

Review Article

Resilience of the Hindu Civilization in the Indian Sub-Continent-A Perspective

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A B S T R A C T

Hindu civilization predates to the third or early second millennium Before the Common Era (BCE) when the Indus Valley Civilization prevailed and the Vedic civilization began. Hinduism, evolved over centuries from the blend of divine revelations of many pious sages (Rishis). The Indian sub-continent, primarily a Hindu dominated cultural society, was invaded and ruled for centuries by a sect of vigorously intense monotheistic cultural society of Islam. The British, Christian by religion, too ruled over the subcontinent and the Hindu masses for two hundred years. The paper aims to evaluate the strengths of the two imposed cultures viz., Islam and Christianity vis-à-vis the native Hindu civilization. Hindu religion has stood the test of time. Strong tenets of tolerance and capacity to accept all pursuits, possibilities and characteristics of the truth, be it with Jesus, Allah or any other supreme deities, has enabled it to withstand wave after wave of slaughter, deprivation, insult and pain. The reconciliatory and accommodative nature of the Hindu religion has enabled numerous other religions and even splinter groups to coexist with mutual respect and co-operation. The resilient spirit of Hinduism, draws its strength from the fact that, it does not rely on any one scripture, deity or place of worship. Destroying any one or many would still not douse the faith.

Keywords: Civilization, Culture, Religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity, Resilience

Introduction

Civilization refers to a complex human society that shares certain common socio-political-economic features, such as, their means of survival, types of occupation, settlement patterns, social hierarchy and the form of government they follow. Besides, each civilization has prompted the development of its own unique art and culture, language, architecture, ritual and customs and most importantly, its religion. All these features together give each civilization its unique identity. In fact, the world's greatest civilizations have been recognised by the religion they follow, for example, Hindu, Judas, Christians, and Islamic civilizations.

Historically, all early civilizations developed along the banks

of great rivers, such as Egypt along the Nile, Mesopotamia along the Tigris and Euphrates, the Chinese along the Yangtze Kiang. The Hindu civilization too took roots and spread along the great rivers Indus, Ganges, Narmada and Cauvery. The rich alluvial soil of the plains, attracted people from other regions, to settle here and benefit from the rich river-soil-climate landmasses. These people brought with them, their own set of customs, language, cultural and religious persona. Cohabitation resulted in intermingling of these diverse cultures, which finally gave rise to a unique society that is distinctly Indian, and at the same time incredibly diverse and inclusive.

However, not all foreign settlers came in peace, and in

due course, India was invaded by the Mughals followed by a takeover by the British. The Mughal dynasty ruled over India from early 16th to mid-19th century, and during their reign, endeavoured to enforce their Islamic culture, religion and traditions on the Hindu masses. Though, the Hindu values remained irrepressible yet it was able to weave new threads of thoughts, traditions, and customs into its rich tapestry, without destroying its essential fabric. Despite all vigorous onslaughts by the Mughals, the Hindu society endured the adversities and remained resilient all through out. As the sun set on the Mughal rule, India was bestowed with two distinct cultures, the Hindu majority and the Islamic minority.

The British ruled over India for 200 years. They too came with a distinct religion and culture, but differed in their approach. Unlike the Mughals, the Brits came not to establish an empire but to colonise for reaping the benefits of the enormous wealth, which they transferred to their own country back in England. The British administered authoritatively with no religious overtures. Conversions to Christianity, their religion, did take place but covertly. The disgruntled and deprived weaker sections of the Hindu society were cajoled and lured into their religious fold. However, living together did have a diluting effect on the Hindu culture, as some people willingly gave up stringent Hindu practices and adopted the comforting western ways. Despite the opulent and sumptuous lifestyle of the adopted culture, the Indian remained Hindu by heart and soul.

Hypothesis

The aim of this paper is to analyse and determine the resilient supremacy of the Hindu civilisation and its ability to endure and survive in the face of an overbearing six centuries rule of the Mughals and two centuries of the colonial era. Despite the vicious persecution, the Hindus¹ successfully held on to their ethos and beliefs, there by averting a definite extermination.

Civilization and Religion

Civilizations are the congregation of societies or cultural groups that share common characteristics and follow a similar patterns of livelihood. The strengths of a society are built upon a well-rehearsed, social hierarchical stratification and a sound economic system. Besides, they are also identified by other cultural traits, such as

literature, professional art, architecture, organized religion, and complex customs generally imposed on the societies by their elite.² Academicians³ often consider civilization as synonym to "culture". Virtually every definition of civilization contains culture as an inseparable ingredient.⁴

Religion, on the other hand is amongst the most important objective elements that defines civilization. Major civilizations in human history have been closely identified with the world's great religions. Religion plays a major role in defining the social behaviour amongst inhabitants. While some religions believe in peaceful coexistence, there are others that believe in their supremacy over others, motivating their followers to take to force, to impose it on what they term as the 'non-believers'. Religion has, therefore, over the period, been a source of conflict between different societies, sometimes even leading to wars within the civilization/ cultural groups, as it happened in the case of Lebanon, the former Yugoslavia, and the Indian subcontinent.⁵

A study of different nations, cultures and civilisations brings to light a very interesting fact, that religion is one of the most important element that defines each of them. Where people had earlier seen culture as that belonging to a particular area and race of people, it is increasingly being seen and acknowledged as belonging to a religion. An interesting example of this is the case of Bangladesh, which traditionally had a rich culture of dance and music. However, Islam, or its interpretation looks down at these kinds of expressions of human creativity as un-Islamic, a fact which brought the curtains down for the country's rich cultural traditions.⁶ Islamic preachers use the fatwa route to ban anything which they consider as going against their religion. Another example back home is that of a recent fatwa issued by Dar-ul-Uloom declaring the practice of touching the feet of elders, a very Indian way of respectful greeting, as un-Islamic. Examples such as these, highlight the close relationship between culture and religion, and how religion plays a dominant role in defining the cultural practices of a society or civilization.⁷ A study of civilisations therefore is predominantly a study of religion. At a time when the world is seeing a growing chasm between 'us and them', and growing nationalism all across the globe, a look into the reasons for such awakening would put things in perspective.

¹Hinduism as a term did not exist before the coming of the British. It was they who coined the term to refer to those following Hindu religion, custom and traditions. The term gained wide acceptance and is still in use today.

²Civilization, Wikipedia.

³Samuel P Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (SIMON & SCHUSTER 1996), pp.41-42

⁴Ibid, p.42

⁵Huntington, Loc.cit.

⁶The Hindu, 'Music on buses "vulgar": Taliban', 22 January 2009

⁷<http://www.india-forums.com/news/article.asp?id=142971>

Religion by itself is a complex phenomenon, which can be best understood through analytical explanations. While numerous theories have been propounded, yet its role, function and definition cannot be captured in totality. Religion is nothing but a system of thoughts or a devotion to a cause, which gives significance and value to our fragile and fugitive existence. Religion, in fact is the intrinsic element of our human nature.

Religious congregations conglomerate into cultural societies, which over the centuries take the shape of civilizations. Religion, can then be perceived as a thread that binds a sect of people together for centuries together, deepening the solidarity between them. Religion plays a major role in shaping a society either through internal or external interventions. Adherence to these time-tested religious practices as solutions would make the society progressive. Non-adherence, would result in weakening of the societies and a major cause for its decline. Religions too, that have failed to acknowledge the forces at work and to deal with them ingeniously, have faded into oblivion.

Religion treads over uncharted territory with undefined prescriptions and practices. In this modern age of science and technology, it is gruelling to accept these incredible dogmas or exclusive revelations associated with religion. A resilient religion, however, relies largely upon the hypothesis of objective consideration of the cosmos. Its theology, is based on the study of empirical perceivable facts, and not on imposing revelations of traditional sources. It is precisely why the belief that science and religion are opposite sides of the same coin does not hold true. Irrepressible religions forever have analytical foundations akin to scientific perceptions.

Religion is also characterised by human inclinations. Those that are insensitive to human ills and social causes are discarded by people at large. Religions that are divisive, discordant and do not foster unity, cohesiveness and understanding, too are spurned by the common man. Such religions land them into the hands of unscrupulous opponents of religion, who exploit it against humanity for selfish gains. Such religions fail the test of human values⁸ and are short lived. Religions that become a cult form are short-lived.

Religion has always come to the rescue of mankind. In the present yug (era), every human being is confronted with a conflict between divine and the mundane. Our thoughts are channelized in two streams viz., that of virtue and vices. When at crossroads, religion plays a crucial role in

resolving this conflict and providing a sense of direction.

The Hindu Canvas

Hindu religious concepts guide us to look at life not merely as a physical phenomenon or a biological process, but as an opportunity for self-realisation. It is largely believed that, within each incarnate soul dwells the god-consciousness, which needs to be sought and awakened. In other words, we should persistently strive to wrest the immortal from the mortal by developing a communication with the supreme.

There is a unique distinction between intellectual recognition and spiritual realization, which can be best understood by an analogy. Matter is considered the source of all creation; however, science has gone further and broken down matter into smaller particles one of which is the atom. Atom has been further broken down into yet smaller particles. It is the remarkable ability of the mind, to dissect matter into smaller particles, of which atom is one of them. It may be prudent to believe that the mind of the man that caused this remarkable fete is in many ways superior to the atom. This proves the point that, the spirit of man tides over all scientific achievements. All religions and Indian religions in particular, drives devout human beings towards spiritual realization.

Religion enables people to realise the divine in themselves by breaking the shackles that bind them to the mortal surroundings. Seers of yore, through gruelling penance, were able to break the barriers and bask in the divine union. The intuitive experiences of these seers are compiled as Vedas, which establish the essential foundation of the entire spiritual traditions of the Hindus. The Vedas contain integral experiences and not theories or theologies. The hymns contain reflections of a consciousness that is in communion with the metaphysical reality. The Vedas are revered as the sacred religious teachings of the Hindus and embody the principles of life and the universe. Vedas are primarily ritualistic and the mantras contained therein are recited during Vedic ceremonies.

The governing principle of the Hindu religion is the oneness of the ultimate spirit. The Rig Veda describes one Supreme Reality as Ekam Sat. Upanishads describe the Supreme Reality in four-fold, viz., Atma Catuspat (Brahman), Isvara, Hiranyagarbha and Viraj. Upanishads further explain that one Brahman is known by many names, according to the sphere of influence where they flourished.

The one supreme is conceptualised in the form of three gunas. Srishti (creation), Sthiti (maintenance) and Laya (destruction) are traced to three gunas of *Sattva*, *Rajas*,

⁸Human Values encompass Morals and Ethics (welfare principles), Integrity (unity of thoughts, words and deeds), Civic virtues, Living peacefully, Respect for others etc.

and Tamas.⁹ Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, has the dominating Spirit of Sattva. Brahma, the creator of the universe, has the dominating spirit of Rajas and Siva, the destroyer of the universe, has the dominating spirit of Tamas. The three qualities of the One Supreme are developed into three distinct personalities, which function through their own respective Shakti of energies. The One Supreme (God), who is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent, appear to different minds in different forms.

The Hindu system of philosophy and religion, recognises the law of Karma as that of moral causation. It is largely believed, that there is no single supremo God, who administers justice on a case to case basis. God resides in every human being and each moment that person is on trial, through his karmas. Every honest act of his, would reap dividends in his eternal endeavours. Deeds, good or bad, are the stepping stones to achieve the ultimate of oneness with God. A single lifespan is too short to achieve this fete, which thus propounds the concept of rebirth. Hindu religion thus considers rebirth as a reality and not an enigma. These forces of creation, amalgamate to mend and renew, the disarranged lives. Errors and omissions in one's life, sustain the universe and civilizations therein, which continue to perish and resurrect through unimaginable eternities.

The philosophy of Karma-Yoga is aptly explained in the Gita, which states *"You have a right only to do your work, but the outcome is not under your control. do not make the fruits of action your motive for work. Nor should you be attached to inaction."*¹⁰ Karma-Yoga essentially snaps the link between desire and action by diluting the inducement of attachment. The Law of Karma, unlike fate or destiny - a product of someone else's doings, is determined by one's own actions in the present, which shapes the future fortunes. The burden of Karma does not end with one birth, but is carried forward to another as the soul transmigrates through several rebirths or reincarnations. Belief in the Laws of Karma and their implications, gives one great ethical strength and persuasive power, to lead a devout life of virtues, with an aim to uplift oneself by own self.

The Hindu religion, unlike other religions has evolved over centuries and not stuck in the same old mould. It has reformed itself by adapting to the changing circumstances from time to time. The historic development of Hinduism can be marked by five broad phases. First being the Vedic phase, which marked the composition of prayers and

rituals with poetic fervour addressed to various divinities. The second phase being the philosophical speculations of the Ultimate reality. During this phase composition of the Upanishads, emergence of six Darshanas, ethnic system of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism took place. With the economic and political advancement of the society, need for reforms became paramount. The third phase addressed these issues through Shastras – for the stability and survival of the society, Epics and Puranas – for prophesizing religious and moral values to the masses. The fourth phase, associated with the famous Bhakti Movement simplified and democratised religion by drawing attention to the social inequality being spread through Shastras and Scriptures. The modern and contemporary fifth phase, energised the existing phenomenon by rediscovering the intrinsic and philosophical tenets and integrating with the modern values of human rights, equality and social justice.

Hinduism, generally referred as the Hindu religion, has no definite period of origin. It evolved from a blend of divine revelations received by many pious sages, compiled as Vedas in the form of hymns and religious texts between 1500 and 1000 BCE. These are revered as the fountain head of deepest Hindu beliefs. Vedic literature is religious in nature with a strong priestly bias. There are total of four Vedas, the Rig-veda- which contains Hymns of praise for recitation, the Sama-veda - which embodies melodies for chanting, the Yajur-veda- enunciates sacrificial formulas for worship and Atharava-veda—encompasses of magical recipes. During the Vedic period sacrifices and rituals dominated all ceremonies. It was largely believed that god would bestow protection and prosperity in return to the Vedic practices. Very often than more, people began to lose faith as Vedic practices failed to provide the desired results. To escape persecution, the clever priests composed set of texts, which laid down the nitty-gritties of the Vedic practices, known as *Brahmanas*.

The failing intuitive ceremonies and rituals, diminished the authority of the Vedas, thereby giving way to a new religious blend that would dominate the Hindu society for centuries to come. There was a subtle shift from mythological ascendancy to a spiritual approach. The pursuit of spiritual progress gave rise to the philosophy of meditation, celibacy, and fasting, among others. *Upanishads* scripted an antidote to the derailed rulebooks of ceremonies and sacrifices. The Upanishads broke the shackles of ritualism and emerged

⁹The concept of Triguna comes from Atharvaveda, belonging to the Samhya or Sankhya system. Samkhya is a dualistic philosophy which postulates two independent yet simultaneously existing realities such as Purusha (consciousness) and Prakriti (nature or matter). Everything in the universe is physical and psychological, including the mind which has its origin from Prakriti. Prakriti is constituted of Triguna viz., Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Samakhya is one of the schools of practical philosophy called Anvikshiki. Similarly there are other schools such as Yoga and Lokayata (Charvak).

¹⁰Bhagwat Gita II.47

as contemporary to the dogmatic practices and became a source of subsequent development of Hinduism. Since Upanishads appeared at the culmination of the Vedas, and they are also appended at the end of respective Vedas, they are colloquially referred as Vedanta (end of the Vedas). Hindu philosophical thought, which is an offshoot of the Upanishads are also popularly referred as Vedanta.

Despite the fact that Hinduism has been an evolving phenomenon, living up to the challenges by recalibrating its responses to the demand of the masses, it underwent great changes during the 550 – 450 BCE. This period saw the rise of breakaway sects who rejected the traditional religion by challenging the authority of the Vedas and the Brahmanas. Prominent amongst these unorthodox teachers were Siddhartha Gautama, called the Buddha, and Vardhamana, called Mahavira, the founder of Jainism. Buddhism and Jainism have thrived on the premise that the Upanishads are characterised by the belief that life sufferings and liberation can only be achieved through detachment from the material world.

Jainism, traditionally known as Jain Dharma, for the first time, shifted focus from the study of outward nature to that of inward life. Like all other religions, it proclaims that Moksha could be attained by reducing the karmic burden, a concept akin to the core Hindu beliefs. The path prescribed by Jainism is self-conquest through a steady process of austerity, discipline, self-purification and understanding. Intrinsic beliefs of Jainism is a complete purification of the soul through faith and knowledge, abstain from killing, lying and taking what is not given, preserving chastity and renouncing worldly pleasures. Jain followers, therefore, live a life of, self-denial, self-mortification and austerity, in order to reduce the burden of karma and achieve nirvana after death.

Jainism and Hinduism share the theories of karma, reincarnation, and salvation, though each treats these concepts differently. Perceptive differences of karma and salvation has led to different approaches.

The Hindus believe that as a living being, one cannot dispense with the karmic deeds, however, the karmic burden can be minimised, if not neutralised, by maintaining a fine balance between good and bad deeds. Jainism, on the other hand, believes in negating the Karmic burden, good or bad, by self-abstinence, austerity and discipline.

Hinduism belief rests on the premises that the path to salvation is only through the Gods, who would sit in judgement over ones activities, before liberating them from the cycle of birth and deaths. Jainism, on the other hand, focuses on the concept of automatic liberation from the Karmic burden by negating ones deeds. For them there is no God who works as an arbitrator.

Jainism could not outlive Hinduism and remained confined to a small portion of North India. This was mainly due to the rigid adherence to the principles of Ahimsa and equally strict observance of austerities. Jain monks – the ambassadors of the faith found it difficult to travel to distant places and abroad, thereby restricting the spread of the religion.

Buddhism is an offshoot of the more ancient faith of the Hindus. It was perhaps a schism or heresy of Hinduism. Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) is universally recognised as the sole founder of the transcendental enlightenment while in penance under the Bodhi tree. Buddhism underlines a world beyond sufferings and the un-dying. The central teachings, like Hinduism, are focussed on the concept of rebirth and the law of Karma. Buddhism perceives a human mind in conflict with a large assortment of vices and virtues that he possesses. The teachings aim at harmonising the discords through chants and meditation. This spiritual experience douses the self-cravings, fear and passion, instilling inmost peace accompanied by complete spiritual freedom.

Objectives of Buddhism was to reform the religious practices and free it from ignorance and superstition. He attempted to restrict the Hindu rituals and practices within the framework of awakened consciousness. Compassion was the high moral passion in all his teachings. Buddhists believe that they would be judged not by the creeds, labels or slogans but by our deeds. Buddha is considered as the ninth avatar of Vishnu, who took birth for the emancipation of misplaced Hindu expressions. By virtue of his distinct habits and convictions he left a mark on the soul of this country and became an integral part of our culture. Buddha, in fact is the maker of modern Hinduism.

Hinduism and Buddhism are like two sides of the same coin, having similar insights, but with different approaches. The tacit resemblance stems from the Buddhist concept of Nirvana, which is so close to the Upanishadic perception of Brahman, despite the fact that Buddha did not believe in 'God'. The resilient nature of Buddhism, enabled it to spread the teachings to other nations in Asia. Buddhist monks were the true ambassadors, who enthusiastically undertook harsh journeys to share their knowledge and divulge the new founded wisdom.

Sikhism, (the Sikh religion), is amongst the fifth largest and the youngest of the religions, barely 500 years old. It is an offshoot of the Bhakti movement, being influenced by the Nirguna aspect which has its focus on Knowledge. It perceives divinity, the ultimate reality, to be formless and devoid of attributes or quality. Its teachings are an amalgamation of the Hindu tradition and mystical Muslim beliefs. The philosophy and beliefs of Sikhs is in many ways very similar to the Hindus on matters of Karma, Dharma, Mukti, Maya and Samsara but differs on

the practice of rituals and worship. The religion is based on a very strong believe in 'Faith in the all mighty'.

The Sikh community are ethnically Punjabis, with a strong Hindu ancestry. Virtually, an organic relationship exists between the two in religious thought, as a result of which, the elder son of Punjabi Hindus were raised as Sikhs. Sikhs were historically also seen as the protectors of Hindus, and often referred to as the "sword arm" of Hinduism. The religious beliefs and cultural values of both Sikhs and Hindus are governed by ethical decisions, which are primarily duty based. Traditional teachings deal with duties of individuals with an aim to maintain a healthy physical, mental and spiritual lifestyle.

The Sikhism is an offshoot of the Hindu religion, born out of necessity for the protection of the oppressed Hindus. The sect of Hindus who took to arms, to fight the Muslim oppressors, were given a unique identity by their leaders. In a short ceremony, the last of the gurus Guru Govind Singh initiated five of His followers, of which one was a Brahmin, one a Kshatriya and the rest from the lower castes. Transgressing all social boundaries He called them Khalsas. Having adopted new script, scriptures, centres of worship, symbols and distinctive ceremonies, Sikhism became a new sect, if not a new religion. What started as a movement of Hindu dissenters, has now become a new creed.

The Islamic Mosaic

Islam as a religion, was founded in the Arab hinterland of the Middle East. It blossomed and matured in that area and spread to other parts of the world. It was a local phenomenon that spread its tentacles and soon became a dynamic force that changed the course of human history. The impact of Islam was so profound and wide spread that the Indian subcontinent too came under its influence. Hinduism traditions, has by and large, been confined to their own society and has had no direct/ indirect overbearing on other religions. However, it has been just the opposite in the case of Islam which has had a domineering impact on other faiths. Islam has always been monopolising theirs to be the absolute truth, thereby persecuting their co-religionists for interpreting a tradition differently or for holding heterodox beliefs. Historical evolution of Islam, therefore cannot be ignored, while studying its cultural impact in the Indian subcontinent.

Before the advent of Islam, the Arab society was ridden with ignorance, iniquity, idolatry and every conceivable vice which had reduced it to a very low level culture. Widespread licentious orgies, drunkenness, blood feuds and female infanticide had brought misery all around. Amongst the economic decline, political anarchy, social tension and

spiritual vacuum, a great leader *Muhammed ibh Abdallah* was born on 571 AD, who gave the land a new faith, a new strength and a new unity that revolutionised the entire life of the Arabs.

Muhammed despite having no formal education, was a very intelligent, inquisitive and imaginative person. Right from childhood he would reflect on the miseries of the masses. His disturbed mind would often compel him to withdraw to the isolation of a neighbouring cave Hira to ponder over the higher realms of truth. It is during one of these sittings that he had his enlightenment at the age of forty. It is believed that he heard the mysterious voice of the angel *Djibril*, which told him that he was the Prophet of Allah, and he should read and recite in the name of the Creator.¹¹

The preachings of the self-appointed Prophet, was in the form of recitals, which were articulated and compiled as the Holy book of *Quran*. The new sect, which grew out of these preachings, was called *Islam* (i.e. submission of oneself to God). Men or women who submitted their entire being to Allah and His demands that, '*human beings treat one another with justice, equity and compassion*', came to be known as *Muslims*.

Islam, as expounded in the *Quran*, has five important constituents, also referred as the tenants of Islam. These being *Shahada*, *Namaz*, *Zakat*, *Roza* and *Haj*. The other theological concepts of Islam are derived from secondary sources of Islamic jurisprudence which are the *Hadith*, the *Sunna* and the *Sharia*. *Ummah* is yet another striking feature drawn from the *Sharia*, which empowers the Muslims with a unique system of bonding, with their co-religionists, in the farthest corners of world and across oceans.

With the death of the Prophet *Muhammed* in 632, and in the absence of a nominated/ declared successor, the Islamic sect began to crumble. Two prominent factions that survived the turbulence were, the Shias and the Sunnis. The Shia, believed that only an individual having direct lineage to the Prophet could guide the Muslim community righteously. The choice fell on Ali, the closest male blood relative of prophet *Muhammed*. Sunnis, on the other hand, believed in the elective process in determining the Prophet's successor. Abu Bakr, the most trusted companion of the prophet, was elected to lead the Muslim community.

The ideological difference between the two factions, rising out of diverse political and religious views. The rift between them rages till date. Sunnis are in the majority and occupy most of the Muslim world, while Shias are concentrated in Iran and Iraq, with sizeable numbers in Bahrain, Lebanon, Kuwait, Turkey, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

¹¹B Sheik Ali, 'Islam A Cultural Orientation', Macmillan India Limited, 1981, p 3

Islam and the Hindu Thought

Islam is a simple religion devoid of any enigmas. The religion abstains from any form of theological delicacies, supernatural paradoxes or metaphysical pretensions. The religion has one central principle that, 'there is but one Allah (God) who is all supreme and controls all happenings.' Islam does not indulge in caste discrimination, priesthood, and there are no rituals/ ceremonies involving sacrifice for appeasement. Pilgrimage to Mecca and homage to the shrine of Kaaba are the only sacraments dictates. Attention to Mecca unites the entire Muslim clan in allegiance to Mohammad, the sole prophet of Allah.

The commonality between the earlier life of Prophet Mohammad and our ancient seers is their deeply religious nature. Before wisdom dawned upon the prophet he was obsessed with the mysteries of creation. In order to seek the truth of life he would betake himself for prayers and meditation in a cave on mount Hira. It is here that the revelations God were bestowed upon him. With true insight Mohammed laid more stress on conduct than on doctrines. Qur'an describes a Moslem as the one 'who trusts in the lord (Allah) and work righteously.'

Developments in any religion is subjected to the cultural traditions and national character of the environment in which it germinates and matures. Islam is a case in point as its origin was in Arabia but it was able to spread into diverse cultural heritages and character. Islam, a lofty theism, subdued the Persian people having Semitic tendencies to mystic ones. The incomparable primitive Arab traditions gave way to rich philosophy and intriguing mythology.

A large population of India follow Islam since it has an ethnology similar to the Hindus. The Indian heritage dates back to the mists of antiquity, having customs, legacies and traditions that appeal to all, strike hidden chords, stir the memory and open the forgetful eyes. It is this spirit of India that makes us Indians, irrespective of religion, caste or creed. Islam in this Indian spacious spiritual milieu, is different from that followed in other nations, having dissimilar inheritance. The traditional Indian Muslims, heirs to the great spiritual inheritance and having the same blood running in their veins, ought to interpret the faith of Islam in its truest, highest and noblest sense, so as to distinguish it from the creed professed by ignorant bigots, political conspirators and religious fanatics. The true essence of Islam can only be realised by synthesising the old inherited traditions and the newly acquired faith. By doing so, the yoke of a crystallised religion would be replaced by an Islam that reflects the true spirit and message of the Prophet. It is for this reason that Islam in India is in variance with the one followed in the Arab world.

The concept of God, as perceived in Islam, does not vary to the Hindu view. Although all religions agree about the with objective reality of God, yet His craterisation gives a distinct identity to each one of them. All religions profess and strongly believe in the 'one and only one God who is infinite and absolute, has no beginning or end and cannot be restricted or bound by any limits. This absolute character of God and His incomprehensibility has been brought out in various verses of the Qur an. The religious fervour of Islam is a testimony of its strict ethical practices of prayers, fasting, alms giving, pilgrimage, practice of self-denial, universal charity, hospitality as a religious duty, chastity as a virtue etc. We could conclude that both Islam and Hinduism teach that, true religion is to serve God and obey His laws reverently in all affairs of life.

Shadows of Islam over Hinduism

Islam arrived into the Indian subcontinent in three different waves, namely, for trade to foster business, invasion to loot and plunder the wealth and lastly for colonising and settlement. Each had its own shades and ramifications, which left lasting impression on the psyche of the inhabitants. The first foot fall was through the ports of South East Asia in the Malabar region. The port of Daibul became a very busy and prosperous commercial centre. The local people, who had been living a life of misery, whole heartedly welcomed the generosity and treatment amongst equals with full religious freedom of the new dispensation. Poor people, especially Buddhists, impressed by the affable policies embraced Islam voluntarily. Mosques and Madrasas sprang up in important towns and sooner Sindh became a centre of Islamic learning. The first of the Muslim rule thereby paved way for future propagation of Islam in the adjoining regions.¹²

The peaceful spread of Islam was suddenly checkmated when Muslim armies began to invade India, across the mountain passes. Centuries after centuries (8th to 12th), they plundered, annihilated, massacred, enslaved the local populace of Hindus and Buddhists and absconded with the spoils. Will Durant, the world famous historian, has written in his *Story of Civilisation*, that, "the Mohammedan conquest of India was probably the bloodiest story in the history of mankind".

Conquest after conquest, over the centuries, continued with Muhammad Gauri (1173–1206), Qutb-ud-din Aibak (1206–1210), Alauddin Khalji (1296–1316), Tughlaq Dynasty (1321–1394), Timur's massacre of Delhi (1398), Sikandar the Iconoclast (1399–1416), Sayyid dynasty (1414–1451), Lodi dynasty (1451–1526). Each invasion/ conquest witnessed the marauding and systematic persecution of Hindus, burning of their villages, desecration and destruction of Hindu and Buddhist temples and shrines, ashrams and

¹²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_India

hermitages including other holy places. The male population was butchered mercilessly, women folks and children taken as prisoners to be sold as slaves in the markets all over the Islamic world. The idols of worship were broken and trampled over to disparage the faith. Such was the greed that wealth, precious jewels and artefacts were looted and carted away on elephants, camels, horses, bullock carts, on the backs of sheep and goats and even on the heads of Hindu prisoners. Every war waged against the Hindus was treated as *jihad* warranted by the Prophet and his devout Caliphs.

Atrocities by fanatic brethren Shiites, compelled the Mughals to Migrated into the safe havens of the Indian subcontinent, which spread rapidly to other parts. Since the Mughals had come to stay and rule, the barbaric butchery of the local population, loot, plunder and displacement of the wealth, slave trade etc. was considerably reduced. However, the denigration and extermination of the Hindus, forceful conversion by the sword, and destruction of Hindu temples and construction of Mosques on its sites continued unabated.

The first five successors of Babur were remarkable rulers who promoted art and culture. Sufism played an important role in softening the temperament, intolerance and destructive nature the ruling minority. Religious tolerance and broadmindedness troubled the orthodox followers, who feared that secularistic tolerance towards other religions if not checked, Islam would one day become another Hindu sub religion. With the passage of time the orthodox finally found their support in Aurangzeb, who was different from the earlier rulers. Aurangzeb, being a puritan, reversed the process of secularism started by Akbar. Under the influence of *Ulama*, he put an Islamic stamp on the administration. Aurangzeb ruled for more than fifty years, but his policies sowed the seeds of the destruction of the Mughal Empire. His constricted policies of *sulahkul* collapsed the empire within decades of his demise, which his great-grandfather had consolidated. The disintegration of Islam which began in the eighteenth century, gathered momentum in the nineteenth century. Many attempts were made to reform and renew Islam, but without much success. The last of the Mughal emperors, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was captured in 1857 AD, and deported to Burma, where he died.

If one was to look back at the historical events, one would realise that there existed a benign and intellectual Hindu civilisation. Circumstances brought in another aggressive and belligerent civilisation (Muslim) into the subcontinent that not only ruled but trampled and marauder the existing one with an aim to impose their own religion through coercion. The Muslim civilisation, despite its long reign

over six centuries, was unable to exterminate the Hindu civilisation. In the end the Indian sub-continent became home to two civilisations the Hindus (in majority) and the Muslims (In minority).

Islam is a vigorously intense religion, totally monotheistic in character and wholly uncompromising. Islam though, sublime in its original form has churned into the motivation, ideology and organisation of hatred, intolerance and violence. India today faces a greater challenge to its unity, than it ever did, in its long history. The threat is not so much from across the borders, as from within, arising out of the dissensions between its two major communities, Hindus and the Muslims. For centuries these have lived side by side, not in perfect harmony but neither in perpetual discord. The factors uniting them have been far more enduring than those that have set them apart. Power politics in recent years has not only undermined these bonds but also deliberately disrupted them. The gulf between the two has therefore widened arising out of disruption of the age-old equilibrium, at some pretext or the other.

The spread of fundamental Islam in India and its growing spread among all classes of people has disturbing trends that do not augur well for the future of the nation. The violence associated with radical groups is but one of the challenges. While the threat of violence is real and has been witnessed in numerous forms, the greater threat is the challenge to the very idea of India as a secular nation.

Christianity

Christianity like Islam was not a religion of the land, it was brought in by the traders and rulers who set base in the country and then began to convert the local population through enticement. The low caste Hindus, who seemed disgruntled by deprivation became the primary targets. The inducement was so intense that some were willing to relinquish their spiritual inheritance to the new adaptation. Christianity which embarked unpretentiously along the coastal regions, grew rapidly as the traders became occupants and administrators. The religion however could not crush the gigantic Hindu spirit and sentiments. With less than 2% of the total population as Christians, it assumed the status of a minority.

The Hindu and Christian philosophies have very little in common. The fundamental difference lies in the theology and philosophies. Hinduism is not based on any one personality or one book, rather on the philosophy that there is one supreme God and numerous paths lead to Him. The scriptures are the guiding principles that contain the experiences and revelations of various sages recorded over the centuries. Christianity, on the other hand, revolves heavily around the life of Jesus Christ as detailed in the Bible.

Hindus strongly believe in the doctrine of karma, which states that one is responsible for their own karma and that they cannot be redeemed by another. Every Hindu is solely responsible for working off his Karmic debts. Christians, on the other hand believe that Jesus Christ redeemed deeds of the others, with his own life. It is also prophesised that He would continue to do so for his disciples. Hindus have a strong belief in reincarnation, as salvation is not definitive. The soul (ataman) takes a rebirth and once again redeems the karmic debts. Whereas in Christianity it is believed that one will dwell and reign with Him for eternity.

The younger Indian Christians, who are moulded in the spiritual Indian past are deeply instilled in the divine doctrine. The thoughtful amongst them believe that God resides in all humans and the whole world. The Christians in India are choosing wisely by combining the best elements of Hinduism with the best of Christianity. Doctrines aside, if this process grows, spiritual life in the world at large and India in particular would increase.

The advent of Christianity has had no major impact on the foundation of the Hindu faith or religion.

Conclusion

Hindu religion (perceived as much as a way of life) has stood the test of time despite having to face wave after wave of slaughter, deprivation, insult and pain. The strong tenets of tolerance and capacity to accept all pursuits, possibilities and characteristics of the Truth, be it with Jesus, Allah or any of the other supreme deities has enabled Hinduism to withstand this consistent onslaught. The resilient spirit of Hinduism draws its strength from the fact that it does not rely on any one scripture, deity or place of worship. Destroying any one or many would still not douse the faith.

The reconciliation and accommodative nature of the Hindu religion has enabled various other religions and even splinter groups to coexist with mutual respect and co-operation. Confrontational elements do exist in Hinduism but are extremely insignificant. A sense of bonhomie pervades the entire subcontinent till recent times when vested interests have upset this balance thereby disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the region. The Hindu religious activism is primarily a reaction to the overbearing overtures of the others.

The belief that inherent softness of the Hindu religion were a cause for the Muslim rule, is ill-founded. Drawbacks of Hindu religion, led to the formation of reformist splinter groups like, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. The resilience of the Hindu religion is a testimony to the fact it could withstand the onslaught of a belligerent Islam. Pugnacious Islam, was unable to obliterate the Hindu religion and culture in India as it had been able to vanquish other native religions and cultures in countries like Iran and Central Asia.

Religion has been able to polarise mankind between two extremities – an atmosphere of cooperation with a spirit of freedom and understanding extended by moderate religions or that of fear, suspicion and jealousy fostered by aggressive ones. The future of religion and mankind would depend in the choice we make.

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