harmlessness. Given such a wide variety of approaches, interpretations and goals of different religions adopted by mankind, it is useful for people not to hold dogmatic view about their religion but to be open to and tolerant of other religious views.

Religion advises people to do good and be good. It is our duty to respect the other man's religious belief even if we cannot accommodate it; tolerance is necessary for the sake of harmonious and peaceful living. Religion is not a subject for bargaining; one should not change ones religion for personal, material gains. Religion is to be used for spiritual development and for self-salvation. A religion of goodwill is based on the sacrifice and service for the welfare and happiness of others.

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## **Introduction**

*Man is the only living being in this world who has discover religion and perform worship and prayer.*

Man develops religion in order to satisfy his desire to understand the life within him and the world outside him. Many of this religion have become organized and are flourishing to this day, backed by a strong following of devotees many people are drawn to organized

religion because of the pomp and ceremony. While there are some who prefer to practice their own personal religion in view of their various origins and path of development which religions undergo, it is hardly surprising that the religions of man should differ in their approaches, the understanding and interpretation of their followers, their goal and how it can be achieved and their concept of reward and punishment for deeds performed.

Every religion has its own concepts of what is regarded to be the goal of spiritual life. For some religions eternal life in haven or paradise with the Lord is the final goal. For some the ultimate aim in life is the union of universal consciousness because it is believed that life is unite of consciousness and it must return to the same original consciousness. Some religions believe that the ending of suffering or repeated birth and date is the final goal. And there some who believe that the present life itself is more than enough to experience the aim of life.

### **Different Religious Approached in Society**

In terms of approaches religious practices may be based on faith, fear, rationality or harmlessness. A religion of cause and effect or *kamma* is based on the principle of self help and assumes that the individual alone is responsible for his own happiness and suffering as well as salvation. A religion of wisdom is based on the application of reason and seeks to understand life and the reality of worldly conditions through analytical knowledge.

Harmlessness and goodwill are common elements found in religion. A religion of peace is based on the principle of causing no harm to oneself as well as others, and its followers are to cultivate a harmonious, liberal and peaceful life. A religion of goodwill is based on the sacrifice and service for the welfare and happiness of others.

Religions differ according to the understanding capacity of their followers and the interpretations which religious authorities give to the religious doctrines and practices. Every religion will offer reasons to explain the existing human problems and inequalities and the way to remedy the situations.

To attain the desire goal every religion offers a method. Some religions ask their followers to surrender to God or depend on God for everything. Some others recommend the performance of animal sacrifices and many kinds of rites and rituals as well as the recital of mantras for their purification to gain the final goal. There is yet another which upholds

diverse a methods and devotions, intellectual realization of truth and concentration of the mind through meditation.

Given such a wide variety of approaches, interpretations and goals of different religions adopted by mankind, it is useful for people not to hold dogmatic view about their religion but to be open to and tolerant of other religious views. Religious principles should be used positively to improve the quality of life of all beings. Yet today, humankind is corrupted and has gone away from basic religious principles. Immoral and evil practices have become common among many people, and religious minded people experience difficulties trying to maintain certain religious principle in modern life.

Religious laws and precepts should enable people to lead a meaningful life, and are not to be used to bind them to archaic practices and superstitious rituals and beliefs. A person who upholds the basic religious principle should give credit to human intelligence and live respectably with human dignity. There must be some changes in our religious activities to correspond to our education and the nature of our changing society, without sacrificing the noble universal principles. But it is recognized that making changes to any religious practices is always difficult because many conservative people are opposed to changes, even if they are for the betterment of society. Such conservative views are like a stagnant pool of water while fresh ideas are like the waterfall where the water is constantly being renewed and is, therefore, usable.

### **Distortion of Religion from Society.**

Despite the value of religion in moral up-liftmen, it is also true to say that religion is a fertile soil for the development of superstitions and devotional hypocrisy, wrapped under the cloak of religiosity. Many people use religion to escape from the realities of life and put on the garb of religion and religious symbols. They may even pray very often in places of worship, yet they are not sincerely religious minded and have not understood what religion stands for. When a religion has been debased by ignorance, greed for power and selfishness, people point an accusing finger and say that religion is irrational. Before one criticizes one must study the original teaching of the founder and see if there is anything intrinsically wrong with it.

Religion advises people to do good and be good, but they are not interested in acting thus. Instead they prefer to cling to the other practices which have no real religious values.

Unfortunately they develop jealousy, pride, cruelty and selfishness instead of eradicating them. Religion is being misused for personal gain and power. Certain immoral practices have been encouraged by some irresponsible religious groups to introduce their religion among youth. Some missionaries claim that the practices of morals, ethics and precepts are not important as long as person has faith and prays to God, which is believed to be sufficient to grant him salvation.

It is very difficult for a man to find out why there is so many different religions and which religion is the true one. Followers of every religion are trying to show the superiority of their religion. To introduce their divine and peaceful messages some people have resorted to weapons and wars. Have they not polluted the good name of religion? It seems that certain religious are responsible for dividing instead of uniting mankind.

### **Moral and Spiritual Development**

*Without a spiritual background man has no moral responsibility: man without moral responsibility poses a danger to a society.*

It is said that the spiritual development of man is more important than the development of material welfare. History has taught us that we cannot expect to gain both worldly happiness and everlasting happiness at the same time. The lives of most people are generally regulated by spiritual values and moral principles which only religion can effectively provide. Religion tells us what to do and what not to do. If we do not follow a religion sincerely, mere religious labels or belief in God do not serve us in our daily life. Whatever religious differences we have, it is our duty to practice tolerance, patience and understanding. It is our duty to respect the other man's religious belief even if we cannot accommodate it; tolerance is necessary for the sake of harmonious and peaceful living. Merely to believe that there is someone to wash away our sins without suppressing our evil state of mind, is not in accordance with the teaching of religion.

Paradise is open not only to the followers of particular religion, but it is open to each and every person who leads a righteous and noble way of life. There are some people who go from house to house trying to convert other religionists into their faith and promising them the heaven they carry in their bags. They claim that they are the only blessed people who can go to heaven; they also claim that they have the exclusive authority to send others to the same goal. They introduce their religion like a patent medicine and this has become nuisance to the

public today. Many innocent people who lack the knowledge to their own religion, have become victims of these paradise sellers.

### **Religion in Scientific Age**

*Religion without science is crippled, while science without religion is blind.*

Today we live in a scientific age in which almost every aspect of our lives has been affected by science. Since the scientific revolution during the seventeenth century science has continued to exert tremendous influence on what we think and do. The impact of science has been particularly strong on traditional religious beliefs. Many basic religious concepts are crumbling under the pressure of modern science and are no longer acceptable to the intellectual and the well-informed man. Since the modern man refuses to believe anything blindly, even though it had been traditionally accepted.

Without having moral ideals, science poses a danger to all mankind. Without religious guidance, science threatens the world with destructions. Never was there a time when the co-operation between science and religion is so desperately needed in the best interest and service of mankind. Religion without science is crippled, while science without religion is blind.

### **Religion of Freedom in Society**

There is no real religious freedom in any part of the world today. Man has not the freedom even to think freely. Whenever he realizes that he cannot find satisfaction through his own religion to which he belongs, which cannot provide him with satisfactory answer to certain questions, he has no liberty to give it up and to accept another which appeals to him. The reason is that religious authorities, leaders and family members have taken that freedom away from him. Man should be allowed to choose his religion which is in accordance with his own conviction. One has no right to force another to accept a particular religion. Some people surrender their religion for the sake of love, without a proper understanding of their partner's religion. One must think very carefully before changing ones religion. Religion is not a subject for bargaining; one should not change ones religion for personal, material gains. Religion is to be used for spiritual development and for self-salvation.

When you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome and bad; tending to harm yourself or others, reject them. And when you know for yourselves that certain things

are wholesome and good; conducive to the spiritual welfare of yourself as well as others, accept and follow them.

Emperor Asoka respected and supported every religion at that time. His tolerance towards other religions was remarkable. One of his scripts engraved in stone on Asoka Pillars; and still standing today in India, says:

“One should not honour only one’s own religion and condemn the religion of others, but one should honor other’s religion for this or that reason. In so doing one helps one’s own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others to. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one’s own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honors’ his own religion and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking, ‘I will glorify my own religion.’ But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely, so concord is good. Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others.”

Man has forgotten that he has a heart. He forgets that if he treats the world kindly, the world will treat him kindly in return. The time has come for wise people to separate religion from dogmatism and superstition. Otherwise, the good name of religion will be polluted and the number of non-believers will be increased.

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