

CHAPTER I

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF SACRED TEXTS

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Religion has been a subject of study from various standpoints. Some of the well-known approaches to the study of religion have been through History, Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology. The historian has been interested in religions as social movements and has taken pains to trace the development of various religions. The anthropologist, who treats man as essentially as a social animal, has stressed on the genetic approach in the study of man, both in physiological and psychological aspects. How has religion come to acquire a place and importance in the life of the homo sapiens has been one of his concerns. The sociologists lay emphasis on the development of human society, and study its nature and laws which govern it. The sociologist therefore is primarily interested in the institutional and the ritualistic aspects of religion. But to a transcendentalist, religion is concerned with 'Values' and 'Ideas'. It can be understood only in terms of values and belief systems which a person accepts. These can be rationally justified and logically established. The transcendentalist approach to religion is different from those of other disciplines of Social Science because whereas the latter study religion only as a 'struc-

ture', the former studies the religious values as constituting the inner core of religion. But this approach of the transcendentalist too can be subject to criticism, depending upon the kind of methods it adopts to study religion.

In this chapter, I will not elaborate on the methods of studying religions; I shall rather be concerned with another aspect of this methodology as it is applicable to the study of religious texts, since my concern in this thesis is textual. Religion without its religious scriptures cannot be understood fully; its meaning and functions cannot be fully understood without a reference to its scriptures. Therefore, to understand religion one has to understand the religious text, be it the Bible for the Christians or the Vedas for the Hindus or the Koran for the Muslims. If we take away these sacred books from their respective religions, the latter will lose its meaning. Thus, one of the important concerns in the study religion is to study the different methods for the understanding of the religious text. But this is not to say that religions, particularly tribal religions that do not have a sacred text are not religions at all. In fact, what I wish to suggest is this: In one very significant sense, to study a religion means to study its sacred text and where textual materials are not available to fall back on oral traditions that come to us in the form of legends and stories.

I. METHODS OF STUDYING SACRED BOOKS

A study of religion is made possible by the study of sacred books of that particular religion. Thus, one can study Hinduism with special reference to a sacred book, for example, Bhagavad-Gita, even as one can study Christianity with reference to the Bible. For this, we need first of all an overall perspective about scriptures in general and the special status given to these books by the members of the corresponding religion.

? / In the first year, we shall reflect for a while on the sacred books in general, highlighting the sacred, human and communitarian aspects of these books; in the second, we shall discuss the appropriate methods of getting into the 'truth' of the scriptures. Finally, a few remarks will be made concerning historical questions with regard to any scriptures. I shall take the case of the Gita and the Bible, as an instance.

(A) SACRED BOOKS IN GENERAL

(1) Sacred Aspects of the Scriptures

The first observation we may make about the scriptures is that they are 'sacred'; they are sacred books, set apart from other kinds of literature. Irrespective of what people see in the 'sacred', one thing that is common to the structure of the sacred is this: that which we call sacred is marked

by a sense of 'the other', the extraordinary; it is set apart from the 'secular'. For instance, we shall consider the scriptures of two of the world religions, viz. Sikhism and Islam. The Adi Granth occupies the most prominent place in the Gurudvāra. The book is treated with awe, reverence and love. When Guru Govind Singh, the tenth and last Guru, was asked just before his death as to who was to succeed him in the spiritual throne of Nanak Dev, he replied: "The word enshrined in the Granth Sahib. Whoever searcheth me here, findeth me. You shall hereafter look upon it as the visible embodiment of the Gurus".¹ With no less reverence and awe do the Muslims treat the sacred Quran. This idea is clear in names like Al-Kitab (the Perfect Book), Al-Nur (the Light) and Al-Heda (Guidance), by which the Quran is known. Special treatment of reverence is displayed to the scriptures in other religions too, including the non-theistic ones, though the reasons for such treatment may differ.

Why are these books considered sacred? To pin-point just one or two reasons will not do justice to this special consideration, though an elaborate treatment of this subject would be far beyond the scope of this study. We may, however, briefly say that the chief reasons should be sought in the

1. Gopal Singh, Guru Govind Singh, Delhi: National Book Trust, 1966, p. 73.

belief of the people with regard to the origin of these books, and in the function these books perform in the religious life of the people. All world scriptures are believed to have some sort of preternatural or extraordinary, if not divine, origin. Thus, for example, we can even speak of the Constitution of the country as a political entity as sacred, in the sense that the constitution of a nation has a special status because of its privileged function as the principles guiding the process of all laws of the country. To some extent the function of the scriptures with respect to the religions, to which they belong, is similar to that of the constitutions with respect to the nations concerned. Another way of approaching this question would be by a close consideration of the numinous and mystical power attached to the concept of 'word' in the 'primitive' and in the world religions.

(2) Human Aspect of the Sacred Books

Books are specifically human means of communication. Even when divine authorship is ascribed to a sacred book, as in Christianity and Islam, it does not mean that there was an absolute need on the part of God to communicate his designs through books; but rather it means that God adapts himself to human situations. This will become obvious to us if we closely observe the symbolic expressions, parables, metaphors, allegories and paradoxes used in the world scrip-

tures. Let us suppose that God himself dictates certain books as a boss dictates to his secretary. If this message is to be relevant and meaningful for the people for whose sake it is dictated, it has to be situationalized or humanized, taking into account the spatio-temporal limitation of man. For instance, if the Biblical message had been communicated in terms of a heliocentric world view or of an Einsteinian physics, it would have remained unintelligible to a large extent to the people of the Biblical times.

The failure to take into account the human elements in the scriptures has caused many needless controversies in different religions. An example in point is the Galileo controversy with regard to the teachings of the Bible. In spite of the experimental evidence provided by Galileo in defence of the Copernician theory of heliocentrism, the church authorities are said to have opposed him on the ground that the Bible 'teaches' geo-centrism. The enlightened statement of one of the chief spokesmen of the church, Cardinal Boronius, that the Bible is not to teach the movement of the heavenly bodies but to teach us 'how to go to heaven in final liberation', fell on deaf ears.

(3) Communitarian Aspect of the Scriptures

When a few human individuals who have experienced a significant event come together to share their experience,

a community grows up. It is natural to have a sort of 'Constitution', stipulating the common ground of their coming together. When such a community grows up on religious grounds, often centered around a charismatic and a prophetic personality or events, this community eventually will have a 'Sacred Book', either in written form of considerable details or in the form of mnemonic statements, embodying the spirit and insights of this person or event. This is easy to understand in the case of religions, like Buddhism or Christianity, which trace their origin to a sacred person. It is however not very easy to conjecture the origin of at least some of the sacred books of religions, like Hinduism, which do not claim to have sacred founders. This is the reason why I refer here not merely to a person but also to events, at any rate. It is however obvious that the scriptures of these religions too functioned, as far back as their history goes, as sources of enlightenment, inspiration and guidance to the members, thereby establishing their intrinsic connection with the religious body to which they belong.

Here we may make a passing reference to the sacred traditions of the 'primitive' religions. As the languages of the primitive may not have scripts, their sacred oral traditions, transmitted from generation to generation, do in a way what the sacred books do in more developed forms

of religion. These traditions contain various myths, ritualistic formulae, customs and taboos, as we find in some of the sacred books. When we take into account that many of the world scriptures had centuries of oral existence before they were committed to writing, we may rightly call these sacred traditions, Sacred Books in the process.

When we observe the inter-relationship between the Sacred Books and their respective religions, and when we consider the beliefs of the people with regard to their origin, we are led to say that the Sacred Books belong to the essential constituents of different religions. Indeed, the scriptures are the self-expressions of the religion concerned. When we take into account the intimate relationship between the scriptures and their respective religions, we must not overlook the fact that we cannot truly understand the scriptures totally independent of the interpretations given to the scriptures by the religious communities concerned.

(B) PARTICULAR METHODS

(1) Community-Oriented Method

We have pointed out that religious texts belong to the essential constituent of religions, and that religions and scriptures are intimately connected in their origin, growth and functioning as the case may be. They are only the conceptualized verbal expressions, mostly of the 'ineffa-

ble' religious experience of a religious founder, religious reformer, and an official religious teacher, and the like. This obviously implies that the scriptures do not and cannot contain exhaustively the religious experience, but rather partially, symbolically and suggestively. But scriptural statements are such that they can evoke and help to recapture the original experience in various degrees.

Indeed, the scriptures come into being in a sacred numinous milieu of religious experience. And, if they are separated from this milieu, they will be literally out of their elements. It is therefore obvious to say that the interpretation of the Gītā by a Saṅkarācārya, or by a Rāmānujācārya, will be far more credible than that of a Rodolf Otto or of a Hopkins. If a non-Indian with no knowledge of the socio-cultural background of the Indian people cannot enter into the spirit of the Indian constitution, it is much more difficult to get into the spirit of the Indian scriptures without getting into the religious background. Hence, to know the true meaning of a particular sacred book, one has to 'study' it within the religious milieu whose self-expression it is, however partial and inadequate it may be.

By this we do not mean that the interpretation of the scripture by their respective religions, or the spokesmen of these religions, would be totally free from error. Cer-

tainly not. For instance, the interpretation of the Gītā by Saṅkarācārya and Rāmānujācārya are very different, though both represent Hinduism. Nor do we say that a non-Hindu, or non-Christian, cannot grasp the meaning of the Bhagavad Gītā and the Bible respectively even in a better way than a Hindu or a Christian. We in fact uphold even the latter possibility, provided that these persons 'study' them without detaching them from their respective religious life, or the stream of experience.

(2) Hermeneutical Method

The word 'hermeneutics' is derived from the Greek word 'hermeneuses' meaning 'interpretation'. The Greek word, 'hermeneuses' is in turn derived from 'Hermes' (called Mercury by the Romans) who, in Greek mythology, was the messenger of the gods and patron of eloquence. Thus, at the outset, we see that hermeneutics is concerned with 'divine' truth, and with making that truth clear and precise so that it can be understood. Therefore, hermeneutics may be defined as the science, and art too, of interpretation, especially of ancient writings which are held to contain divine truth.

In a technical sense, then, hermeneutics, as applied to scriptures, can be defined as the investigation and determination of the rules and principles which guide the interpretation of scriptures. Hermeneutics is the theory and the

methodology of scriptural interpretation. Its basic principles of interpretation are based on psychology, sociology and culture. For example, the culture of the New Testament was to some extent built upon the categories of Greek philosophy. So, to study the New Testament in the Bible, one has to take into account the sociological and the cultural background of that period of time. Similar is the case with the religious texts of other religions also. Closely associated with the hermeneutical method is the symbolic method for the study of religious texts. In modern times the name of Paul Tillich is associated with this method.

(3) Symbolical Method

Central to Tillich's theory of religion is his understanding of religious symbols. Religious symbolism can be taken as the method to study the religious text, because every religious expression is symbolic. A symbol is not a sign, even though both point beyond themselves. A sign stands for something other than itself; such a representation is either natural or conventional. A symbol however, participates in the reality it points to. This reality is not merely factual and empirical; it is an existential reality. Symbols cannot be invented intentionally; they are born in situations where their meaning is relevant; they live as long as they have existential power, and they die when they no longer

evoke response. There are two fundamental types of symbolism, discursive and presentational. But what is important about symbols, as Susanne K. Langer says, is that "It is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly mean".² The religious concepts like God, Love, Power, Justice etc. are all symbolic. Paul Tillich says, "Symbol is the native language of religion."³ Symbols are not a primitive form of expression which has been superseded by modern scientific thinking; it is rather a perennial form of human consciousness which conveys profound insights into the nature of reality and the depths of human being.

In understanding the religious text of any religion, we cannot ignore the fact that symbols play an important role to exhibit the values enshrined in the sacred text. So, in order to understand the religious texts, one has to treat symbols conceptually.

(4) Ethico-Mystical Method

Unless one has certain empathy with the ethico-mystical attitudes, it is impossible to get into the numinous, or sacral, aspects of the scriptural truths. The statement of the Rig Veda, that "Even if he (who does not know 'The path of righteous action') hears her (vāk), still in vain he

2. Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in the New Key, Oxford University Press, 1951, p. 61.

3. Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 55.

listens" (10:71:6), is echoed in the New Testament when Christ, quoting the Old Testament (Isaiah 6:9), says, "You will listen and listen again, but not understand" (Matt., 13:14).

"Interpretation always presupposes a spiritual communion between the interpreter and the object he seeks to interpret. This becomes imperative when one seeks to interpret a culture, a way of thought, or a thing of the spirit. A process of saturation, resulting in a participation mystique, must set in before the eyes are ready to see and the mind to grasp."⁴

The author referred to goes on to say that,

"Not to have a mystic touch in one's soul and yet to think oneself qualified to interpret the scriptures of any faith including one's own, is a piece of presumption which scientific scrupulousity should not have allowed."⁵

In other words, we cannot get into the meaning of the scriptures by approaching them as the book of science, or history or even of aesthetics. We have to approach without missing the intrinsic meaning of the scripture by the process of "participation mystique".

To get the meaning of scientific statements, it is enough to consider them with detachment and without subjective

4. Cfr. Srimat Anirvan, The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol.I, pp. 311-332.

5. Ibid., p. 326.

involvement. But the meaning of aesthetic statement is grasped or rather experienced, when there is intuitive participation by the subject. When it is a question of religious statements, a purely objectified and externalized consideration would make us miss completely the numinous element in them. Rightly therefore, Robert Avens says, though in a slightly different context:

"In the religious context, what has to be reversed, if we are serious about revivifying the traditional creeds and formulas, is the process of externalization and intellectualization of religious images and symbols. The numinous value which, as a result of this process has been largely extinct, must be recaptured and made an integral part of man's religious experience".⁶

How then shall we get into the sacral dimension of the scriptural truths? We can however get definite guidelines from the Upaniṣadic tradition which can be applied to the study of the sacred books of other religion as well. In the context of explaining the supremacy of the knowledge of the supreme self the Upaniṣad says, "Verily, O Maitreyi, it is the self that should be seen (draṣṭavyaḥ), heard of (śrota-vyaḥ), reflected on (mantavyaḥ) and meditated upon (nidihyā-sitavyaḥ)" (Br. Up, 2:4:5). Here we can only make some general remarks of these four steps suggested by the Upaniṣad to

6. Robert Avens, "G.G. Jung's Analysis of Religious Experience", The Journal of Dharma, Vol. I, No.3, Jan., 1976, p. 227.

get in touch with the numinous element of Vāk. This is how Kochumuttam gives a brief description of this method:

"In darśana and sṛavana, the sage, apart from the ascetic preparation by tapas, is almost passive under the spell of the spirit manifesting itself or of resounding Vāk. The new experience has put him in a very strange predicament in which he feels a kind of unrest. He should get used to the new situation, by his personal reflection and contemplation and this process is meaningfully called manana and nidihyāsana".⁷

In the Indian tradition, Mīmāṃsā (in the sense of scriptural exegesis) is a spiritual exercise rather than merely a rational discipline. In this matter, Anirvan's observations are enlightening:

"It (Mīmāṃsā) is more of the nature of a coordination of spiritual experiences or of thoughts having an inner certitude, and is thus more akin to the spiritual practice of manana than to the logical procedure of tarka. The mind there works ... more by illumination derived from within than by ratiocination dependent on objective data. If we carefully study the psychology of spiritual expression (Vāk) we have no doubt left as to the antiquity of mīmāṃsā as a form of intense meditation creating a tradition of mystic knowledge which must have been orally handed down from father to son or from teacher to disciple".⁸

7. Thomas Kochumuttam, "Sanskrit Terminology and Christian Theology", Unique and Universal, Dharmaram Pub., Bangalore, 1972, p. 62.

8. Ibid., pp. 316-317.

In highlighting this ethico-mystical method, our purpose has not been to work out systematically a methodology for getting into the numinous dimension of the scriptures, but rather to bring out the insufficiency of the purely positivistic methodology which is today used in getting into the 'truth' of the scriptures. We maintain that the Indian tradition can provide us with the materials for such a methodology.

(5) Scientific Method

We have seen how important it is to recognize the human element in the sacred books. This implies that, apart from the ethico-religious method, various other devices used for the correct interpretation of various kinds of secular literature, could also be used for getting into the 'truth' of the scriptures. In this matter both the Indian as well as the Western contributions in scientific exegesis can be fruitfully used.

The whole of the Vedānga literature with its six branches of sikṣā (Phonetics), kalpa (Ritual), vyākaraṇa (Grammar), nirukta (Etymology), chandas (Metrics) and jyotiṣa (Astronomy) are exegetical devices for the correct interpretation of the Vedic literature. It goes without saying that this ancient literature needs revision in the light of modern studies in the fields of philology, linguistics, structural

analysis, etc. Still this literature can complement the Western methods of scientific exegesis. For instance, without a certain understanding of metrics and phonetics, one cannot fully grasp the fuller import of a scriptural verse.

Scientific exegesis of the scripture is very much of a modern phenomenon in the West. It was largely the result of the gigantic strides empirical sciences have made. Philosophy, since the time of Descartes, also has contributed much to Biblical criticism. In the context of Biblical exegesis the following five types of criticism are in vogue in the West: textual criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism and historical criticism. Textual criticism tries to find out whether the present day text is faithful to the original. Literary criticism inquires into the literary form, authorship and the inter-relationship among the books of the scripture concerned. Form criticism inquires into the pre-history of the text before it was committed to writing. Redaction criticism makes conjectures with regard to the ideological bias of the compiler or the redactor of various oral traditions into a final book form. Historical criticism makes queries with regard to the authorship, the date and the historicity of the persons and events spoken of the scriptures.⁹

9. Cfr. Rudolf Bultman, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, John Marsh (Tr.), Oxford, 1963.

The scientific objective to arrive at the 'truth' is also applied to the study of religion. And the scientific method of analysis is one of the important studies of religion and of our conclusion with the understanding of the sacred books. Thus, it tries to bring out the close relationship between science and religion, whose differences are only apparent but not genuine.

(6) Historico-Critical Method in the Context of the Bhagavad Gītā and the New Testament.

Through this method one tries to find out who was the author of a book, at what time the book concerned was committed to writing and how historically the events and persons mentioned in the book are. This method is applicable to the study of any ancient book. But the grades of importance of this type of investigation vary according to the nature of the book in question. Here we limit ourselves to pointing out the different degrees of emphasis on historical questions required by the Bhagavad Gītā and the New Testament.

From an overall look at the Bhagavad Gītā and the New Testament a feature that strikes us the most is that the former is more doctrine-centred than fact-centred, while the latter seems just the opposite. But at the same time stories about Kṛṣṇa's childhood, youth and friendship with Arjuna is well known to the Hindus. In the Bhagavad Gītā much

of the doctrine communicated could stand by itself, independent of any authority, though the Lord's own authority enhances its value. In the New Testament, on the other hand, what is primarily important is not what Christ merely taught but what he was and what he did. The New Testament records not only words spoken by Christ, but He himself is the 'Word' (John, 1:1), incarnated (John, 1:14); he not only spoke truths but He was the truth (John, 14:6), not only pointed out ways of salvation but the way (John, 14:6).

There is hardly anything mentioned in the Bhagavad Gītā with regard to the personal life of Lord Kṛṣṇa: his birth, childhood, parents, activities etc. In the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, the personal life and activities of Christ are given great importance. When we read the commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā by the great ācāryas or the modern Hindu scholars like Sri Aurobindo or Dr. Radhakrishnan, very little interest is shown whether Kṛṣṇa was truly a historical person, whether the doctrines taught in the Bhagavad Gītā are the very words of Kṛṣṇa or only an interpretation of the Lord's words by a later writer, whether all the 18 chapters of the Bhagavad Gītā constitute one whole book or a compiled whole of various strands of literature already existing. Radhakrishnan says:

"So far as the teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā is concerned, it is immaterial whether Kṛṣṇa

the teacher is a historical individual or not. The material point is the eternal incarnation of the Divine, the everlasting bringing forth of the perfect and divine life in the universe and the soul of man."¹⁰

Aurobindo would say in the same way that "The Kṛṣṇa who matters to us is the eternal incarnation of the Divine and not the historical teacher and leader of men."¹¹

The New Testament commentators, especially the modern scholars, are to a considerable extent different from those of the Bhagavad Gītā commentators. They seem to be more interested in the Christ-fact, although they are not oblivious of the Christ-value, if such a distinction is permissible. Are the events described in the New Testament historical or mythical? Are the sayings attributed to Christ really his own or of the interpreters? Are the narratives on the miracles factual or imaginative? How are we to reconcile the apparently incompatible resurrection narratives? What are the sources from which Jesus drew his doctrines? Such questions are of great concern to them. Though the Bultmannian School of New Testament criticism was to shift the emphasis from the Christ-fact to the Christ-value, still it failed to achieve its goal due chiefly to its inability to take

10. Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavad Gītā, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948, p. 28.

11. Aurobindo, Essays on the Gītā, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1959 p. 18.

seriously the ethico-mystical method. On the other hand, the early fathers of Christianity, like Basil, Jerome and Augustine tried to bring out the Christ-value far more fruitfully and forcefully than the Bultmannian, without at the same time dividing artificially between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The orthodox Christian position is that the Christ-fact in itself has the meaning or the value factor, and that the one cannot be considered independently of the other.

Because of this inseparable and intimate relationship between the Christ-value and Christ-fact, the New Testament interpretation is immensely helped by the contributions of the modern historical critics. But the greatest danger in getting into the truth of the New Testament is in approaching the Christ-fact as though it were independent of the Christ-value on the one hand, and of utilising only the secular methods, overlooking the ethico-mystical method, on the other. In this chapter we have pointed out that the peculiar nature of the sacred books demands special methods to get into their true meaning and import. Since the ethico-mystical method is very much overlooked today, we have laid a special emphasis on it. We have also stressed the need for taking seriously the communitarian discussion of the scriptures in trying to understand them, especially in a centralised religion

like Christianity. In our special considerations of the Bhagavad Gītā and the New Testament we have highlighted the special relevance of the historico-critical method in interpreting the New Testament in contrast to the Bhagavad Gītā.

A religious text is neither a purely historical nor purely scientific document, though often it does reflect the socio-cultural history of the times. In this chapter I wish to point out that religion is neither science nor history in modern sense. It does not advance either a scientific or historical theory, it has its mooring elsewhere. Science, history and religion belong to different realms.

II. SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Irrespective of different methods being applied for the study of religious text, we have to bear in our mind of a few general observations in the study of religion itself. Firstly, since religion is a cultural phenomenon, its historical moorings must not be overlooked. Secondly, since study of religion is sometimes done from a scientific standpoint, we must not fight shy of the application of the scientific tools and investigation. Thirdly, even when we have applied the historical and scientific method, we must be sensitive to what is specifically religious in the phenomenon that we called religion. This at once brings us to the inter-relation between history, science and religion.

Science and religion though can be treated to some extent as identical in purpose, yet they are opposite in methods. So, scientific enquires cannot purely explain the meaning of religion, or given an interpretation of the scriptures. Treatment of science and religion as similar entities often led the positivists to denounce religion as a pseudo-science.

Science explores that which is perceptible through physical manifestation. It confines itself to the external phenomenal world. Things that belong to the materially manifest world of form, space and time are detectable through the physical senses and comprehended through the mind by science. But there are also things that we cannot grasp through our physical senses or through the mind, but the presence of which we cannot deny. This transcendental realm is the domain that religion explores. Religion explores life as it manifests from inside out, and expresses it in reference to the universe outside. Religion thus goes further than the physical universe by exploring the mysteries in the transcendental realm beyond the mind, whereas physical science explores the manifestation of the material world. Man is the combination of the spirit and the body. But science searches for the meaning of life, excluding the spirit and inner values. Nevertheless, science and religion are actually

not two separate and opposing phenomena. Science deals exclusively with the physical universe, whereas religion deals with the realm of the spirit. Nonetheless, spirit and matter cannot be so divided as to treat them entirely independent of each other, for they are manifested simultaneously. In the light of what is stated above, we may make the following observations.

Firstly, the basis of the exploration of science is objective analysis. Science compares things to determine their differences. But religion begins with postulation of the unity of all. Secondly, doubt is an important element of the scientific process; but faith is a corresponding necessary element of religious practice. Thirdly, the scientist is careful to establish his objectivity, and not become personally 'involved' in his clinical process. But the religious seeker must be fully involved personally in his practice. Scientific procedure makes use of hypothesis-questioning-measurement of results etc. Results must be consistent and repeatable, no matter who conducts the experiments. When the scientist comes up with his discoveries and inventions, they become the common property accessible for all. Thus, although Franklin discovered electricity and Edison invented the light bulb, anyone can use these inventions without being a Franklin or an Edison. But, because religious search is

subjective and individual, the realised truths of religion can be talked about but not passed on to another. It takes another man to become a Buddha; Buddhahood cannot become the common property of those who fail to apply themselves on the path of Buddhahood.

Religion deals with the 'Why' of things. It deals with the highest and the noblest that responds to the highest and the noblest, something beyond the mere physical or material or chemical. We cannot explain everything by science. There are items in the realm of the soul which are beyond the grasp of the physical sciences, and they can be contemplated, studied and explained only through the science of religion.

Fourthly, science deals with the things seen but religion deals with things unseen. Huxley went to the extent of saying: "Science is nothing but trained and organised common sense".¹² But there is uncommon sense which is religion. Fifthly, the religious urge is an urge to be encompassed. It is an urge to feel oneself a part of something greater. On the contrary, the scientific urge is an urge to encompass. It is an urge to manipulate, control, direct and dominate.

12. Huxley, T.H. Collected Essays, 9 Vols. 1894-1897, London.

There is no contradiction in these two urges, since it is clearly possible for us to be in control of our functioning on one level, while, at the same time, being controlled or encompassed on another level. Basically then, the religious urge and the scientific urge are complementary, as each reinforces the other. Finally, science is the systematised study of the things we experience with our five senses. It is the knowledge ascertained by observation and experiment, critically tested, systematised and brought under general principles. Religion however is that part of our human experience which has to do with realities beyond the reach of our five senses, and theology is the systematised study of such religious experiences.

Historically speaking, some theologians have treated sacred texts as containing scientific truths. Hence, this led to a dichotomy between science and religion, but this dichotomy is bizarre and uncalled for. The antagonism between the two has arisen out of a misunderstanding about their meaning and purpose. The conflict between science and religion is only apparent and not genuine. Einstein writes, "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind".¹³ Science and religion are not antagonistic in and of themselves.

13. Einstein, Out of My Later Years, New York: Philosophical Library, 1950, p. 26.

The basic thrusts of both science and religion have always been to explore the mysteries of the universe and to alleviate human suffering. Science and religion, each has the same aim, but they are different in methods.

Likewise, we can also take note of a contrast, and yet a complementarity, between history and religion. But first a comparison between science and history. Science and history also have their different purpose and methods, and religion is neither science nor history as such. R.G. Collingwood, a British Philosopher, tries to differentiate between science and history in his book, The Idea of History. He puts two questions, one scientific and the other historical: The one, why does this red litmus paper turn blue? This is a scientific question. And the other, why did Brutus murder Caesar? This is a historical question. To the first question there can be only one answer. Even Einstein could not give another answer. If he gives the one answer, and if it is correct, that would be the only answer, so that at no time can there be simultaneously valid but different answers to this or any scientific question. On the other hand, for the second question, there can be many answers and all of them equally valid at the same time. The purpose of historical enquiry and the purpose of scientific enquiry differ, and this constitutes the vital difference between science and history.

The following differences can be pinpointed: Firstly, the scientist can repeat his experiments; the historian cannot call for a repetition of the past. Secondly, the scientist can be objective towards the phenomena before him. The historian cannot be objective in a sense in which science is objective. This is certainly not a difference in degree, it is one of kind. Thirdly, the ultimate objective in scientific exploration is the formulation of a scientific law. But there can be no law in history, the kind of which one comes across in science. Scientific knowledge provides the power of prediction on the basis of such laws. The historian cannot make such absolute prediction. Fourthly, the scientist makes no moral judgement, the historian cannot help making them. Fifthly, the material which the scientist deals with is mostly inanimate, and where animate, it is incapable of rationality. On the other hand, the historian deals with human material. Sixthly, history is not a positive science though it adopts scientific methods in the matter of collection of data. The primary function of the historian is to collect the data, interpret the facts, classify them and make guesses and formulate constructions. The historian is not concerned generally with the past as such but only with the select realities of the past. The scope of history is not static as it moves in time. Thus, the method, functions and scope of history are radically different from those of science. Now we are

in a position to compare and contrast between history and religion.

In virtue of its human concern, specially with the system of human values, religion is more closely related to history than to science. Indeed it is possible to consider religion as a humanistic discipline par excellence; this in so far more than one reason. In the first place, there hardly is a religion in the vacuum, a religion is always given in a historico-cultural milieu. It is possible to think of religion that does not entail the concept of God; but every religion without exception has to be a religion of man. Hence, religion necessarily has a historical dimension. Secondly, a religion is a human response to concrete human situations that man was forced to adopt himself to; it is in virtue of this that religion is intimately associated with man's life and his system of values. Finally, a religion may also be linked with the transcendental aspirations of man who is a spatio-temporal being. It is here that religion, while having the history of its own, yet, transcends the history of religion. At any rate all these make the link between history and religion intimate. Nonetheless, religion and history belong to different realms. The conflicts appear to be there, only when we try to understand the one in terms of the categories appropriate to the other. In short, the

method and categories applied in the study of religion are radically different from those employed in scientific and historical enquiry. Religion would go beyond the secular, but everywhere history includes religion within its scope.

A failure in our understanding of the inter-relations among history, science and religion in the right perspective makes a study of religion vulnerable to the charges of the positivists. It is to this that I now turn.

III. POSITIVIST'S DENUNCIATION OF RELIGION

The attempt to study the religious text with the application of the only scientific and historical categories has often led the positivists to denounce religion as a pseudo-science. In this connection, I would take up the view of Karl Marx and Freud who had tried to denounce religion in general, and established their ideology in accordance with the historical, the sociological and the scientific evidence of the times.

In the historical context of a critique of religion, a comparison between Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud seems almost indispensable. To start with, they share the same intellectual and cultural life of the nineteenth century bourgeois society; but they turned out to be critics of that social class and its culture, religion and morality. Whereas Marx analysed

and criticised the economic structure of the bourgeois society, Freud took up the burden of analysing and criticising the sexual life of the same society. They theorized, more or less, under the same intellectual tradition which embodied in it the two elements of scientism and romanticism. The scientific influence is easy enough to recognise in their works; for both of them were wedded to determinism and a belief in the ultimate victory of rationality. For both Freud and Marx, there is no possibility of man disobeying the laws of nature explicated by science. Both Marx and Freud were in a sense social atheists. They were concerned with the social function of religion, not with the philosophical disputes about the existence or the non-existence of God. Nowhere in their writings do we find any arguments designed to refute the traditional proofs for the existence of God, such as those advanced by theologians and philosophers. Marx refused to attack religion on its own terms. They are both critics of the reactionary social role which religion plays in supporting an exploitative social system.

Marx holds, that "Man makes religion, religion does not make man". Religion does not originate from a source independent of man, such as divine revelation in the Christian and Jewish traditions. Religion is used as the opium of the people. He taught that people to abolish religion. The fantasy

compensations of heaven must be destroyed. He does not use the opium metaphor when speaking of the function of religion for the capitalist class but only to the middle class. The proletariat takes its religious opium in response to actual pain. Just as the drug addict or the alcoholic is simultaneously seeking relief from his sufferings, so it is with religion. Religion provides compensation for the intolerable conditions of the worker's life. Under the influence of religious opium the proletarian enters the deep sleep in which present misery is forgotten, and thereby gains a fantasy compensation and consolation.

To Marx, religion is used as a Capitalist Ideology. The real profit of religion benefits the capitalist class from the religious belief that a man's social status derives not from a dominant exploiting class but from the divine will. It is the capitalist who profits from the religious devaluation of material goods and economic power. The aim of Marx was not simply to diagnose the evils of capitalist society, but above all to overthrow the system itself. His critique of Christianity exposes the two sides of the reactionary social function of religion. On the one hand, he shows how it can support the dominant position of the exploiting capitalist class, on the other hand, he demonstrates that religion offers a narcotic compensation to the proleta-

riat, thereby disguising the true source of their suffering and their revolutionary energies.

For Freud too, religion is a dangerous illusion. Religion, he says, is an 'enemy' of human progress. It functions like a sleeping draught which gives consolation at the expense of wakefulness. It is a poison that destroys reasons. It further induces infantilism by subduing intellectual vigour.

Religion, according to Freud, impoverishes a believer's ability to effectively cope with the threatening forces impinging upon him from the natural world without, and from the unconscious impulses within himself. Instead of dealing with these forces in a mature and rational manner, Freud demonstrated, the religious person frequently turns to a divine father-figure whose protective love is sought through prayers, penances, confessions and so forth. He thought that the impoverishment of a person's critical ability in one area such as this impedes the use of reason in other areas as well.

The views of both Freud and Marx make it abundantly clear that, if we try to explain religion by purely historical or scientific explanation, religion will be nothing but an illusion or a narcotic opium, and the religious and moral

values only serve as the means for exploration of the middle class in the society. Freud and Marx denounce all values upheld by religion and morality, since these values degrade the lower classes of the people in the society. But this argument does not hold good, as such religion is unique, it cannot be explained away purely by history, or science, or economic order of the society or even by culture etc. Religion is a sacred feature in man's life. One has to understand it not merely collectively, but by personal relationship with the infinite in one's own life and its values.
