



V.S. Naipaul's Vision of Indian Religion and Hinduism

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V.S. Naipaul's Vision of Indian Religion and Hinduism Abstract: The present paper is devoted to a critical study of the origin, history and growth of religion and Hinduism of India. In order to understand the feelings and attitude of V.S. Naipaul who visited India several times and presented his opinion about the people and culture of India, it is imperative to know the various aspects of the religion and culture of India with reference to its people and environment. In his visit to India and some Islamic countries, V.S. Naipaul has presented his realistic portrayal and also the exposure of the various

Abstract

The present paper is devoted to a critical study of the origin, history and growth of religion and Hinduism of India. In order to understand the feelings and attitude of V.S. Naipaul who visited India several times and presented his opinion about the people and culture of India, it is imperative to know the various aspects of the religion and culture of India with reference to its people and environment. In his visit to India and some Islamic countries, V.S. Naipaul has presented his realistic portrayal and also the exposure of the various abnormalities and irregularities in the religion and culture of India. V. S. Naipaul has also shown his satiric approach and views while visiting various cultural and religious places of India.

Key Words

Religion, Belief, Rites, Customs, Conventions, Hinduism, Cultural Heritage.

Religion plays a very significant role in human life. To give a proper definition of religion is not easy but very difficult. So many people, social scientists, philosophers have tried their best to define religion in their own ways. The most common definition of religion is that it is one of the system of beliefs that is based on a belief in a God or Gods. In other words, the belief in a God or Gods are the activities connected with this is generally known as religion such as worshipping or praying in a building such as a church, temple or mosque. The following are the definitions of religion:

1. Religion is a specific fundamental set of belief and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects. (www.dictionary.com)

2. Religion is a belief in a divine or super human power or powers to be obeyed and worshipped as the creator (s) and ruler (s) of the universe. (www.collinsdictionary.com)
3. Religion is the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a person, God or Gods. (www.oxforddictionary.com)
4. A personal set or institutionalised system of religious attitude beliefs of practices is known as religion. (www.merriamwebster.com)
5. Religions do not come from without but from within (Vivekanand, 134)
6. Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas nor in intellectual argumentation; it is being and becoming, it is realisation. (Vivekanand, 135)
7. Religion is a way of achieving union with the Ultimate Reality. It is not merely the end of a process of ratiocination but is an act of faith based on experience. Religion required a growth from the unregenerate to the illumined consciousness called differently by different religions. (Radhakrishnan, 19)

Thus religion is such a belief in which all human being want to associate themselves to a super human power or the ultimate reality in order to illumine the consciousness and lead a life of morality and spirituality.

The word 'Religion' derives from the Latin word 'Religio'. which means reference for God or gods, careful pondering of divine things and 'piety'. Cicero, the great philosopher says that the term religion derived from the verb 'relegere'. On the other hand, another great writer, Lactantius was of the view that religion means to 'fasten' or 'biden'. He says in his famous book 'Divine Institutions':

The term 'religare' is tied to God and bound to him by the bond of piety and it is from this, and not, as Cicero holds, from the careful study that religion has received its name. (www.jstor.org)

It is very difficult to know the exact origin of religion. It remains unknown even today the exact time when human first became religious. Some researches in the field of archeology show some credible evidence of religious cum ritualistic behaviour from around the middle paleolithic era.

The earliest evidence of religion can be seen in the ritual of the treatment of the dead body. This ritual burial shows that there is a possible belief in the after life. The organised religion can be seen in the neolithic revolution around the world. After the invention of agricultural system mans stands living a stable and permanent life, particularly on the bank of the rivers. This agricultural revolution gave birth to various forms of religion in man's life:

...While bands and small tribes passess supernatural belief, these beliefs do not serve justify a central authority, justify transfer of wealth or maintain peace between individuals. Organised religion emerged as a means of providing social and economic stability. (www.wikipedia : Evolutimary origin of Religions)

Hinduism is the major religion of India. The term 'Hindu' was not applied to the followers and invaders who came to India. They meant by this term the people inhabiting 'Indus Valley'. Later on this term 'Hindu' was used to describe those people who follow a particular faith that is Vadic Dharma or 'Sanatan Dharma'. Today this religion is followed by not only the people of India but also some people of Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, Bangladesh, Srilanka, Indonesia, Guyana, Fiji, Pakistan and Mauritius.

Hindu religion has some certain beliefs and systems which are as follows:

- a. Hinduism is not centred at only one belief of the omnipotent 'God'. While the Vedas describe 'God' as 'Omnicient' and 'Omnipresent', there are some other beliefs also which embrass many religious ideas. This is why it is known as a family of religion or a way of life.

- b. The Theory of Reincarnation: One of the salient features of Hinduism is the belief of the doctrines of the continuous cycle of life, death and reincarnation. The Hindu also believe that according to the theory of 'Karma' one has to take birth after death.
- c. **The Theory of Atman:** This theory shows that all living creatures have a soul and they are all part of the supreme soul, that is, 'God'. So the duty and religion of every soul is to attain supreme bliss or 'Moksha' or 'Salvation'. It is after gaining this salvation, the soul becomes an eternal part of an Absolute Soul. About 'Atman' it is said:

The 'Atman' is considered indestructible and passes through an endless migration or incarnations of human, animal or super human forms. The nature of its incarnation depends on good and bad, 'Karma' (deeds) in previous births. Good or bad is defined according to 'Dharma'. (Religions of India, 27)

- a. **The Concept of 'Purusharth':** Every Hindu has to perform four types of Purushartha or pursuits: (1) Dharma, (2) Earth (material pursuits) (3) Kama (love or desires) and (4) Moksha (Salvation) According to scriptures a successful life is that which associates and integrates all these four pursuits in life. At the same time a Hindu has some certain obligations to perform, that is, obligations to God, to ancestors and to sages and to fellow human beings.
- b. **Reverence for all living creatures:** The most important features of hinduism is that the people belonging to hinduism gave respect to all living creatures including that plants and the trees, mountains and rivers. They worship the river the Ganga as their mother. Besides the Ganga, they also worship some other well-known rivers in India. They even worship the plant 'Tulsi', 'Neem', and 'Peepal'. This shows their ecological consciousness. They even worship the cow as their mother. They also worship the earth and often attribute motherly affections to the earth.

Scriptures and Holy Books of Hinduism

In Hinduism there are a number of religious books and scriptures which are highly revered by the people of India. They are as follows:

Vedas: The most earliest texts of the Hindus are the Vedas which are four in number—*Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. All these Vedas are in the form of verses. The Hindu believe that these Vedas transcend all time and do not have a beginning and end. It is not written in the beginning rather it is heard from ancestors to the posterity.

Brahmanas: The Brahmanas granthas are the theological treatises written in the form of prose from time-to-time. They are related to various spheres of life—man's relation to society, to God and to his own self. They also explain the religious significance of various rituals performed by a Hindu on various occasions.

Aryanakas: The term 'Aryanakas' means the forest. In the ancient time the sages and saints and even the kings went to forest in their last 'Ashram', a sanyas Ashram. In the forest they are fully devoted to several religious performances so as to gain salvation from this mortal life. In this connection they have written several 'Aryanakas' which deal with the matter of meditation.

Upnishads: The Upnishads which are 108 in number are the most important religious documents of the Hindu religion. They contain the themes of Indian philosophy. They also present a great truth of life and death, body and soul. Some of the important Upnishads are *Isa*, *Kena*, *Prasna*, *Mundaka*, *Taittiriya*, *Chandogya*.

Vedangas: The Vedangas are six in numbers and they are very much connected with the study of Vedas. The first vedanga is 'Shiksha'. This deals with Phonology and Phonetics, accent, stress,

melody and other rules of euphonic and cacophonic sounds which helps to recite the hymns of Vedas. The second Vedange is known as 'Chhandas' which is called prosody in English language. It is centred to the study of poetic metre, syllables in verse and some other rules of poetic craftsmanship. The next vedangas in known as *Vyakarnas* which is called Grammar in English language. It deals with the linguistic analysis, the origin, growth and the development and its relation to sentences. This vedanga helps to understand the various complexities of Vedas.

The next Vedanga is 'Nirukta' which means 'Etymology'. It deals with words. This discipline shows the linguistic analysis so as to help the proper meaning of words. The next Vedanga is 'Kala' that means the ritual instruction. It shows the procedures for Vedic rituals particularly the birth, wedding and death in family. It also shows the personal relation of human being, his social and cultural duties as an individual in different spheres of life. The last vedanga is *Jyotisha* that means Astrology. It deals with the movement and effects of the heavenly bodies on the life of human being.

The most important feature of the Hinduism is that it strongly believes in the theory of Charity. It also adapts the multiplicity of aboriginal gods and others which originated outside the Aryan tradition. In other words Hinduism believes in bringing together all believers in God. In other religions we see that the believers were very fond of heresy hunting. G.B.Shaw has beautifully presented the negative aspects of heresy hunting in his famous drama *St. Joan*. It is this heresy that caused the death of Joan of Ark who was burnt alive in France. But Hinduism is a singular religion which is free from this heresy. S.Radhakrishnan in his famous book. '*The Hindu View of Life*' rightly observes:

Here and there outbursts of sectarian fanaticism are found recorded in the literature of the Hindus, which indicate the first effects of the conflicts of the different groups brought together into the one fold; but the main note of Hinduism is one of respect and good will for other creeds. When a worshipper of Vishnu had a feeling in his heart against a worshipper of Siva and he bowed before the image of Visnu, the face of the image divided itself in half and Siva appeared on one side and Visnu on the other, and the two smiling as one face on the bigotted worshipper. (Radhakrishnan, 28)

The *Ramayan* and the *Mahabhart* are the two great epics of India. They are full of morals of life. They have also given a proper shape of the concept of family, society and kingship of the contemporary time. Their influences can also be seen even today in our day-to-day life. The teachings of the Upanishads and the Vedas are very tough to understand but the teachings of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* are so common that they easily appeal to all the sections of society. *The Bhagawat Gita* which is part and parcel of the *Mahabharat* deals with the nature of self, the dying nature of the body and the liberation of the soul from the body. It also presents a deep and profound description of eternal and the immortal soul. Lord Srikrishna is the central character of Gita. He emphasised on doing the duty without the expectation of fruits. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan is of the view that *Srimand Bhagawat Gita* is the part and parcel of the Hindu view of life. He says:

The Hindu attitude to religion is interesting. While fine intellectual beliefs mark off one religion from another, Hinduism sets no such limits. Intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience, outer expression to inward realization. Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstraction or the celebration of ceremonies, but a kind of life. (P.13)

Conclusion

Thus through these various ways of life and worshiping not only a single God but visualising God in all human beings including the florae and faunas, the Hindu religion is the most comprehensive and inclusive religion of the world. They think that a soul tormented with remorse for its deeds is in hell and a soul with the satisfaction of a life will live in heaven.

Like all other religions of the world Hinduism has two prominent symbols 'Swastik' and 'Om'. The 'Swastik' symbol is generally written and painted on the front walls of all the people of Hindu religion. It can also be seen on various temples of Hinduism. This symbol shows 'Good Fortune' and 'Good Luck'. It also shows the dynamism of life which is meant for flowing and not for stagnation. This swastik symbol later became the symbol of NAZI party in Germany in 1920. The 'Om' Symbol is composed of three Sanskrit letters a, u and m which is supposed to be the most auspicious sound in the Hindu religion. It is also found on the walls of Hindu's homes and their temples.

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