



Research Paper

Colonization of Dharma

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ABSTRACT: Even after independence from the British, Indian psyche is still ruled and governed by the theory of 'White Supremacy', causing greater harm to Indian culture and philosophy; considering it inferior to the British one. One of such colonial legacies is our perception of the word 'Dharma' as 'Religion'. This misconstruction has greatly subverted the true concept and framework of 'Dharma'. 'Dharma' means the **universal or** ultimate law that holds one and innumerable universes, and their all animate and inanimate objects together in harmony. It is the eternal law of universe, inherent in the very nature of things. Law of gravitation is Dharma as it holds not only different plenary systems of this universe but also innumerable universes outside of this universe. Religion is simply a particular system of faith and worship that is based on the belief in the existence of a particular God or gods. Religion is founded by someone; Dharma cannot be founded as every man is born with many Dharmas of body and mind. Religion has a life span; Dharma is eternal, sanatana. Our failure to comprehend this essential difference between the two concepts has led not only to an irreparable loss of our rare spiritual identity and a vast cultural heritage but has also created a socio-political chaos. Present research paper is an attempt to analyze the difference and interlinking of 'Dharma' and 'Religion'.

KEYWORDS: Dharma, Colonization, Religion, Truth

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A community called Britishers' England which was in a state of barbarism, as king Alfred in the 9th century would say, colonized the oldest and the most civilized nation called Bharat; and, in a slow but poisonous process, subjugated not only the physical territory but its mindset too by creating a colonial narrative of superiority. The minds who inherited the hoary legacy of Vedas, Puranas, Darshanas and Upanishadas pitifully surrendered to the white man's burden.

Muslim invaders and the British tried to forcibly or craftily graft upon the Indians their own religion and culture, destroying India's century-old social, cultural and political structures. As a result, even in the post-Independence era, we assess ourselves on the parameters of the western concepts, forgetting all together the evaluative framework of the Indian traditions. One of such colonial legacies is our perception of the word 'Dharma' as 'Religion'. The misconstruction has greatly subverted the true concept and framework of 'Dharma'. The word Dharma derives from the Sanskrit root *dhr*, which means to hold, maintain, or keep. That which holds or maintains or keeps is Dharma- धारयति इति धर्मः. Thus 'Dharma' means the **universal or** ultimate law that holds one and innumerable universes, and their all animate and inanimate objects together in harmony. It is the eternal law of universe, inherent in the very nature of things. Law of gravitation is Dharma as it holds not only different plenary systems of this universe but also innumerable universes outside of this universe.

Dharma is far from rights and duties incorporated by men in any constitution. This idea is authenticated by Sri Aurobindo:

"..both rights and duties are European ideas. Dharma is the Indian conception in which rights and duties lose the artificial antagonism created by a view of the world, which makes selfishness the root of action, and regain their deep and eternal unity." (*India's Rebirth* by Sri Aurobindo).

It is a natural law that holds harmony and prevents chaos in the universe. Therefore, flowing of water is Dharma; blowing of wind is Dharma; shining of the sun is Dharma; and so on. It can be interpreted that the Dharma of water is to flow, the Dharma of wind is to blow, and the Dharma of the sun is to glow. But it will be a subversion of meaning if we say that the duty of water is to flow; the duty of wind is to blow; and the duty of the sun is to glow.

Dharma and truth are identical. Following Upnishadic verse explains it precisely:

धर्मः तस्माद्धर्मात् परं नास्त्य् अथो अबलीयान् बलीयांसमाशंसते धर्मेण यथा राजैवम् ।
यो वै स धर्मः सत्यं वै तत् तस्मात्सत्यं वदन्तमाहुर् धर्मं वदतीति धर्मं वा वदन्तं सत्यं वदतीत्य् एतद्ध्येवैतदुभयं भवति ॥
([Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1:4:14](#))

-Nothing is higher than Dharma. The weak overcomes the stronger by Dharma, as over a king. Truly that Dharma is the Truth (*Satya*); therefore, when a man speaks the Truth, they say, "He speaks the Dharma"; and if he speaks Dharma, they say, "He speaks the Truth!" For both are one and the same.

Dharma and **truth** are one identity; they cannot be split into two. Water flows downward universally. It nowhere can flow upward. एकम् सत् विप्राः बहुधा वदन्ति (*RigVeda, 1:164:46*), Truth is one and sages call it by many names. This verse forms the basis of the strongest notion that Dharma (Truth) is one and the realized men can call it by many names. If so, then the closest word that describes a part of Dharma in English is 'Truth', not religion.

Dharma is an integral part of every animate or inanimate being of this universe. Our Vedas and Upanishads are the embodiments of Dharma. They are filled with innumerable verses about Dharma like आ नो भद्राः कृतवो यन्तु विश्वतः (*Rigveda, 1:89:1*) welcomes noble thoughts from all around the universe; सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः (a poem composed by Adi Shankara) preaches welfare of one and all; कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन (*Bhagvad Gita, 2:47*) advocates Karmayoga.

Dharma is also known as *Sanatan Dharma* which means an eternal Dharma, the eternal truth, the eternal ultimate law, the eternal natural law that transcends time and space, and the very nature of the objects of the universe. According to the Big Bang Theory, before the creation of the universe, all the matter and energy of space stood compressed at one point. This energy had an essential property of compulsive expansion, which inter alia was its Dharma. Scientists including Stephen Hawking believe that it is a matter of pure speculation how that primordial mass of energy came into existence. Science seems to reject the idea of eternity of the universe postulated in our Vedas. Albert Einstein stated that energy is eternally constant and cannot be created or destroyed; it can only change from one form to another. This theory supports the eternity of matter or energy; a theory similar to the 'energy point' of Big Bang theory. In the light of this theory, it can be stated that Dharma also cannot be created or destroyed; it only changes its forms as a function of its essential nature. Water's Dharma (nature) is flowing downward, but when it evaporates, its Dharma also changes and it moves upward.

On the contrary, the concept of religion entirely differs from that of Dharma. Oxford dictionary explains religion as "One of the systems of faith that are based on the belief in the existence of a particular God or gods." It is simply a particular system of faith and worship.

There is a fundamental difference between Dharma and religion. Religion is founded by someone; Dharma cannot be founded as every man is born with many Dharmas of body and mind. Religion has a life span; Dharma is eternal, *sanatan*. **Atenism**, a religion expounded by Pharaoh Akhenaten in Egypt, disappeared with his death ([listverse.com](#)). More recently The **Din-illahi** propounded by the Mughal king Akbar in 1582 AD, disappeared a few years after its birth. Dharma cannot die as it is the very nature of the universe. Religion has the scope for change of principles and beliefs or division, whereas Dharma is an unchangeable law. Christianity can be divided into Catholics and Protestants; Dharma of water can't be divided. One can be converted from one religion to another but not from one Dharma to another.

Our failure to comprehend this essential difference between the two concepts has led not only to an irreparable loss of our rare spiritual identity and a vast cultural heritage but has also created a socio-political chaos.

With the entry of the Europeans, the concept of religion was imported to India by the late 19th century. Europeans could not conceptualize a society without religion as the church played a pivotal role in their own society. They had a firm belief that religion should be universally present in all the societies. But here in India, they found that the majority of Indians followed a system which was not introduced by any individual and yet they believed in God. They were still far, far away from comprehending the elaborate system of Dharma. As there was no one-word translation for Dharma, they interpreted Dharma from the vantage point of their own concept called religion. Thus the word 'Dharma' was translated into the word 'Religion', a linguistic faux pas of the late 19th century.

Europeans defined our Sanatan Dharma as 'Hinduism'. Scholars of Dharma have opposed the concept of Dharma-Religion, but the concept of Dharma-Hinduism was accepted. Although the word 'Hinduism' was coined by the Europeans in the late 19th century, it has its root in the word 'Hindu':

The word '**Hindu**' has its origin in **Sanskrit** literature. In the *Rigveda*, **Bharat** is referred to as the country of '**Sapta Sindhu**', i.e., the country of seven great rivers. The word 'Sindhu' refers to rivers and sea and not merely to the specific river called 'Sindhu'. In Vedic Sanskrit, according to the ancient dictionaries, 'sa' was pronounced as 'ha'. Thus 'Sapta Sindhu' was pronounced as 'Hapta Hindu'. This is how the word 'Hindu' came into being." ([veda.wikidot.com/Hinduism](#)).

Historically speaking, the word 'Hindu' in Persian and Greek texts refers to the land of the Indus. The meaning of Hinduism was narrowed down to a mere single monolithic religion. Europeans tried to relate it to a certain community or sect rather than the universal and ultimate law of the universe. This restricted meaning of Hinduism is unacceptable. Hinduism and Dharma are semantically and epistemologically one. If still there is there is confusion in the trilogy of Dharma- Religion -Hinduism, omit the term religion, and the confusion also ends.

Unlike Christianity or Islam, Hinduism is not a religion but a system of Dharma. Dharma is an ultimate universal law to hold or maintain universe, or it is the very nature of the objects of universe. Appropriation of the concept Dharma for the word 'Religion' has created a semantic, philosophical and political chaos.

The western construct "religion" has created disharmony among different communities in India. It is interesting to note that prior to the emergence of the Europeanism, Hindu was a word used to refer to whole of India, and its natives, with immigrating Muslims being referred to with their ethnic names. (King, 146-185).

During that period, the distinction between Hindus and Muslims was bleak, for example, the *Meo* community found in Rajasthan professed the Muslim principles but followed local Hindu mores. But when the colonial dominance (of the Britishers) reinterpreted and re-synthesised the terms Dharma or Hinduism, the Indian Muslims whose ancestors were Hindus, the same Hindu mores became alien. Even offshoots of Hinduism like Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains felt alienated from the Hindus.

History has witnessed many fratricidal wars among followers of different religions. The world at the moment needs more Dharma and less religion. If the Dharma prevails-Truth will prevail, all over the world. Only Dharma has the potential to bring all the religions and communities to a universal whole. Hopefully Vivekananda's words may show us the path:

India must conquer the world and nothing less is my ideal. Our eternal foreign policy must be the export of the Shastras to the nations of the world. One of the reasons for India's downfall was that she narrowed herself, went into a shell, as the oyster does and refused to give her treasures and jewels to the other races of mankind outside the Aryan fold. (Vivekananda, 229)

When a nation or human beings behave in a manner that is alien to their inner nature, it is bound to fall. The day Indians are guided by their Dharma, peace and prosperity will prevail all over the world. We must remember: "Expansion is life and contraction is death".

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