

CHAPTER - IV

SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

Sociology :

The term 'Sociology' was invented by Auguste comte, a French philosopher in 1839. Sociology is the youngest discipline of the social sciences. The word 'Sociology' is derived from the Latin word 'Societus' meaning 'society' and the Greek word 'logos' meaning 'study or science'. The etymological meaning of sociology is thus the 'science of society'. "In other words, Sociology is the study of man's behaviour in groups or of the inter-action among human beings, of social relationships and the processes by which human group activity takes place"¹.

The social character is the distinctive feature of human life. Every human being interacts in the society in order to survive. According to Aristotle, man is a social animal; both nature and necessity impact man to live in society. Man carried on a study not of society but of different aspects of society which give rise to different social sciences like History, Economics, Political Science, Anthropology, Psychology etc. All these social sciences deal with social phenomena where conception is particularly made on human conduct. These social sciences do not give us a complete picture of society. These social sciences do not fully explain man's social behaviour. So, Sociology is a synthetic discipline which is essentially and fundamentally deals with that network of social relationships we call society. In society we should recognize that we are not attempting to study everything that happens in society but as forces that maintain and control social relations. The main interest of sociology is to study social relationship.

Society :

Usually the word 'society' is used to designate the members of specific groups of persons, social relationships of the persons. We can speak Horizon society. Sometimes the word is used to designate institutions like Arya samaj (society), Brahmo samaj etc. Society is a system of relationships. It is the system of norms of interaction among the persons by which the members of the society maintain themselves. Relations are organized in the society. So, society is a place where members are known by each other and possesses common interests.

It is a wheel of social relationship. Among these relations some are complex, some are simple, some are temporary and some one permanent. These relations include behaviour, customs, modes of operation, authority, assistance and other types of relations. "Society includes behaviour of human beings and the consequent problems of relationships and adjustments among them"². All these are understood in the society. A society is a group of individuals, a system or pattern of relationships among human beings. So, it may be defined as the total complex of human relationships. Social relationship always possesses a psychological element. Neither any society nor a social relationship can exist without this element. Society exists only where social being behaves.

Man and Society:

Man is an integral part of the society. Every man belongs to some society. It is the essential fact of man. Man cannot exist without any society. Man has the capacity to have a social life, which is the intrinsic need of man. "One would almost conclude from the foregoing statement that the individual is a product of society"³. Some essential

fact like emotional development, intellectual maturity etc. cannot be possible without society. Man cannot develop all these things in isolation.

Man is said to be a social being. Man's character of socialness is universally accepted. It is because that man lives in society in company with others where his conduct is evaluated as right or wrong. Moral judgment on the actions of man is done in the society. It is also fact that no man can achieve success or pleasure in his own efforts without society. It is not possible for man to achieve what we want without society. Man lives with his fellow beings. He lives in collaboration and co-operation with the human beings as because all human beings are lived with a character of socialness which is the essence of society. Hence, the relation between man and society is very intimate.

Social relationship is the essence of society which is only made possible between the presence of man and society. Due to this social relationship man establishes relations with other members of the society.

Regarding man and society, Spencer says, society is an organization; it is a social organization. He says that individuals are the limbs of the society. Just as the limbs separated from the body have no life, similarly individuals separated from society have no life.

Religion:

Religion is an institution with a recognized body of persons who gather regularly to worship ultimate reality. It is also the place where we accept the set of doctrines offering some means of relating the individual to what is taken to be the ultimate reality. Some defines religion with the moral life, some again considers it to be a typical

aesthetic enjoyment, while some other says that religion is nothing but the philosophic contemplation of reality. Mathew Arnold defines religion as the morality and he describes religious object as the power that makes for righteousness.

Kant defines religion as the moral duty as a divine commandment. It obviously supposes that religion has no other function than proving an ontological foundation of the consciousness of moral deligation. Religion is a unique experience of man's relation to an eternal and absolute reality not expressible in terms of the relations between finite things and beings.

Religion concerns belief and social institution and maintains the social relationship that exists in society. Individual, family and community life in general are regulated by religion, which influences people's behaviour, action, faith for enforcing social norms and ethics. Religion is a system of belief as well as an agent of value enforcement and action. "Religion involves thought and activity as well as beliefs and values"⁴.

Relation between religion and philosophy is very intimate. It is different from that type of relation which is found between philosophy and science. Philosophy tries to give a more unified and complete understanding of the world while religion attempts a more perfect unity. Though religion and philosophy are different with regard to their field but due to some important aspects they can be said to have an alike system. Both religion and philosophy has the same aim to understand the world. Though they are different in their field of interest but both deal with the same idea such as soul, god etc.

Tribal Religion:

Tribal religion was the most primitive form of human religion. Primitive people never believed one object, they believed different things and objects and also worshipped natural objects as gods. Tribal religion was also found in the form of Animism. Animism refers to the view of the Universe that include even plants and inanimate objects, it is one type of psychological being similar to that of human and non-human animals. This theory of the primitive people is called Animism. "According to Risley, Tribal religion is animism. The tribal people believe in the presence of supernatural powers at the back of high mountains, flooded rivers, big trees and epidemics"⁵. The primitive people tried to convince the powers by different propitiations and worships.

'Ancestral worship' is also another type of animism found among the tribes. It was the most important part of religion of ancient Greece and Rome. It was also found existed in China and some parts of Africa and Asia. "The term ancestor worship is sometimes used in a wide, loose sense to refer to any sort of rites referring to dead persons"⁶.

'Ancestor worship' is occupying an important place among the Bodos in the form of worshipping the spirits of dead person or ghost. Fear of dead person or ghost is the main inspiration to make 'ancestor worship'.

The Bathou religion as the tribal religion of the Bodos can be considered as a religion of the world because it established the characteristics of perfect unity among the Bodos.

Society and Religion:

The word 'religion' is used as more wider sense in sociology than religious texts. Sociologically religion is defined as institutionalized

systems of belief. Religion is a sociological phenomenon and religion plays an important part in the social order. The relation between religion and society are fundamental to the nature of religion. According to Galloway, religion is a faith of man in a power beyond himself. Religion is the field and systems of sociology. According to Herbert Spencer, sociology covers its field by the family, politics, religion, social control and industry and work. The goal of religion is not only liberation but it is mostly concerned with the social factor like social welfare, social relation, social cohesion and national integration. Religion is a need and support for the betterment of human beings. All religions are mainly concerned with social welfare and humanity service. "According to Hindu Social Philosophy each person wants to achieve purshārtha e.g.: dharma artha, kāma and mokṣa. Dharma is the root, artha is branch, kāma the flower and mokṣa the fruit of the tree of life. If the root is watered, the brances and flowers will be healthy and yield delicious fruits"⁷.

It is the first order language by which we communicate our feelings, thoughts and acts in relation to an object of devotion. Religion is the most influential forces of social control. It is also the most effective guide of human behaviour. Unless we understood religion we shall fail to understand society.

According to the intellectualist, religion has the intrinsic to the nature of society. Some religious ideals like belief, attitude, behaviour etc. are established in society. "Religion offers prescriptions for social order, individual behaviour, and collective action"⁸.

Both sociology and religion are value oriented. A society can be more rational and civilized with the help of religious and moral values. We can build up a noble, valuable and ideal society if we emphasise on

the religious aspect of the society. The value of religion is nothing other than the human value like truth, right conduct, love and non-violence.

All the religions or religious traditions give expression to the relationship what is understood to be the most compelling objectives of human life and day to day conduct. The religious traditions can be distinguished from each other in regard to their interpretations and yet, they also share some common convictions and attitudes towards society.

All the religions or the religious traditions are nothing other than the social groups or the part of society. Religious traditions differ from one another on the basis of their culture and style of living, but also have similarity in regard to the worship of some supernatural agency. All the religions or religious traditions seek a measure and ideal for the societal ordering of life. Invocation is the key of religious traditions by which the relation of brotherhood and the status of society are established. Society is a collective aspiration to which traditions provide some means by which individuals and communities can establish their lives on a basis that is distinct from the social and cultural status. It is clear that the religious ideals and the day to day ordering of common life are not fully suitable. They are rather characterized by conflict and tension. So, such problem requires a deliberate spiritual and practical agency as the mediator for effective solution. Some supernatural powers like God as the basis of the nature are admitted by the belief of God which varies from mind to mind of different traditions.

God in the Society:

The status of God is sociologically understood in the different societies or in the different religious traditions. God has the most

influential character in the society. The idea of God is inseparably related to society though God is an inseparable part of religion. The religious minded people of the society always believed some supernatural power or energy as the basis of natural world or as a source of justice and goodness. According to Kant, men cannot live in the society without the faith of God though the existence of God cannot be rationally proved. The different religious traditions like Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Hinduism etc. are the branches of our social culture or some sociological groups where the existence of God is either affirmed or denied. In some religions like Buddhism and Jainism, we do not start with pre-supposition about the existence of God. So, in a different society God stands as a being who is believed as the ultimate source of values and powers, and also believed as the ultimate source of social integration.

Sociologically the status of God is understood by using different religious behaviours or systems like ritual, bhakti, puja, sacrifice, iconographic worship, prayer etc. found in the society. These religious systems are performed to propitiate gods and goddesses in different occasions.

Ritual:

Ritual is a religious practice. It is a complex pattern of behaviour for the individual as well as for various social groups in all sphere of life with reference to the sacred objects. Ritual is a performance of action or a system of worship to propitiate god which is performed by the priest (brahmana). Ritual appears in all religious rites and societies. Body is the centre of ritual and is also the vehicle of religious experience. Ritual is the symbolic action. Ritual underlines symbolic intention. In ritual special clothes, altar, manner of speech, distinctive

places and time are used. Here to nurture god, people voluntarily submit their bodily existence and assume very specific roles. The priest ensures the goodwill of the god to the people of the society.

Culturally ritual is defined as sets of behaviour. It is regarded as a form of social communication or code of information and analysed in terms of its "grammar". Ritual is treated as a cognitive category. Ritual is a socio-cultural function. According to social anthropologists, ritual is a stylized repetitious behaviour that explicitly religious. It is also called social as because it is performed in the different ceremonies of the society. According to Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, ritual arises from the 'numinous' or 'sacred' or mysterious reality that is always manifested as of a wholly different order from ordinary or "natural" realities.

Ritual more fundamentally is intentional bodily engagement for the relationship to reality. "As a result, ritual draws into itself every aspect of human life, and almost every discipline of the social sciences and humanities has something to say about it"⁹. Ritual may appear in the verbal behaviour also. The verbal behaviour such as chant, song and prayer are of course included in the category of bodily actions.

Ritual is symbolic in nature. Ritual underlines and makes emphatic its symbolic intention.

Bhakti:

Bhakti is another way to nurture god. Bhakti is said as the best way to have union with God or Goddesses. Bhakti is the way that reflects the cultural and social changes in Hindu society. In the Bhāgavat Purāna, bhakti is conceived as a way of life, as selfless dedication to Krishna.

Puja:

Puja is also a form of ritual which is performed in the Hindu society to propitiate god. Puja or Yajña is also important in domestic ritual. Puja for the gods which is also called Deva puja is performed in four different settings: (a) at shrines of Hindu home, (b) at temples, (c) at festivals and (d) at shrine or temples of localized village divinities.

- (a) Most of the Hindus maintain home shrine puja to honour the divinity. Home shrine consists of pictures of god or a small images of gods on a table or low platform. Here images of Śivalinga, small cast-metal statues of various gods are housed. Here gods are worshipped by single family representative. In home shrine puja sixteen different upacāras are used to propitiate god. These are Āvahana, Āsana, Svāgata, Pādya, Arghya, Ācamanīya, Vastra, Anulepana or Gandha, Puṣpa, Dhūpa, Dīpa Ārati, Naivedya or Prasāda, Namaskāra or Pranāma and Visarjana or Udvāsana.
- (b) Temple puja is mainly performed by the temple officiants like Brahmana. Temple puja are of two types – Non-Śaiva and Śaiva. Non-Śaiva temple pujas are usually addressed to anthropomorphic images while in the Śaivic temple addressed is made to the non-anthropomorphic linga. Temple gods like Śiva, Vishnu etc. are royal. The temple is his or her palace and priests are palace servants. Temple pujas in some places, are performed by dances by the dancing girl (devadasis). In the vaiṣṇava temples devotional hymns are often sung during the pujas or honour to the images of Vishnu. All the upacāras mentioned above are required for temple puja also.

- (c) In this puja gods are worshipped by the people of a local community. In this type of puja, gods are mounted on a cart carried on the roads like a procession or is called as ratha yatra. Here gods are worshipped by the devotees through tossing flowers or sprinkling water to the images.
- (d) In the village puja different gods and goddesses are worshipped. Village divinities are different according to different sect. Blood sacrifice is common in the pujas of village divinities, Village pujas are not necessarily maintained on a regular basis. Coconuts, Bananas, betel leaves, turmeric and cooked rice are the most common non-bloody offerings. The pujas to the village gods are performed by the pujaris. "Village gods may possess their pujaris or other mediums during the course of pujas; festivals feature such possession experiences, as well as processions, sometimes fire walking, and sacrifices of sheep, goats, fowls, or buffalo"¹⁰.

Sacrifice:

Sacrifice is the most important rite of religion. It is the universal phenomenon in offering animal sacrifice though it has no longer plays any part in Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity. In the history of religion lies its fact that it is the means by which it seeks to establish the communication and to enjoy communion with their gods. This type of communion is essential function for the religion. The offering of animal sacrifice is a cardinal importance for the history of religion.

A sacrifice is called universal when the offering is done by the community to their god. When the offering to the ancestors is made by the family descendants, it is not universal but particular. Sacrifice is not

only made by animal but also made by offering food and any article to their gods. The offerings are normally made by food or animal or vegetable. "If, for this purpose offerings simply, or offerings of food simply, were all that was required, then any article of food would serve to propitiate any god"¹¹. Sacrifices may be regular and irregular. Regular sacrifices occur when it is performed as a religious rite under a religion. An irregular sacrifice occurs when the sacrifice is performed by the community when calamity occurs in the society.

"In connection with every religion, whether ancient or modern, we find on the one hand certain beliefs, and on the other certain institutions, ritual practices and rules of conduct"¹².

In Hindu pantheon, sacrifice is a means to worship God in some cases. Sacrifice is made in front of the different deities by sprinkling some drops of water and scattering of leaves or grains, Sacrificial act is also maintained by offering animal and also rarely even seen human sacrifices. Sacrifice is believed as the way to enter into the godhead of the gods and even to control gods.

Iconographic Worship:

Iconographic worship is the another means to propitiate god. Iconography are visual images which are called concrete image (mūrti) which can be seen and touched. Image worship has its own purpose in stimulating religious devotion among ordinary men and women. Visual images of Vishṇu, Śiva and different goddesses are worshipped in Hinduism. These images transcend human appearance. These image in translated terms are called pratimā. These images are man made and man like, and invoking is done in front of the images to reflect transcendent vision. The images have the special place in the temples.

An average intelligent man goes to temple and worships an idol as the image of God.

Prayer:

Prayer is a type of worship, prayer is done collectively to various deities and God at home as well as outside the home. In a home family gods and goddesses are prayed. The prayers are offered by the members of the family at the family altar. Collective prayer is seen to the village gods installed in the village temple. Sometimes prayer are also offered to the river deity, forest deity and to other deity of the locality. In the period of Vedas, the prayer was directed towards the chief manifestations of natural process such as sun, moon, wind, fire, rain etc.

Goddess worship:

Goddess worship has played a central role not only in the small-scale social organizations but also to the emergence of civilizations. Goddess worship is found as an important characteristic in Hindu pantheon. Lakshmī, Saraswatī, Durgā and Kālī are the chief Hindu goddesses. They are very popularly worshipped by the average Hindus. In the complex agricultural society female deities have been variously linked to the fertility of crops. The worship of female sacred images are found in the societies throughout the world, except if these societies are not dominated by Islam or certain branches of Protestantism.

The everyday worship of goddesses is primarily seen in Hinduism at the village level. Many of these goddesses are only regional or local in reputation though they may be associated in the minds of some villages. These village goddesses are preoccupied by some small communities with lives and well-being. "Local village goddesses were

besought (as they continue to be today) to increase human fertility, to cause or cure diseases, to bring about good fortune, to enhance the productivity of crops, or to destroy demons"¹³. They are especially associated with fertility, both for humans and crops, and with diseases. They often receive blood offerings and are usually worshipped by all members of a village, regardless of caste affiliation.

Goddess worship is found as an widespread important characteristic of the religious traditions. In some parts of the world female deities or goddesses are associated with virginity, purity and perfect piety. Hindu virginity is found in some places of Nepal and India in terms of which kumārī puja is performed. In the worship of the puja, the premenstrual girl is assumed as the embodiment of a goddess.

The worship of natural phenomena is assumed generally as has the link with goddesses worship. Basically female deities are associated with the earth while male deities are with the sun. There is considerable evidence from ancient times that goddesses were associated with various natural phenomena particularly the sea, the earth, and phases of the moon.

Another widespread important characteristic of goddesses worship is due to their power over the fertility of soil. The fertility of earth is closely and widely associated with the goddesses worship which is concerned with the human fertility in some societies. Barren women are believed as formal divinities in some societies of Europe, India, Africa and many other parts of the world to ask for aid in pregnancy. In European countries the images of corn mother deity have been placed in the fields by peasants for hundred of years. Here goddess becomes a source of life so that the human community may be sustained.

Healing is believed as an essential and important characteristics of goddess worship. The goddesses are assumed that they can give life and take it away. They are frequently assumed to have the power to cure diseases. The Indian goddess Śitalā not only cures small pox, She is considered to be its source and requires elaborate rituals to cool her anger, which causes the diseases. Thus, Hindu people fear and adore her. They are assumed and worshipped as the primary and original source of life like human mothers.

Female deities are mostly worshipped and strongly represented in the home rituals, in roadside shrines, and at local pilgrimage sites in many parts of the world. Here goddesses are worshipped by the pilgrims more on a sub regional basis for the purpose of curing diseases and asking for small favours, while pilgrimage to the shrines of male deities is almost always at the regional or national level.

Sacrifice is the most interesting rites associated with goddess worship. The practice of blood sacrifice though not universal but found as widespread in some form or other in most religious traditions. The sacrifice of blood, whether of human or animal origin, has been linked to goddess worship from ancient times. In contemporary India, large number of goats, buffalo, chickens, and other animals are offered to these deities to satisfy their thirst for blood. Kālī and Durgā in the Hindu pantheon are deities of this kind. Though, now the fact of blood sacrifice is outlawed in many parts of the world, but this custom continues to thrive often underground. Sometimes various types of sacrificial substitutions are made in place of blood offerings, like the sacrifice of cucumbers, pumpkins, or money.

Many patterns of goddess worship throughout the world have been found in antiquity and continue to thrive in many of the world's

religions even to-day. Goddesses played a prominent role in prehistoric cultures by which the great traditional civilizations are developed throughout the development of agriculture and in the emergence of urban life. They continue to be a fertile source of religious experience within our contemporary world.

The sociological status of God is understood differently in different religious traditions found in the society. In the different religious traditions gods and goddesses are worshipped by different socio-cultural system.

Hinduism is an ancient Arya dharma of Hindus. Hinduism perhaps is the oldest of all the living religions of the world. Hindu religion is the amalgamation of various beliefs and practices. Hindu religion or culture is a growth out of amalgam and synthesis of different beliefs and practices. "Hinduism is not only a religion, but a social system and a tradition too"¹⁴. So, Hindu religion may be said that is lived by the people of the Hindu society.

Different gods and goddesses having different forms, nature and characteristics are believed and worshipped by the Hindus. Hindu as a religion or system is found a firm believer in God either in one God or in many gods and goddesses. In the Vedas, the basic text of the Hindus, the prayer was directed towards the chief manifestations of natural processes such as Sun, Moon, wind, fire, rain and others. The worship was thrown through the medium of yajña and prayer with the mantras.

The earliest Hinduism was characterized by polytheism. There has been a gradual development of religious thought from anthropomorphic polytheism through henotheism to monotheism. There are different gods and goddesses having different forms, which are

characteristics and nature in Hindu religion. Among them the most notable gods are 'Brahmā' the deity of creation, 'Vishṇu' the deity of preservation and 'Śiva' the deity of destruction. Among these 'Śiva' and 'Vishṇu' have been widely worshipped in India giving rise to what are known as 'Śaiva cults' and 'Vaiṣṇava cults'. These cults are also further divided into some sub-cults due to the wide variety of distinction in places of worship, forms of idols, modes of worship, beliefs and religious values, places of pilgrimage, religious goals and practices etc. Out of these three gods in Hinduism, Brahmā seems to be the least-worshipped. Among them Vishṇu was worshipped first as because He creates the world first

The "mother worship" has been an important feather of Hinduism. People worship Śiva's and Vishṇu's consorts 'Śhakti' and 'Lakshmī' respectively. Among the goddesses, the most important are Durgā or Maheśvarī, Mahā-Lakshmī, Mahā-Kālī and Mahā-Śaraswati. In Hindu religion Lakshmī is worshipped as she has the association with fertility. Lakshmī is worshipped throughout the year in different festivals. Lakshmī is worshipped in Orissa as she has the association with crops and food in 'Kaumudī Purnimā'. In the autumn, during the Durgā Puja, the worship of Lakshmī is significant. Saraśwatī is also popularly worshipped goddess of the Hindus. She is most popular among the school children and is worshipped on a special day throughout the India as the patron goddess of learning. Durgā is the most impressive formidable and the popular goddess of the Hindu pantheon. The worship of Durgā is celebrated as the Durgā Puja, an important festival during the autumn in the month of Āsvina or Kartika. The offerings of blood to Durgā is the important characteristics of Durgā Puja. Kālī is the fierce goddess. Blood is the main content of the worship. Wherever she is worshipped, She receives blood offerings

Judaism is the religion of the Jews, the people of the Israel. Judaism is a monotheistic religion, based on the concept of one God. In Judaic society God's holiness is much emphasized. "The early Philosophical thinkers, such as Sa'adyah Gaon (882-942), adduced proofs for God's creation of the world, from which they deduced God's unity and Sovereign power"¹⁵. The prayer is recommended in Judaic society as the service to God. Devotion and love to God is also recommended to propitiate God like Hindu society. Neither the stars nor the moon, nor any other heavenly or earthly phenomenon can be worshipped or thought to have divine characteristics. In Judaism man is sometimes called the servant of God. Prayer and devotion to God are also prescribed for man in Judaism. It is said that the purpose of the creation of man is the service of God. And this service essentially consists in praying God with inner heart without any outside thought or preoccupation. In Judaism man must pray with true inwardness regularly at stated times and occasions. A man is obliged to pray three times a day in the morning, in the noon and in the evening. It reminds us the Hindu custom of trisandhya, i.e., prayers to be performed thrice in the morning, in the noon and in the evening. Jewish prayer to God is petitionary and devotional. It is both individual and collective.

Islam is a prophetic religion. It is the religion of Muslim. Islam is strictly a monotheistic religion. It believes only one God or Allah. Prophet Mohammad is believed as the messenger (Rasul) of God (Allah).

It is the basic duty of a Muslim to respect the words before every prayer "La ilaha ila llahu, Muhammad resulu llah" (There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet). "According to Koran, there is one Allah, who is detached and uninterested, yet at the same time he

observes, enjoys, becomes angered at, takes pity on his disciples and destroys their enemies"¹⁶. The deep influence of Allah is seen in the heart of a muslim when the Imam or Mullah cries every morning and evening by uttering the words from the top of a Mosque, "Allahu Akbar, La ilaha llahu, Muhammad resulu llah" (God is great, there is no God but Allah, Muhammad is the prophet of God).

Daily prayer to Allah is the important pillar of Islam, is an act of faith. The purpose of prayer is to submit oneself to God. Every Muslim is expected to take as his basic duty praying to God unfailingly five times a day at the appointed hours at daybreak, at noon, at mid-afternoon, at sunset and at early night. These prayers follow a set of formula of devotional postures. In prayer a Muslim has to face towards Meccā. Each complete set of prayer is called a *rakah* and consists of eight separate acts of devotion. It starts with the proclamation "Allahu Akbar".

A Muslim can pray anywhere. But Mosque is the holy place for prayer. Mosque is arranged in such a way that while praying one will face to-wards Mecca. Mosque is devoid of any image or idol. Islam does not recognize priesthood but a leader is selected locally and is called Imam.

In Islamic society, there is the faith of the prophets of God and believed prophet Muhammad as the last messenger.

Zoroastrianism was the religion of the persian race. Zoroastrianism has a special worthy note of significance in the theological history. The ancient persian religion was similar in many respects to the vedic religion in India. Many of the Gods worshipped in Persia were similar to the Gods of Hinduism. In essence and reality both

Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are monotheistic though ostensibly both appear as polytheistic.

Zoroastrian theological concept is based on two supernatural kingdoms- the light, the God of good and other is the God of evil. The first is called Spenta Mainya and is so often identified with Ahura Mazda and the second is known as the Angra Mainya or Ahriman or God of darkness.

Ahura Mazda is the only God whom people adore and worship 'Ahura' means master or Lord, 'maz' is great and 'da' is knowledge; Ahura Mazda means Omniscient master and is assumed as the only god to be worshipped. Zoroaster was well aware of the Aryan tradition which saw only one reality behind all the various deities that people worshipped at the vedic age.

In Zoroasterian tradition 'Agni' is assumed as the child among the deities. Fire was a sacred symbol of son in Avesta, and was regarded as the son of Ahura Mazda. However, Zoroaster did not teach the worship of fire, but the worship of the one supreme Lord of the Universe under the name of Ahura Mazda. In Zoroastrianism, there are fire temples in which sacred flames burn eternally. Priests tend these fires and Zoroastrian people often visit these temples with sandalwood to offer. Though fire is not the direct object of worship or devotion but fire is regarded as very pure in the Zoroastrianism. "Fire was only the sacred object, the symbol of Divine, as it was in all ancient sacrifices"¹⁷.

Buddhism like Jainism is an offshoot of Hinduism. Buddhism is a purely humanistic religion. Buddhism presents a pure ethical and spiritual religion against extreme polytheism and ritualism of the vedic tradition. Buddhism is primarily a religion without God. Buddha, the

founder of Buddhism does not speak of any God and therefore no ritualistic acts find any place in it. No worship, no sacrifices, no ritual or prayers are found in Buddhism. Buddha did not say there was a God but he never says that there was no God. He always remained silent on the issue whether there was a God or not.

Although Buddhism does not believe in any God, later on Buddha himself was venerated like God by his devotees, in the form of Hinayāna school, there is no mention of God. According to Buddha, Who attains Nirvāna becomes a God. Each man, therefore, is a potential God. God in this sense is not a reality, rather Godhood is a status which is to be attained. So, early Buddhism is a purely ethical religion free from all sorts of ritualism.

The later Buddhist society, in the form of Mahāyāna school, is found to accept Buddha as God and believed in his various earlier incarnation. Later Buddhism gives vent to ritualism, monasticism etc. The modern Buddhist society was in favour of the establishment for the various Buddhist temples where images of Buddha are worshipped and adored more or less in fashion of the Hindu God. The Mahāyāna Buddhist also worship many Bodhisattvas other than the Buddha and abound in various sorts of ritualistic practices. For Mahāyāna Buddhists, Buddha became the idol of worship and came to be identified with the ultimate existence. For them, Buddha is God. This side of Buddhism seems very near to Hindu polytheism. It seems that instead of taking him as the creator, the Buddhists for the most part worship and adore him as an embodiment of holiness and compassion and as a great spiritual leader and saviour of mankind. By worshipping him, they expect his kind helping hand for removing their suffering.

Goddess worship is an important characteristic of Buddhist society. It is found in the Vajrayāna tradition of tantric Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia is widely associated with goddess worship. In Buddhist society, some goddesses, however, retain a certain degree of autonomy and represent independent deities. This is the case of the goddess Tārā, a female Bodhisattva. In Chinese pure Land Buddhism, Kuan yin, goddess of mercy, is also considered to be a Bodhisattva. She is assumed as a principal teacher, a saviour who can give her devotees assurance of enlightenment. This goddess continues to be worshipped through out china and in Japanese Buddhism.

Buddhist puja had become a full-blown cult within a few centuries after Buddha's final nirvāṇa which is celebrated mainly to worship the departed master. This cult drew upon an ancient formula of veneration. In this type of worship, the practitioner offered flowers, incense, and perfumes and sometimes used music, burning lamps, decorative cloths, banners and umbrellas etc. During the earlier centuries of the cults development, puja was offered primarily to bodily relics (Śarīras) of Buddha.

Christian society is the most influential and has dominated large population of the world, specially the western part. Christianity has its origin in the teachings of Jesus, a Jew. He is regarded by the Christians as the "son of God". He is sometimes regarded as God and sometimes as man. "Jesus has been described as Man, son of God and a prophet only to manifest the divinity in him"¹⁸. Jesus Christ is most popularly worshipped by the Christians as the incarnation of the Heavenly Father and as the greater saviour of mankind.

Although in Christian society there is the monotheistic belief of one God, but is pointed into three-in-one. This idea of God as three

persons into one is known as the idea of Trinity. The other persons into one are: God the Father, God the son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is regarded as the second person, the son incarnate. Though there are three persons but Godhead of the Father, of the son and of the Holy Ghost is all one.

Christians also believe heavenly angels which are of good and bad. Satan is the chief evil angel, the devil, who contributes to the spread of evil by instigating people to do sin. Satan is also deemed to be the master of hell.

In Christianity prayer and praise have an important place, which are recognized as the form of worship. In the churches of Roman Catholic order, an elaborate form of ritual was developed. Catholic Christians have to use two types of prayer-ordinary and mystic. It is an attempt to dwell in the presence of God. Mystic prayer is passive contemplation of the soul entering into direct communication with God. But in the protestant Churches, prayer and praise are exercised by preaching the Gospel.

Jainism like Buddhism is known as the offshoot of Hinduism. Both of them arose in the Indian soil as the reaction against the excessive vedic ritualism.

Lord Mahavira is treated as the God more or less, by the jainas like Buddha. There are Jaina temples at many places where the statue of Mahavira are kept inside and the Jaina play their devotion and respect in many ways. It is clear and certain that Mahavira is prayed only as a great, as a saviour of mankind, as a religious leader and guide and not as a omnipotent creator God.

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