

RELIGION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIETY

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Religions have a huge impact on the society of a country not only on the religious communities but also on a social, cultural and economic structure of a country. In most of the country rules and regulations are defined and shaped according to the social and religious environment of the country. Religion is almost always a belief in some form of supernatural happenings or causes. It is always associated with some sort of discipline, be it physical, mental or psychological. Such disciplines often manifest themselves as religious ritual or habitual behaviour.

Religion underpins the emotions and logic of almost everyone. In today's secular societies, many deny the fact, but all are so steeped in the traditions and ideas basic to religion that it is impossible to shake off its effects. Even in societies where the official line has been that there is no God, the ordinary people have been so exposed to a long tradition of religious concepts that almost no-one could be devoid of its effects.

Religion effectively provides an identity for those who consider themselves to be members of a particular group. Even those who do not consider themselves to be members, or do not actively participate, but are associated mainly with those are members of a sect, effectively identify themselves and are identified by others, as belonging to the culture of the sect.

The act of following the discipline of a religion, however sparingly, is associated with the idea of generating a sense of well-being. When people confess their sins, they feel better about themselves. When people are devout and follow the discipline rigorously, they often feel that they are superior to those who are less rigorous. They have generated a self-excusal for condemning and despising others. This type of behaviour is, of course, not confined to religion.

There are many examples where people are bound by other common elements, such as living as neighbours, working as colleagues or supporting the same football team. However, all these groups take on some elements of religion, because there are common beliefs and values. Those who are seen to have a disregard, or even disrespect, for those values are seen as a threat to the group. This has always been the case with religion.

It has been used as an excuse to persecute others. Thus, the real nature of religion is that it forms individuals into groups, who share common superstitions, common ideals, common fears and common means of achieving a sense of well-being.

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Religion is said to help to satisfy the human need for spiritual fulfilment. One description of spiritual fulfilment is the need to feel comfortable with things that are beyond human understanding. Thus the need to believe in a god or gods arises from the inability to understand the origin and purpose of life.

Note that the need relates to things beyond human understanding, rather than personal understanding. Given the need to come to some understanding of things that are not understandable within society, it becomes clear that the birth of religion was a consequence of the gradual realization by the human race of its awareness of cause and effect.

This can be seen from the perspective of early mankind. How do natural phenomena occur, what causes them, where did we come from, who made us, why are there good times and bad times? These must be just some of the many questions asked by the emerging human race. It was easy to see cause and effect where there was human activity.

When it came to accounting for wind, earthquakes, rain and floods, drought and famine, the Sun, Moon and stars, it must have been inconceivable that there could not be some hidden hand or hands behind them. And so they invented gods. In the Middle East, there were monotheistic religions. In Europe there were polytheistic religions.

In Asia there were mystical religions. It has been asserted that God made man in his own image. It is more correct to say that man-made God in his own image. When things went well it was because the gods were well pleased. When things went badly it was because the gods were angry.

People began to offer prayers and supplications to the gods to appease them and enlist their help. Those who claimed to understand the gods, or who could predict happenings such as eclipses, became the priests to the gods. It was seen that human emotion could be swayed by sorrow, remorse and pleas for forgiveness. So it was only natural for the concept of repentance to become part of the rites for appeasing the gods.

Those who controlled religion realised that it was a great source of power. It offered reserves of strength when cultures clashed. By the time social complexity reached the point which we might describe as civilisation, religion was well established and accepted by almost everyone.

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