

A Critical Assessment on Essential Unity of Religions with Special Reference to Bhagwan Das and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the development of human civilization, researchers, historians, and philosophers have faced enormous difficulties in trying to understand and interpret religion. Historically, different religious traditions have thrived in different parts of the world at various times. Religions generally have their roots in Asian nations. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all have their roots in West Asia. Persia is where Zoroastrianism first emerged. Religions like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism all have Indian roots. Religions of Chinese ancestry include Taoism and Confucianism. The predominant religion in Japan is Shintoism. Vertical historical evolution has occurred within each of these religions in various places of the world. But as the contemporary world has developed as a result of political, scientific, and technical forces, many religious and cultural traditions have come into conflict with one another. The fundamental methodological concern of the veracity of these religions was automatically elevated in light of this drawn-out interface. However, there were significant methodological challenges with such an exclusivist project. These serious methodological issues eventually led philosophers and academics to view religions from a different angle. In this essay, the topic of religious unity will be discussed with particular emphasis on Bhagwan Das and Ananda Coomaraswamy. The studies will give a brief historical overview of the idea of religious unity. It will summarise the opinions of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Bhagwan Das in this regard. It will compare and contrast the ideologies and principles of numerous religions and investigate the veracity and viability of the idea that all religions are one. The approach will be critical, historical, analytical, and comparative. In an era characterized by ideological fanaticism and religious exclusivism, it is believed that such an approach will make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the nature and purpose of religions.

Keywords: Religions, Unity of Religions, Pluralism, Christianity, Islam.

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INTRODUCTION

Religion plays a significant role in defining human society and values. But in our lives and society, it has a tumultuous impact. Although its primary goal is to create, maintain, and spread love and peace throughout the world, it has the potential to become a significant catalyst for violence. Because it deals with existential concerns like salvation, death, terror, the sacred and profane, etc., it is one of the most important urges in human beings and cannot be suppressed or ignored. Furthermore, many eminent researchers, including Nobel laureates, believe that our existential problems require a theological or metaphysical solution. Rabindranath Tagore defined Dharma as the inherent truth, or innermost nature, of everything. The ultimate goal that is active within us is called dharma. We refer to any wrongdoing as a violation of dharma, which indicates that our actual nature has been misrepresented. Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan, Bhagwan Das, Vivekananda,

Tagore, and Gandhi are contemporary Indian thinkers who display a holistic viewpoint in their synthetic approach to religion. They have stressed humanity's underlying Unity while highlighting the contributions made by each major religion.

Religion is the way a person lives their life. It represents his internal perception of the light that might surround him. Religion is the process of building one's faith and worldview on the premise that man is, in fact, a true human being, regardless of color, caste, nationality, creed, or any other characteristic. It transcends racial, national, and geographic boundaries and is unaffected by governmental restrictions. It is founded on loftier ideals like justice, beauty, love, progress, and truth. It emphasizes the fundamentally spiritual nature of man. All religious beliefs have a common platform thanks to it. To work together, representatives of various religions gather.

(Iqbal, 2013) The Universal Religion movement stresses the fundamental oneness of all major global faiths. It asserts that all spiritual paths ultimately lead to the same destination. Higher values are necessary for both the development of the human personality and the advancement of society. Between the Exoteric and Esoteric elements of any religious tradition, Frithjof Schuon elaborated. Generally speaking, we are used to clearly demarcate the boundaries between the many religious traditions. In the exoteric realm, we observe how several, unique religious traditions cling to a collection of formal components that are derived from Revelation. Scriptures, dogma, rituals, and other spiritual practices are examples of these formal components. The various traditions converge on the Truth (Centre) in the esoteric realm, which can be seen as the perimeter of the formal exotericism, through several mechanisms, including esoteric doctrines, initiations and spiritual disciplines, intellection, and the plenary experience. Under this perspective, which fully acknowledges the formal differences between the religions on the plane where such divisions, even antagonisms, find their proper place, the necessity and the formal integrity of the many traditions are in no way compromised. In a way, we are speaking of "Form" and "Spirit" when we distinguish between the exoteric and esoteric. Formalism is important for exotericism, sometimes known as "religious externalism".

Bhagwan Das

A notable philosopher of the Gandhian era was Dr. Bhagwan Das. He was a fervent advocate of a "one world, one world government." Dr. Bhagwan Das supported the idea that all religions are equal and acknowledged that equality. He scientifically explained several religions. In his opinion, man's humanity is larger than any religion, and it changes in form in response to the environment. He believed that through togetherness, freedom might be attained. No one religion, in particular, is necessary, according to Bhagwan Das. Two inferences can be made from this information, namely,

1. Rejection of all religions, or
2. Acceptance of all religions.

However, Bhagwan Das deems both of these actions to be impractical. Therefore, separating the Essential Religion's constituent parts from its non-essential forms, in his opinion, is the only sensible and prudent way. By using the majority-rule technique, which involves getting not just the biggest number but also unanimous votes from the existing religions, the necessary components can be attained. These components make up universal religion. Bhagwan Das uses numerous quotations from religious writings to demonstrate that there is only one Truth, one Religion, and one God. These texts include the Quran, Sufism, Upanishads, Shiva-Mahima Shruti, and many others. One of the common sayings is: Veda and Saṁkhya, Yoga, Śaiva-view, And Vaiṣṇava, and many others, Men follow as they variously incline! (Masih, 1991)

Bhagwan Das defined the Universal Religion as one "in which there may be Universal Agreement" in his well-known book "The Essential Unity of All Religions." (Das, 1939) The creation of Universal Religion must follow "democratic" principles, i.e., the principles of "majority rule," to put it

broadly and generally. Accordingly, it should go without saying that those doctrines and rituals that gain the unanimous support of all living religions, not just the majority of them, should be regarded as belonging to the category of universal religion. The Latin words "re" and "ligare," which signify to bind back, are the source of the term "religion." It implies that religion is what brings people together in the bonds of love, sympathy, and reciprocal rights and obligations. It makes an effort to re-direct them towards the World-Soul from which their lesser nature causes them to wander. In the middle of their daily tasks, religion keeps their thoughts focused on that Supreme Principle of Unity. The ability to create and sustain high civilization is the ability to unite men's hearts with the All-Pervading "Self." A great religion has served as the inspiration for every great civilization. Every great religion instructs its followers to forgo their baser impulses to maintain and preserve a great civilization. All three of the major tenets of the world's great religions, according to Bhagwan Das, are:

We may distinguish three main parts or aspects in all the great Religions. In the Vaidika Dharma, they are expressly mentioned: the jñāna mārga, the bhakti mārga, and the karma mārga. Generally corresponding to these are, the Haqīqat, the Tariqat or Ibadat, and the Shariyat or Mamilat, of Islam. Gnosis, Pietas, and Energeia; the (a) Way of Knowledge, Illumination, Gnosticism, (b) The Way of Devotion, Pietism, Mysticism, (c) the Way of Right And Ceremonies and Works of self-denying Charity, Activism Energism, Practicalism—these seem to be similarly distinguished. In Christian theology, and to have the same significance. In the Buddhist Eightfold Path, the three most important, under which the other five may be classified, are Right Knowledge, Right Desire, and Right Action (Samyag dṛṣṭi, Samyag-saṁkalpa, and Samyag-vyāyāma); which are the same things as the three Vaidika Mārgas. The Jaina teaching is the same. (Das, 1939)

In terms of their purpose and precepts, all religions—including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—are essentially the same. Every religion teaches the Golden Mean. Every religion has both mandatory and optional doctrines. They specify what is categorical and required, as well as what is superfluous and suggested. They impart both innate and acquired values. Both absolute and relative values are taught. They set forth general guidelines and also take into account contextual or situational elements.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

Ananda Coomaraswamy, who combined faith and reason, is regarded as one of Asia's greatest exponents and interpreters. Coomaraswamy embodied the Renaissance idea of a Universal Man and was a whole man. Rarely has one person contributed so much, in so many diverse ways, to his community and humanity. (Bagchee, August 24, 1968) As said by Coomaraswamy, I have also practiced all religions, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects... Tile Lake has many shores. At one the Hindu draws water in a pitcher, and calls it jala, at another the Muslim in leather bottles, and calls it pani, at a third the Christian and what he calls 'water'. (Coomaraswamy, 1936) According to A.K. Coomaraswamy, Christianity does not lack an intellectual foundation for a ready tolerance of other forms of belief. Christianity was not based, as was the case in Asia, on

the notion that all faiths are true but rather on a growing indifference to all religious beliefs.

Even though religion may be self-sufficient if it is practiced to the very end for which it is intended, it is difficult to imagine a path so straightforward that it could not occasionally be better illuminated by other lights than the pilgrim's lantern because any lantern's light is merely a refraction of the Light of lights. A variety of routes is not only appropriate for a variety of travelers, who are not all alike and do not depart from the same location but may also be of immeasurable assistance to any traveler who can correctly read a map. This is because, where all roads converge, there can be no road that does not aid in illuminating the true location of the maze's center, without which we are still in duality. Therefore, we assert that the very connotations of the term "religious tolerance" should be avoided: the existence of different religious beliefs does not warrant "tolerance" against one's will or the will of God.

Coomaraswamy stated, "We are both serving the same God, you in your way and I in His!" (Kumārasvamin, 1946) Writing this book of his friend and mentor, the Hindu hermit Jadrup, the Mussulman emperor of India Jahangir claims that "his Vedanta is the same as our Tasawwuf"; in reality, Northern India is rife with a particular genre of religious literature in which it is frequently difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish Mussulman from Hindu elements. According to Professor Nicholson, "a cardinal Sufi doctrine" is indifference to religious forms. This means that you and I, whose religions are discernible, can both say, "My religion is the true religion," and to the other, "Your religion is the true religion." Whether either of us is truly religious, however, depends not on the details of our religion but rather on grace and who we are as individuals. We now view religion more as a set of moral guidelines than as a doctrine about God; less as a guideline for who we should be than for what we should do; and because every application of general principles to specific situations must account for contingencies, we now think that theory must diverge from practice. Christianity has suffered as a result of this confounding of necessary means with transcendent objectives, both domestically and internationally.

Because they have never considered what it might be like to practice these other faiths, there are just as many of these Hindus and Buddhists who have virtually no knowledge of Christianity or the greatest Christian writers as there are Christians who are equally educated. Similar to how one cannot have true knowledge of a language if they have never even imagined engaging in the activities to which the language refers, one cannot have true knowledge of any "life" if they have not at least partially experienced it. The greatest Indian saint of the modern era (Ramakrishna) practiced both Christ and Allah and discovered that both led to the same end. Ramakrishna could speak from personal experience about the equal validity of all these "ways" and feel the same respect for each, but he still preferred the one to which his entire being was innately attuned by nativity, temperament, and training. What a loss it would have been if he had "become a Christian" for his fellow countrymen, the world, and even Christianity! Each person will naturally take the path that begins from the point at which he finds himself; he who goes around the mountain looking for another is not climbing. Many paths lead to the summit of the same mountain; their differences will be more obvious the lower down we are, but they vanish at the peak. Never let us go

up to another believer and urge him to be "one of us," but rather treat him with respect as someone who is already "one of His," who is, and on whose unchanging beauty all contingent being rests.

Religion is the repository of heavenly truths that people cannot afford to be ignorant of or unaware of. Religious truths can be ignored to the detriment of very human civilizations. Exoteric and esoteric parts of religion exist. Religions' exoteric facets reveal their numerous and varied characteristics. The esoteric components of faiths, on the other hand, emphasize their similarity and core. They expose the underlying principle. They represent the apex, where all pathways converge. They all meet at the same summit. Unity is the governing principle in the spiritual global order. As methods of life, all religions represent different routes leading to the same destination. Coomaraswamy promotes the idea that all major world faiths can legitimately lay claim to some truths. These statements should not merely be tolerated; they should be appreciated and comprehended comparably. Doctrinal divergences at the base shouldn't keep us from seeing the summit when all distinctions disappear. Coomaraswamy asserts that some of the greatest Indian mystics have worshipped Christ and Allah and discovered that all such ways lead to the same goal, underscoring the importance of interfaith understanding. He asserted that his personal experience had persuaded him of the equality of all of these lifestyles, while he admitted that he preferred the one to which his entire being was innately attuned due to nativity, temperament, and training. Coomaraswamy asserts that religions convert fundamental truths into dogmatic language that the general population can access through faith. Universal truths with enduring importance underlie dogmatic religious beliefs. The Truth, which controls all manifestations and modes of existence, is one, and this Truth is the source of the transcendental unity of all religions. Religious thinkers must determine the transcendental origin of the process of diversity.

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