

ABSTRACT

The aim of this project is to determine the actual meaning of the term *dharma* and to critically evaluate the meaning of the phenomenon *dharma*, which is highly relevant for the secular country like India. Generally, the term *dharma* refers to some activities which are somehow connected with God, more categorically to say it suggests us to obey the different principles to offer the devotion to the God, to follow the different style of the prayer and different manners to worship the God, to observe different ceremonies and activities which are offered to create the gratification of God or gods. All these activities are rituals. But in Sanskrit, the meaning of the term *dharma* is different from what we normally understand by it. The term ‘*dharma*’ is constituted with the Sanskrit root word ‘*dhr*’ adding with the suffix ‘*mana*’. The word *dhr* means upholding. Hence, the derivative meaning of the term *dharma* is something upholding, something sustaining. In the case of an object the essential property upholds it. Hence, the essential property of an object is its *dharma*. For, this property bears the identity of it. *Dharma* is one without which nothing remains the same. In the like manner, the essential property of man which upholds him and distinguishes him from others is the *dharma* of man, i.e., something without which man is not recognized as man in true sense of the term. Generally the term *dharma* is translated in English as religion though the term ‘*dharma*’ is completely different from the term ‘religion’. The meaning which is conveyed by the Sanskrit word ‘*dharma*’ is not transmitted by the meaning of the English word ‘religion’. In English, usually the word religion is meant for the custom of a group of people. But the term *dharma* does not designate any meaning like custom. We see that the proper meaning of the term *dharma* is misunderstood by most of the people which give birth to so many problems. Keeping this view in mind the principal focus has been given in my work to

critically explain the real meaning of the term *dharma*. I do believe that this work will help a lot to remove religious problems in our society.

There is no necessity to judge the famous phenomenon like *dharma*. It is true that intelligent persons do not have enquiry about the phenomenon which is established already in all aspects. Though the phenomenon *dharma* is established but problem arises regarding the nature of *dharma*. *Dharma* is recognized by most of the persons. But divergence of opinion is found regarding what exactly the term *dharma* means. Someone thinks that to worship a particular tree or cremation ground is *dharma*; on the other hand, someone considers that to perform the sacrificial rites is *dharma*. Someone considers that to convert people of one religion to another is their *dharma* and even fighting for this is also considered as *dharma*. The role of religion, in the history of the evolution of human thought is very important. From the very beginning of our society religion has occupied the central position in the life of man. It would not be exaggeration, if we say following Max Muller, that the true history of man is the history of religion. No other thing played greater role in the life of man than that of religion. We may discuss what sort of wellbeing religion has ensured for the human society; but a historical account shows that many conflicts have been occurred in the earth, of which one of the major causes is religious sentiment. Religious conflicts lead to different awful depiction of violence of the riot and even of the war including murder, bloodshed, women-torture, hampering the chastity of women, burning of the house, destruction of the temple, mosque and the church etc. *Lajja*, a novel, written by Taslima Nasrin, is the mirror of such kinds of religious conflicts. In the novel Taslima has shown, just after the destruction of the Bavri mosque in India, how the naked violence was spread upon the Hindus in Bangladesh. This novel, I think, is the vivid picture of the violence taken place in our society due to religious blind faith.

Due to the misconception of *dharma* the division and mistrust among human beings have been spread throughout the country. Religion or *dharma* makes us blind. It is overall noticed that a man belonging to a particular sect or religion does not tolerate people belonging to another sect or religion. It is not that this situation is found in present day. If we go through the history, we come to know about the crusade war which is declared by the Christian to recover Palestine, the holy land of Christian being related to Jesus Christ's life, from Mahomedans. The Brahmins did not accept the emergence of Buddhists and Jainas in India. In eleventh century the Hindu king Hearse of Kashmir destroyed the Buddhist temples and killed thousands of Buddhists. Jainas was attacked and their books were burnt. All this happened due to religious conflict. Division of the country on the basis of religion is a crude reality.

But if we carefully go through our traditional texts in order to determine the actual meaning of the term '*dharma*', we find that this term has basically been taken, in these texts, in the sense of moral value. If we first review the *Bhagavadgītā*, we can see that the term *dharma* has been used in mainly two senses i.e.: i) in the sense of duty ii) in the sense of moral value. The first one is substantiated when Arjuna told Krishna 'I am confused, please tell about my *dharma* i.e. my duty' (*pr̥cchāmi tvāṁ dharmasāmmūḍhacetāḥ*). And the second one is substantiated in the last verse of twelfth chapter of *Bhagavadgītā*. In this chapter Krishna has mentioned some moral values as the marks of true devotee and in the last verse He told that those who follow these immortal path of *dharma* are exceedingly dear to Him (*ye tu dharma-yāmṛtam idam yathoktam paryupāsate*). Here, Krishna has told that these moral values are immortal *dharma* (*dharma-yāmṛtam idam*). In the like manner, in the second chapter, as the marks of *sthitaprajña*, in the thirteenth chapter as the marks of true knowledge, in the fourteenth chapter, as the marks of *trīgunātītah*, in the sixteenth chapter as

the marks of divine nature (*daivi sampada*), Krishna describes some moral values. In the like manner, as the marks of *karma yagī*, *sāttvika kartā*, *brahmabhūtah* some moral values have been described. In the like manner, we see in *Śrī Candī*, the goddess *Candī* has been described in the form of moral values such as *tuṣṭi*, *śānti*, *lajjā* etc. ('*yā devi sarvabhūteṣu ---' *rūpeṇa samthitā / namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai nama namah*' i.e. I adore the goddess who is present in the form of *tuṣṭi*, *śānti* etc.). Not only in *Bhagavadgītā* or *Śrī Candī*, the importance of these moral values have been emphasized in other religious texts such as Buddha, Islam, Christian as well. *Dharma* in the sense of moral value is the basic significance of the term. The other meanings of the term are centered around this. We are so much concerned about whether God exists or not; but not concerned about obtaining these values in life which are very much associated with our wellbeing in our practical life such as physical, family relational, societal, national, international and so on. I consider that this sense of *dharma* is relevant for present situation of the society in order to remove the religious violence.*

If we take the notion *dharma* in aforesaid meaning, i.e. in the sense of moral value, then conflict among different religions could be removed. No one can demand that his religion is superior to any other religion in the world. There is no scope of differentiating among different religions if the purpose of all religions is to generate moral sense, though there may have different rituals among different religions. An action which violates the moral principles and which goes against wellbeing of the human society is not accepted by any religion. All religions seek the wellbeing and prosperity of the human society. And wellbeing and prosperity comes only when each one of the society becomes devoted to moral principle. Accordingly, it is morality which is to be considered as *dharma*, since wellbeing comes from morality in true sense of the term. If the aim of all religions becomes the attainment of morality, rituals and religious performances become secondary matter. Consequently, the

clash among men will not be taken place on the basis of religion at least. At present, the clash among the religions, in fact, is taken place due to the difference of rituals and also due to the difference of religious institution i.e. masque and temple etc, which is to be considered as secondary matter in religion. Misinterpretation of the religion is the root cause of these differences, which make it to be considered as primary one. Man should understand this misinterpretation and be virtuous, which is based on morality. In fact, the religion should be devoted to the welfare of the humanity. It is stated in *Kenoponiṣad* that the persons who are wise see the God among all living entities in the world and transcend this world by rendering the service to them (*bhūteṣu bhūteṣu vicitya dhīrāḥ pretyāsmāllokādamṛtā bhabanti*). Hence, from the age of *Upaniṣad* this Ultimate Truth (God) has been searched within the man and other living beings. If one spends his day by worshiping the God and keeps him confined within the temple, but hates man, then God is never present there.

If religion is based on morality and if we can discover oneness, a concord among different religions, then there is no question of any clash or violence. When a man is in danger, say for example, if a man is sinking in the water, can we ask his religion in order to save him? Shall I decide my duty by considering the fact that to what religion he belongs? What will my humanity / my heart say? In this context, we will certainly not consider the religion. If we consider my duty on the basis of religion, it will go against humanity. Humanity prompts us to help the endangered person. If we think of the urge which lies in the heart of every man, the problem is automatically resolved. In this context, Kazi Nazrul Islam beautifully says. When man is in danger, we should not ask whether he or she is Hindu or Muslim (“*hindu nā orā muslim*”? *oi jijñāse kon jan?*). In that situation, we should consider that a man is sinking into the water, who is the son of my mother (*dubiche mānuṣ, santān mor mār!*). Certainly, all the religions are in the favour of these teaching. We have to discover the unity among the religions. The words of humanity i.e. service to the mankind, devotion to the

duty, love to creature or creation etc. have been considered as the basic principles in all the religions.

Hence, if *dharma* is based on morality i.e. moral values like endurance, forgiveness, friendliness, compassion, non-violence, truthfulness, softness, simplicity, egolessness etc. along with performing one's own duties, as well as true humanity, then one universal religion can be prescribed in the whole world for bringing global peace and harmony. *Dharma* as a moral value is the real meaning of the phenomenon *dharma*, which is the principal teaching of all religions. And this teaching, I think, is highly essential for resolving religious tension and violence in the whole globe.