

An Anthropological Study towards the Religious Beliefs amongst the Youths in India

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Abstract

Religion is among one of the many social institutions which are intrinsic part of a society and it exist in some form or another in almost every known society. With the advancement of science and technology some of the theories of religion have been questioned and debated in the past and recent times, yet the religious belief remained a corner stone in the mindset of general folk. But the youth who feel reluctant to anything which is less descriptive or does not hold any scientific end are asked to share their views about the religious faith. The key objectives of the research project were to understand the importance of religion in youth's life, to understand how religious practices have impact on their life and to understand the cause and degree of religious belief amongst youths. The cause and the degree of belief were recorded and the data analysed to know the psyche of the country's youth and the impact religion is making in their life.

Index terms— religion, supernatural, anthropomorphism, spirits, demons, inscriptions, reconciling.

1 Introduction

Il present contemporary societies are afflicted by the idea of "religion". Societies have possessed many beliefs that can altogether group under the term religion. The beliefs which are in focus may vary from society to society and culture to culture in a given time, but despite of these varieties we shall define religion as any set of attitudes, practices and beliefs pertaining to supernatural power. Whether that power be forces, gods, spirits, ghosts, or demons. With these entire beliefs one thing is also evident that the degree of belief is a variable aspect as not all individuals have exactly similar intensity of belief.

Societal phenomena are often divided into; natural and supernatural. The term supernatural is often related to powers that are non-human and does not follow the laws of nature. May be a belief which is considered supernatural in one society has nothing to do with supernatural powers in other and is often taken as a regular natural phenomenon. Actually the line between natural and supernatural varies in a society according to what people believe about the cause of things and events in the world they observe. May be a cause for an illness is just natural in a modern society with more complexity and with medical specialists but people of a primitive less complex society may create a mentality that the illness is due to some supernatural cause. Anything for which knowledge of people is limited they often regard it as supernatural.

Prehistoric individuals often reflect a strong belief in some sought of religion and there cave paintings and their artistic work can be somewhat related to the concept of religion. The idea that there are some specific gods of those people is still quite ambiguous. Now if we talk about historic times universality is observed in the concept of religion. This fact is enough to understand why the concept of religion is under wide research, theorizing and speculation.

People think that religion is created by humans in response to some universal needs and conditions. The explained reasons may be intellectual understanding which makes the whole society consistently together on some important views in which overall understanding and support is much needed. Natural and supernatural

1 INTRODUCTION

beliefs run parallel to each other but they are often related with one another. It has been seen in almost all societies that they tend to "anthropomorphism" of supernatural powers. That means they make the human like image of their gods, spirits and demons and at the same time make them different from humans. It generally facilitates the understanding of people about supernatural. If a society is having a common belief in some kind of supernatural then they would eventually stay together with the objects associated to supernatural activity. The hierarchy of supernatural beings also reflect the natural hierarchy. The range of social structures in human societies from egalitarian to highly stratified has its counterpart in supernatural world. The social structure of natural and supernatural often correspond to each other.

Anxiety and uncertainty is also thought to be a major explanation for the need of religion. In general it is believed that humans would turn towards religion at times of uncertainty. People in all known societies face anxieties and uncertainties. As they may have both knowledge and skill to take care of much of their needs, but knowledge is not sufficient to prevent illness, accidents and natural disasters. And the most frightening prospect of life is ultimate death as there is intense desire to be immortal. As Malinowski saw it Religion is derived from the universal need to find comfort in inevitable times of stress. Explanation for the need of religion is the need for the community. It is believed that religion in a society may serve social rather those psychological needs.

Mahatma Gandhi once said belief in one God is the cornerstone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. The one religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference towards one's own Faith, but a more intelligent and pure love for it. Today this tolerance level is slightly lacking among few peoples of society which give rise to religious outrages be it Gujarat riots which took life of many innocent people which itself is the biggest sin in almost every religion or ethnic cleansing of Hindus in Kashmir. Hence it is only through the broad religious tolerance that it will break the barriers and lead to worldwide peace and avoid such hatred and discrimination on the grounds of religion.

Religious beliefs are again a part of social system which keeps on changing with the passage of time. The factors responsible for this change and transition can be varied. The selection of religious area of human society for research is motivated by the complexity and intimacy of the subject. It is a scientific and standardised approach to learn more about religion and how it works. The research is mainly focused on young generation as they are the ones who keep on challenging the theories and principles which may be achieved in the past. With the influx of scientific education in distant corners of earth it is now possible for these young stakeholders of society to question and debate already existing norms and give suggestions for a better change if necessary.

Many religions still condemn science very strongly and there has always been a constraint between the two. Religion is very much strict towards its writings and scriptures and all the inscriptions quoted in these religious scriptures are taken as thumb rule irrespective of the fact that they have any valid explanation or not. While on the other hand science give proper evidences and explanation to prove the point and it is very certain and very much answerable to all the questions asked in criticism of a scientific theory. Although, having so many differences they will always be associated as close companions who complement each other whether in negative or positive way. However, there were many scientists who believed in religious views and many religious leaders who kept religious inscription on stake and supported what was right according to him. Father Robert Nugent, a Roman Catholic priest, whose support of gays and lesbians in the church brought the Vatican's censure, ending his public role as an advocate for reconciling church doctrines with the realities of gay life.

Science and religion are mutually irrelevant, that they represent two non-over-lapping domains. Sometimes you hear slogans like "Science deals with facts and religion deals with faith." But this is a gross caricature of both science and religion. As science probes the universe, she encounters problems and questions which are philosophical in character and therefore cannot be resolved scientifically, but which can be illuminated by a theological perspective. By the same token, it is simply false that religion makes no factual claims about the world. The world religions make various and conflicting claims about the origin and nature of the universe and humanity, and they cannot all be true. Science and religion are thus like two circles which intersect or partially overlap. It is in an area of intersection where the dialogue takes place.

Since the research is driven by scientific approach it is necessary to highlight the relation between the religion and science for the better relativity and understanding. Science and religion are seemed to cross each other's track and this had also led to conflicts and tensions between the two. Religious beliefs are well supported unless we develop a scientific explanation and evidences in favour of the phenomenon which was previously explained by religion. There are numerous examples in the past that how society responded to the explanations of science which were defying religion. The most classic example is of Charles Darwin who was criticized for discarding the principals of genesis and introducing the theories of evolution. And since incorporation of new idea or new belief is not very easy as people of the society usually tend to hold their previous beliefs, it is a slow and long process. Therefore it can be assumed that religion is a thought designed for the satisfaction of human anxieties and never ending curiosity. Any explanation whether it is scientific or not, which may be able to explain the phenomenon better will become prevalent in the long run. The research was on 100 individuals in order to understand what belief they share when it comes to religion, and to study the possible correlation and influence of their culture and surrounding on their beliefs. The recorded views are then interpreted and studied intensively in order to reach a general conclusion and to observe the influence of science and other contradictory forces on their belief.

Study of spiritual beliefs and practices amongst youth is important for understanding multiple aspects of their life and how they respond to the word religion also describes their character, upbringing, emotional development, psychology and even morality to a great extent. It reflects the state of mind of individuals and how they react towards more logic oriented questioning in their lives. How they correspond religious beliefs with their day to day life and how it is affecting their daily routine and social interaction.

The major objectives of the research which enable proper understanding and gave a direction to the whole research process are as follows:

1. To understand the importance of religion in youth's lives.
2. To understand how religious practices is having an impact on their life.
3. To understand the cause and degree of religious belief amongst youth.

II.

2 Materials and Methods

In reference to above mentioned objectives a research has been carried out on hundred individuals of age group around seventeen to twenty eight years in Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, pertaining to their religious beliefs. The method employed for data collection for structuring the research is a well documented questionnaire which includes both qualitative and quantitative characteristics and the questions are formulated in such a way so that the core objectives of the research can be achieved. In addition to the questionnaire observation is also applied on the participants to observe their reactions and behaviour on religious and scientific things. The questionnaire used for the research process is enclosed as annexure 1. On the basis of the information collected from questionnaires conclusions are reached. Code sheet of the collected data is enclosed as annexure 2 followed by data entry which is enclosed as annexure 3.

3 III.

Observations IV.

4 Qualitative Analyses

Some of the quantified information about the participants is described above where the candidates are classified on the parameters like age, sex and religious belief and the communal or educational background possessed by them. However, the enclosed questionnaire in annexure 1 also contains questions which can attribute to qualitative analysis. These questions reveal the intensity, cause and percipience of religion and its belief among the studied participants.

When the question about the cause of belief in god/religion was asked most of the participants described god as a supreme power and their creator and a governing body. They attribute the events which happen in their life whether they are good or bad to their religious belief and their god. Some believed in life after death as a strong reason for believing in god as their belief will ensure a good life after death. Many possess a common belief that god is a kind of supreme energy who runs this entire universe and without him nothing exists. And they believe that every individual has a soul which is connected with supernatural or god, they often believe themselves as a part of god and he is a final destination.

Still others believe that religion and belief in supernatural can provide explanations and answers for previously unanswered things and events that take place around them. This view can be related to relieving of anxieties which surrounds us almost every time and this relieve can be co-related with the constant urge for mental and inner peace. Some individuals believe they can seek help from god in pressure situations and hard times and it is god who provides strength to face difficulties and he plays a part of a guide in one's life.

A large number of studied individuals were sceptic in their belief in religion or god and they find their belief as situational. Some simply does not have a concrete reason for their belief as their belief is just a societal function and a social duty which they perform as a learnt behaviour or by imitating their parents or relatives. Some believed that god is like a parent and they are his sons/daughters and like our parents take care of all are needs, he is there to fulfil our requirements and he is the provider. As parents sometimes punishes their children when they do wrong, god also have the authority to punish us when we went wrong.

Again there were some individuals although there proportion is less who does not share a religious belief at all as their approach to see life is quite scientific and they only believe what they see and observe. They are in search of valid and concrete answers and explanations which can be proved. Scientific theories are more important for them and they have a debating kind of attitude towards what they see and feel in life. They are curious to understand the reason and logic behind things whether those things are trivial ones or complex they need an answer for that. They do not believe in what society thinks about issues like sexuality, religion, caste, etc. They have their own explanation and reasons for what they see and observe. One subject thought of god as an energy which is running this universe and then he relate that with energy solar energy as it is the primary requirement for photosynthesis and is the primary source of energy at any tropic level.

However, when the believers were asked if they pray regularly and if they are not praying regularly, is it going to harm them in some way. Most individuals were not involved in constant praying and if they do it is only one or two times a day. They do not think that not praying to god will harm them but they possess a belief that praying make them happy. But in few cases where I came across a few followers of Islam, they usually pray more

than four times a day and one can be harmed if he does not pray because praying is their duty and everyone should perform it in a right manner. Thus this characteristic feature of Islam can be related to its strict Religious belief/Faith fig. ?? prescriptions and practice and devotion towards the almighty. They can be grouped under god fearing people with a little exception and as a result they perform their religious duties regularly. They tend to account religion in important decisions of life and their intensity of belief is generally very high. The patterns of belief can also be drawn through the educational status and stream of the participants. The individuals who were studying the biological sciences which give many contradictory explanations of events such as origin of life and evolution of man are found to be little hesitant in reciprocating religious views about these events and scientific theories. The individuals which were not related with the life science subjects were seemed to have a more firm belief. But even some biology students showed a firm belief in god and they perceived him as a creator of all life forms on earth which shows that religion is more powerful than science at times because it also works in the absence of solid evidences whereas science tries to provide a proper explanation for any event it may encounter.

The intensity of religious belief in studied individuals varied from average to high however; there were individuals who expressed low or even no intensity in religious belief but again there proportion was quite low in comparison. Hence religion is a powerful entity which plays an important role in the lives of individuals and many times even powerful than science.

V.

5 Conclusion

The primary aim of the research was to have an idea of religious belief among the educated youth of a developing nation and how they perceive supernatural in their practical oriented approach towards life. It seems that universality of religion and supernatural belief is a correct hypothesis as majority of studied individuals shared religious views very effectively and positively. However, the degree and cause of belief was again quite different among individuals as they possessed different explanations for their belief and their religious orientation is quite different from one another. Religion is an integral part of society and human lives in society therefore, there is a huge impact of religion in the lives of individuals and the way they think and see complexes of life is clear from this research project. It is evident from the research work that intermixing of religious and scientific approaches in the lives of participants have also resulted is little vague answers which are taking either of two away from each other and from the corresponding individual since the fulfilment of one requires denial of other in most cases. Since coexistence of both science and religion is there in individual's life a little ambiguity can be expected. Further development of science and better explanations of events explained by religion can change the mindset of individuals in a long run as no belief is constant and no matter how much supported it is but it is always subjected to unforeseen change.¹

1

Male		Female	
Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
46	46%	54	54%

[Note: Figure1and Table1: shows that out of the hundred individuals studied 46% were males while 54% were females.]

Figure 1: Table 1 :

2

Hinduism				Islam		Sikh		Christian
Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
77				77%	10	10%	6	6%
								7%

Fig.2 and

[Note: Volume XIV Issue II Version I 23 (D)]

Figure 2: Table 2 :

¹.3. 4.5.6.

3

17-19 Years		20-22 Years		23-25 Years		26-28
Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
31	31%	47	47%	17	17%	5
Fig.3 and Table 4 : Frequency and percentage of religious beliefs in studied participants						
Yes		No				
Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage			
91	91%	9	9%			

Figure 3: Table 3 :

5 CONCLUSION

	11	65		25	2	3	M.Ph	2	
				24	2	3	M.B.A	1	
	12	66		21	2	3	M.Sc	2	
				21	1	3	M.Sc	2	
	13	67		21	1	3	M.Tech	2	
				22	2	3	M.Sc	1	
	14	68		22	2	3	M.Sc	2	
				18	1	2	B.Tech	1	
	15	69		20	2	3	M.Sc	2	
				20	2	2	B.Tech	2	
	16	70		17	1	2	B.Tech	2	
				21	1	3	M.Sc	1	
	17	71		17	1	2	BBA	1	
				22	2	3	M.B.A	2	
Year 2014	18	72	??????????????????????????????????????..	20	2	3	M.Com	2	Aligarh 1 24 1 3 M.T

Any instance in your life, which made you a strong believer? 29 24 1 3 M.Tech 1 8

30	86	31	87	32	88	33	89	90	Female-2	22	1	3	M.Sc	B.Sc (Annexure 2)	Coding
Sex: Male-1	34	91								20	2	2			
										21	1	2			
										18	1	2			
										21	2	3			
										21	2	3			
										20	1	2			
										18	2	2			
										20	1	2			
										21	1	3			
										21	1	3			
Education: 35	92	Highschool-1	Intermediate-2	Graduate-3	36	93	37	94	38	95	96	Post graduate-4	Ph.D-5	Reli	