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The Need for Religion

A Comparative Study of Hinduism and Christianity

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Abstract: In order to fully understand the rich tapestry of religious experiences and ideas held by people worldwide, this research paper compares and contrasts Christianity and Hinduism. The study offers insights into the internal and outward aspects of these two ancient faiths by navigating the historical, anthropological, and psychological dimensions of religion.

The study explores the historical foundations before examining the writings of significant individuals like Andrew Lang, Herbert Spencer, Max Muller, Edward B. Tylor, and Father Wilhelm Schmidt. It investigates how early religious conceptions were shaped by the connections between ancestor worship, animism, and the idea of a High God. The views on sacrifice rituals and the function of religion in society provided by Emile Durkheim and William Robertson Smith are invaluable.

The study, which focuses on Hinduism, emphasizes how distinct it is as the oldest religion in the world and how it lacks a founder or sacred text. The dynamic character of Hinduism, its multiplicity of practices and beliefs, and the inclusiveness of its spiritual terrain are emphasized. The study examines Hindu beliefs on karma, the soul's immortality, and the quest for Moksha in order to clarify the various routes that lead to spiritual enlightenment.

Turning to Christianity, the study places its foundation in the teachings of Jesus Christ and recognizes its widespread influence. Its theological ramifications are studied in relation to the unique notion of the Trinity, which includes God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The paper explores Christian origin myths, Original Sin, and many viewpoints on salvation and human suffering.

In conclusion, the study finds similarities between Christianity and Hinduism, especially with regard to their shared pursuit of spiritual emancipation and belief in a supreme deity. The study emphasizes the value of religious tolerance and respect for one another while highlighting the common objective of fostering humanity's spiritual nature. Through an examination of these basic themes, the study advances a more sophisticated comprehension of the various spiritual trajectories that people pursue.

Index Terms – Comparative Religion, Hinduism, Christianity, Spiritual Evolution, Religious Diversity.

Religion is the most prominent and unavoidable aspect of human life, and it is inextricably related to human history. Religion has been an important aspect of human knowledge and experience from the dawn of humanity to the present. Religion is supposed to have prevailed throughout history and throughout civilizations. To appreciate human history and life, one must first comprehend religion, and in today's world, one must first comprehend other nations' ideology and beliefs in order to comprehend the value of life as it is sometimes depicted differently from our culture. We can view temples, ceremonies, and religious holidays with open eyes, but we can't view religion with open eyes. All of these things may be seen, but to fully

comprehend the significance of these rituals, one must first understand the inner lives of individuals who perform them. Take, for example, the practice of baptizing a child. We won't be able to fathom it until we understand what baptizing means to Christians and what the feelings and beliefs of individuals who take part in the ceremony are. As a result, it's critical to comprehend how religion's exterior and internal meanings are intertwined. This is why religious history is more than just a record of events; it is also vital to comprehend the implications of those occurrences.

The word "religion" comes from the Latin word "religio," which means "conscientiousness," "piety," "moral obligation," or "duty." The belief in a power greater than man is the foundation of religion. Man's Dharma, according to Hindu religion, is to become the infinite, which he already is. The word 'Dharma' comes from the Sanskrit word 'Dhri,' which means to retain, uphold, and hold together. As a result, we might deduce that religion is a type of bond that ties men's social lives together. Dharma aims to let people recognize their own self or the infinite within them.

Society instils religious sense in us. As a sacred object, society teaches the person what to fear, love, or appreciate. The spiritual, pious, heavenly, moral, and other concepts all emerged from civilization. With the growth of society, however, the notions change from time to time.

Studying primitive society, its thoughts, and ideas related to primitive quasi-religious activities is critical in determining the mysterious growth of religious disposition and conduct. Magic and religion were intertwined in ancient times. Theoretical – a belief in forces greater than man – and practical – an attempt to satisfy them – are the two parts of religion. The first of these two aspects is belief, because we cannot seek to please them unless and until we believe in their existence. If belief does not lead to action, it is referred to as theology rather than religion.

The human race's religious history dates back thousands of years. Anthropologists regard religion to be one of the most significant and intricate aspects of culture. Every human group needs religion, and religion inevitably interacts with other cultural organizations and social systems. The comparative study of religion piqued the curiosity of many academics. Edward B. Tylor, Herbert Spencer, Max Muller, Sir James Frazer, Robertson Smith, Father Wilhelm Schmidt, and Andrew Lang are the names of the individuals mentioned.

The thesis of animism was developed by Edward B. Tylor in his classic book *Primitive Culture*. According to him, animism—the belief that there are spirits who may live independently of material things—is the source of religion. Ancestor worship, according to English philosopher Herbert Spencer, was the initial stage of religious evolution. It was also considered by Max Muller to be the first indicator of religion.

According to Father Wilhelm Schmidt, ancient humans first believed in a single High God, which was then overlaid by animism, polytheism, and other beliefs. The concept of High God was so widespread among primitives that stories were venerated and regarded as the creators of the world and the human race. The idea of a High God as the creator of the cosmos was also conceived by Andrew Lang, a Scottish anthropologist, among many primitive cultures. He also points out that idol worship arose from the concept of a High God.

William Robertson Smith was one of the anthropological school's foremost and most notable scholars. Through his study of animal sacrifice, which was common among ancient Arabs, he proposed the philosophy of sacrifice. According to him, the primary goal of sacrifice was to achieve communion between society's members and their divine selves. Originally, sacrifice was viewed as a gift or form of worship to God in order to gain their favour. People used to believe that eating a sacrificial meal would help them form a relationship.

The psychological approach to religion's major goal is to determine how religion affects an individual's psyche. The desire to live a moral and virtuous life is an important factor in persuading people to become religious. The key theories in the psychology of religion are Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung.

Religious anthropological and psychological research demonstrate that man, at every stage of his development, has a strong yearning to learn more about the divine being. The primary sociologists who study religion from a sociological perspective include Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. They look at religion from a variety of social perspectives, including family, ethnic group, cognition, and politics.

Emile Durkheim was a French sociologist who studied human cultures from the beginning to the end, from the tribal to the republican, and from the magical to the rational. Durkheim describes the social purpose of religion in detail in his seminal work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Religion, he believes, is an important aspect of social reality. He demonstrated Australian aboriginal religious ceremonies and determined the significance of the totemic principle in the interaction between religious belief, rituals, and tribe characteristics. According to him, the sphere of the profane and sacred serves an important societal role in balancing every society's fundamental conflict.

The savages revered a wide range of artefacts that evoked feelings of awe, wonder, and dread. For them, worshipping was mostly for the sake of gaining material prosperity. They prayed to spirits for food on occasion, and for protection from misfortune or illness on other occasions. From this perspective, we might conclude that early man's veneration was akin to a trade. The primary purpose in early times was to receive material benefits from the Supreme Being, and they never considered moral gains or saving their soul in this life or the next. From that time onwards, there was a gradual evolution in religion as people began to think about moral righteousness and soul salvation.

Hinduism is the world's oldest religion. Religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism are the offshoot of Hinduism. Sanatan Dharma is a belief system that has been passed down through the generations. It does not have a definite date of inception or a specific founder. This is a unique feature of this religion, because almost every religion has a founder and a holy scripture. In Hinduism, neither of these are present. Furthermore, there is a spontaneous evolution of this religion from many elements at distinct periods of civilization. Sir Charles Eliot had this to say about it: "Hinduism has evolved rather than being created. It's a jungle, not a structure" (Tiwari 11).

Despite the fact that many saints and sages have contributed significantly to the establishment of Hinduism, no one has claimed to be its founder. Many religious books, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Dharma Sutras and Dharma Sastras, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavadgita, are also available. Separate from all of these religious works, the Ayurveda, which deals with healing rites and practices, is another significant source for our purposes. Vedas are the earliest of these sacred scriptures, and in Hindu tradition, they are regarded as beginningless (Anadi) and held in the greatest regard. Another distinguishing feature of Hinduism is the absence of hard, well-defined, and dogmatic rules to follow. Those who identify as Hindus adhere to a variety of beliefs and practices. Polytheists, monotheists, and even atheists can all be Hindus. As a result, it is appropriately described as a large jungle because it is difficult to identify how many different species of plants and trees thrive. It is difficult to explain the ideas, beliefs, and practices of any religion, but it appears impossible in the case of Hinduism.

Hinduism is a synthesis of many different ideas and practices. Initially, it was known as an Aryan religion, and numerous cultural and ethnic groups have merged their influences over time. We can find a wide range of ideas and activities in this religion, ranging from most sophisticated theological thoughts to gross superstitions and magic. There is a highly exclusive thing in this religion called *varna dharma*, which is a social structure. Only those who belong to one of the four varnas stated in the Hindu social order, namely Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra, can claim to be Hindu. Previously, varna classification was based on a person's aptitude and worth, but later on, birth became the sole basis of division. Though Hinduism encompasses a wide range of faiths, beliefs, and practices, there are some common grounds among Hindus, one of which is the supremacy of the Vedas and the reverence and respect for ancient texts such as the Bhagavadgita, Ramayana, and Mahabharata. The belief in the immortality of the soul, the rule of karma and rebirth, and the possibility of Moksha, among other things, is another essential trait that connects them together.

Whether a person is theistic or atheistic, he believes in the superiority of the spirit, which is the fundamental, essential, and eternal, over the profane and the material in this religion. Though man lives in a materialistic world, Hinduism teaches that he should not become tied to it; rather, he should always remember that he is essentially a part of the spiritual order. Humans have an exterior and superficial physical body, while the soul is their inner and essential being. The soul is eternal and cannot be destroyed under any conditions. The Bhagavadgita explained this in such a way: "Weapons cannot cut it nor can fire burn it; water cannot wet it nor can wind dry it" (17). As a result, the soul lives on even after physical death.

The belief in the soul's immortality leads to the belief in the soul's transmigration from one physical body to another. In Hinduism, this belief is called rebirth. The term "transmigration of the soul" simply refers to the soul leaving one body and entering another to begin a new life on this planet. In Bhagavadgita, it is written as: "As a man by shedding worn-out garments, takes the other new ones, likewise the embodied soul, by casting off worn-out bodies, enters into others which are new ones" (17). Though Hinduism does not consider rebirth to be good, it is a symbol of enslavement that only leads to further pain. The cycle of birth and reincarnation, as well as bonding and suffering, is determined by man's karma. Every individual must bear the consequences of his actions, according to the rule of karma.

But all the actions do not lead to rebirth or bondage. Sakama karmas and niskama karmas are the two types of karmas. Rebirth is caused by activities that produce outcomes and are carried out with specific attachments or aspirations. Sakama karmas are the names given to such activities. And niskama karma refers to deeds that counter them or are performed with non-attachment and do not result in the rebirth of bondage. As a result, any action performed with a sense of attachment (kama) triggers the birth and rebirth cycle. Anyone who wishes to be free of the cycle of life and rebirth must first free himself of all connected and egoistic activities. As a result, it is possible to free oneself from the cycle of rebirth and achieve Moksha. According to Hinduism, the ultimate destiny of human beings is Moksha, in which the soul attains its true everlasting form. The soul becomes rid of all worldly anguish and suffering and gains its pure spiritual essence as a result of this. Any of the three roads to Moksha can be followed: the path of knowledge, the path of acts, or the path of devotion to God.

As previously stated, a Hindu can be a polytheist or a monotheist. The Vedas, which are considered to be Hinduism's most important source, are polytheistic. Varuna, Mitra, Agni, Indra, and other Gods and Goddesses are mentioned. Many more Gods and Goddesses, such as Ganesh, Hanuman, Durga, Kali, Saraswati, Lakshmi, and others, rose to prominence over time. According to Hindu belief, there are thirty-three crore Gods and Goddesses, and people can worship any or all of them on different occasions. Nonetheless, there has been a monotheism since the time of the Vedas itself. It is widely held that there is only one Supreme God, and that the other Gods are simply his numerous manifestations. It is described in the Vedas as *Ekamsadviprabahudhavadanti*.

God is referred to as Purusottama in the Bhagavadgita, and according to Ramanuja, God is referred to as Narayana, Vasudeva, and Visnu. The entire universe emerges from within him at the moment of creation, and everything within him is withdrawn at the moment of rupture. Many Hindus believe that God has no shape or form and is nirakara. However, he possesses three key characteristics: creative, preservative, and destructive, which are personified as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, respectively. The Hindu Trinity is made up of these three gods. Despite the fact that they are three separate gods, they are recognised as one Supreme Being. Brahma is considered as the creator of all things. To purge the earth of all evils, Visnu incarnated himself nine times in various shapes. In the form of fish, tortoise, bear, man-lion (Nrsimha), a dwarf (Vamana), Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and the tenth is yet to incarnate in the future. Hindus are particularly fond of Shiva worship. Though he is seen as a destructive aspect, he is worshipped as a very gentle being who is said to be satisfied even with a small amount of prayer and devotion.

There is no definitive theory of the world's creation in Hinduism. The world is thought to have been formed from the beginning of time, and the process of creation and destruction continues in a cyclic pattern. Though many Hindu religious books contain legendary stories about creation, most of them are unclear on how and when the universe was created, and the entire process of creation appears to remain a mystery.

Karma, according to Hindu religion, is unrestricted and unyielding. Suffering in one's life is blamed for one's previous karma. Suffering is life or existence itself in this case. The cycle of birth and rebirth also occurs in pain. God created the universe, yet he cannot be held responsible for man's suffering since he builds the world based on the karmas that individuals have committed in the past.

Like other religions, Hinduism has numerous ethical norms and virtues, and it views ethical living as a path to freedom. In Hinduism, Dharma is said to lead the route to Moksha. Actions taken out of emotion or with a purely selfish goal led to enslavement, whereas actions taken for the benefit of others lead to liberation.

There are numerous sects within Hinduism. And each sect has a complete comprehension of one another and does not oppose one another. Between them, there is a bond of brothers. In Hinduism, there are two primary sects: Saivism and Vaishnavism. Saktism is a branch of Saivism that is also an offshoot of Saivism.

Many social and religious reformers have created various organisations within Hinduism in recent times. It's unclear if they should be classified as independent sects of Hinduism, although their beliefs and practices differ significantly from those of the general Hindu population. Brahmo-Samaj and Arya-Samaj are two such organisations, founded by Ram Mohan Roy and Dayanand Saraswati, respectively.

Among all the Semitic religions in the western world, Christianity has proven to be the most prominent and has gained widespread acceptance among a vast population. The teachings of Jesus Christ were the foundation of Christianity. He was born a Jew and was thought to be the son of a virgin mother, Mary. It is a monotheistic religion, but it also contains the concept of the Trinity.

Although Christians acknowledge that their religion is solely founded on Jesus' teachings, there is some debate that Christianity's origins are influenced by Judaism and that it has an unmistakable Eastern history based on Vedic religions. As we all know, Jesus was born a Jew and never considered starting a new religion while espousing his religious ideas. Moses gave the Jews a very moral and ethical religion, but it was soon surrounded by numerous superstitious concepts, rituals, and rites, as is the case with many religions. Jesus just sought to reform Judaism, but it was by coincidence that his teachings stood out so far from conventional Jewish beliefs and customs that a new religion was born. Furthermore, Jesus Christ was regarded as the founder and prophet of a new religion, Christianity. Both Christians and Jews regarded the Bible's Old Testament as equally valuable. Only Christians have access to the New Testament, which includes Jesus' teachings. Christianity can be seen as a more noble and virtuous extension of Judaism.

In Christianity, however, God is depicted as a loving father who loves his children unconditionally and without limitations. He even forgives the most heinous of offenders if they really repent. God is the saviour and liberator of his children, and he sends his messengers to the world to save them from time to time. God sends Jesus as his message in order to teach his children how to walk in the right way, live a spiritual life, and be free of pain.

As previously said, Christianity is built on monotheism, but it also contains the notion of Trinity. God is seen as three personalities in one person in Catholicism. "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit," says the Bible (168). This idea is founded on the idea that God encompasses both unity and diversity, as well as relationality and personhood. God is present in all three Persons, "the Father who creates, the Son who redeems and the Spirit who sustains" (Nelson 92). The second and third persons are Jesus Christ. He is both the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. Love is the spirit of the Holy Spirit. Catholics sincerely believe in the notion of the Trinity.

According to Christian beliefs, God created the world from nothing (ex nihilo). Christianity's creation myths are based on the tale of Genesis, which is found in the Old Testament of the Bible. It claims that God created the entire universe in six days. God created the heavens and the earth first, and then everything else after that. The last thing God made on the sixth day was a man in his image. God signalled the end of the creation process on the seventh day. God is not only the creator of this universe, but also the sustainer of it.

Man must follow God's way, which is love and kindness, and if he fails to do so, he will be considered a sinner. God has given his children freedom as a compassionate father has given his children freedom to choose and act. It is entirely up to man to decide how he will use his freedom. He has the option of choosing between good and evil. Disobedience to God's will is considered as committing sin, whereas obedience to him is regarded as choosing the good. Original Sin was committed by Adam, the first man on the earth, when he defied God. Because of Adam's Original Sin, he lost God's grace, and his descendants eventually became victims of his sin, and man was consigned to earth to suffer. Nonetheless, God, like a kind and loving father, is willing to save his children from pain, which is why he sent Jesus to earth as his messenger to teach people the right way to live. Man can be set free from pain by following Jesus' teachings. It is thought that man can restore his high status by God's grace if he loves God with all his heart and mind, as well as his fellow beings. Christianity believes that only love, and only love, can save a person from suffering.

Men are taught in Christianity to bear hardship as a sign of God's stick of discipline. Suffering should be patiently endured by man. Even Jesus Christ had to suffer on the Cross, but he was victorious in the end. Christ's Resurrection represents the ultimate victory. As previously said, the physical body dies, but the soul lives on. When the world comes to an end, the Day of Judgement will arrive, and the dead will rise again. But no one knows for sure when all of this will happen but God. The end of the world will bring the final day of judgement. All souls will unite with their physical bodies on this day, and they will be presented before God for the final judgement of their earthly deeds. Those who follow Jesus' teachings will go to heaven, whereas those who do things that are immoral, unethical, or sinful will go to hell.

The Catholics and Protestants are the two main sects of Christianity. Traditionalists are represented by the first, while reformists are represented by the second. The question of the Church's authority caused a schism between these two factions. Catholics hold a deep belief in the Church as God's representative on earth, through which God teaches life precepts. The divine authority has been occupied by the Pope and the clergy. Protestants, on the other hand, believe that man can create a direct relationship with God without the necessity for a church in the middle. There is no need to recognize the Pope and the Clergies of the church as divine authority because Jesus Christ is the one and only representation of God. The Bible is the only Holy Book in the Christian religion, and only the Bible's authority should be accepted. As a result, we can conclude that Protestants are a protest and reformation movement that rejects the Church's false dominance and the priests' oppression over the people. The Protestants are divided into various divisions. Lutherans, Calvinists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Congregationalists, and other denominations are among them.

Both Hinduism and Christianity arose from distinct traditions with distinct histories. So there are some variations between them, but there are also many commonalities, because religion as a whole originates in the human mind as a response to some common challenges that people experience in the world. They share the same feelings, thoughts, and feelings.

The belief in a single supreme god is the first fundamental similarity. A Hindu can be a polytheist or a monotheist, but he believes in just one Supreme God, whose diverse forms are the gods and goddesses. Monotheism also prevails in Christianity. God is recognised as the creator, sustainer, and destroyer in all religions. There is an idea of the Trinity in both religions.

Brahma, who represents the creative part in Hinduism, is joined by Vishnu, who is responsible for the sustaining aspect, and Mahesh, who is responsible for the destructive aspect. God is three people rolled into one in Christianity. "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit" are the three names for God (168). However, unlike Hinduism, they do not have any distinguishing traits.

According to Hindu teachings, God takes on several forms to rid the world of all evils. There is no concept of incarnation in Semitic religion. God sends his messenger to teach man real religious, ethical, and moral precepts. The origin stories are the most major distinction between Semitic heritage religions and Hinduism.

Man is regarded as the highest creature on Earth in Hinduism. He has been elevated to the level of a Divine entity. Men suffer from pain and suffering as a result of their ignorance, but when they know their actual nature, they transform into limitless beings who are free of all pain and suffering. The belief that God has a preferential predilection for men is also found in Christianity. God bestowed onto a man all of the traits that a man possesses, such as insight, intelligence, and sensitivity. God has chosen his finest creation to join him in establishing a world-wide domain of goodness. Hinduism, on the other hand, places a greater stress on man's spiritual and immortal essence than Christianity.

As previously stated, ignorance is the primary cause of misery in Hinduism. Suffering is the result of man's previous karmas, which he committed in his ignorance. Man suffers in Christianity because of his Original Sin. Man is the cause of his misery in both religions. However, there is a distinct distinction. The major cause of pain in Hinduism is ignorance, or a lack of knowledge. In Christianity, however, the situation is fundamentally different; man suffers as a result of his knowledge. Adam, the first man, committed Original Sin when he disobeyed God and ate the fruit of knowledge. Because of Adam's sin, he lost God's grace, and his descendants eventually became victims of his Original Sin. Nonetheless, this distinction should not be overemphasized. Christianity does not regard knowledge as the source of suffering, as though ignorance

would lead to salvation. The fundamental source of pain in this case is disobedience to God's will, not the acquisition of knowledge.

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism are all Indian religions that believe that man's ultimate destiny is to reach Moksha, or emancipation. Moksha refers to liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation, as well as the eventual attainment of true immortality. Man's ultimate fate, according to Christianity, is to reach heaven. Heaven is God's residence, and connection with him is life's ultimate purpose. Both Christianity and Hinduism believe that life on earth is a life of misery, and that the only way to find Moksha and salvation is to achieve eternal proximity to God.

There is a significant distinction between Indian and Western faiths. Individual purity is emphasized in Indian religions, such as self-denial, celibacy, forgiveness, monkhood, and so on, whereas social morality is emphasised in Western faiths. This general distinction is one of degree rather than kind. We can't say that Indian faiths are anti-social and that Western religions are anti-individual values.

Respect for other religions and their various methods and customs is taught in every religion. S. Radhakrishnan in his book *Religion and Culture* "Faith without wisdom, without tolerance and respect for others' ways of life is a dangerous thing" (Radhakrishnan 17). India is known for its religious tolerance.

In order to reach the Supreme, one must be sincere in their objectives and diligent in their endeavours. We are all offspring of that one Invisible Church of God, or we might say that we are members of one Fellowship of the Spirits, without prejudice. We should not want any faith to compromise and surrender as children of one Invisible God. All religions should be respected as devoted partners in the greatest duty of nourishing humanity's spiritual existence.

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