

## INTRODUCTION

**Religion: Defining the term:** Defining religion<sup>1</sup> is one of the most crucial tasks to any theorist. The etymological meaning of the term lies with the Latin word 'religare'. This Latin root word implicates the meaning 'to tie, to bind'. People across the world have tried to put forward the definition of religion in their own ways. This accounted to the development of various meanings of the term religion. Thinkers over the centuries have tried to propose different dimensions of religion. Two problems often crop up in defining religion: either they are too narrow or they are too vague and ambiguous. In many definitions of religion, it can be seen that few explanations are too precarious as the scholars define the term in accordance with the belief of the believer. Most of the times the definitions are value loaded, by the definer's own values and opinions on religion, which thereby bars the religious beliefs of other cultures.



Fig: 1--Religion

An example of a narrow definition is the attempt to define religion as the 'belief in god'. On one hand, theorists argue on the innate religious impulse among the people and on the other hand, theorists argue on the diverse religions and its associated beliefs across the world. The second viewpoint states that religion is a socially attained characteristic feature of the human life. Therefore, different scholars have defined religion differently—

According to Emile Durkheim, in his book "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life", "religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is, things that are set apart and forbidden". In the words of Maclver and Page, "religion as we understand the term, implies a relationship not merely between man and man but also between man and some higher power". Ogburn in his own purview said that, "religion is an attitude towards superhuman

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary of sociology, religion is a set of beliefs, symbols and practices which is based on the idea of the sacred and which unites believers into a socio-religious community.

powers". Thus, one can define religion in simple terms as an endeavor to symbolize and classify faiths, emotions, conceptualizations and processes that emerges in retort to direct understanding of the sacred and the spiritual.

Therefore, religion involves the belief in the sacred activities of men. There is a basic distinction between the two dimensions in religion, that is, the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The sacred is considered to be all those holy symbols or things which are set apart or forbidden by the society as it is believed to possess supernatural qualities within it. It inspires awe and reverence among the people dwelling in the society. On the other hand, the profane are the daily mundane activities of the human beings living in the social world. Thus, the emergence of religion in the society is not known to the people. It is the fear of the unknown that makes people to lay their faith on something that is extra-ordinary and is believed to control the world through its power. Sociology of religion, have taken up the task of scientifically exploring the concept of religion and its associated beliefs and practices of the people.

**Spirituality: Understanding the Concept:** Spirituality is a way of life and custom-made system of principles and beliefs. It is universal in nature but found in varied contexts in different parts of the world. The American Academy of Family Physicians states, "spirituality is the way you find meaning, hope, comfort and inner peace in your life." <sup>2</sup>In many occasions, people consider religion and spirituality synonymously, but there is fundamental difference between the two concepts. Some people define spirituality as a smaller aspect of the larger construct of religion, others see it just the opposite, i.e., they view religion as an aspect of spirituality.

The Foundation for Holistic Spirituality has defined spirituality as "the natural human connection with the wonder and energy of nature, cosmos and all existence, and the instinct to explore and understand its meaning." <sup>3</sup>As defined by Hodge & Derezotes (2008), religion is the organized sets of beliefs and practices shared by the community, whereas spirituality is typically conceptualized in more subjective, individualistic terms. It is for this reason that spirituality is often seen as a private and personal form of religion.

The idea or notion of spirituality has advanced from the ancient beliefs, practices and rituals of various religions. Spirituality escorts to spiritual growth among the people. A fundamental part of spirituality is the thought that all can bond themselves up with and become united with the power present in the universe and its associated mysteries. The spiritual sentiment can be experienced by anyone notwithstanding the person being in some other religion or even an atheist. It profoundly affects lives of the humans and allows for the growth of a robust sense which makes him/her realise that life is an essential part is a gift which must be maintained properly, looked after and cared for.

Believing in spirituality is the personal choice of the believers. Few communities choose to assemble among them to allocate their common beliefs and to endeavor for a higher

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://psychidlibrary.com/beyondBooks/spirituality/>

<sup>3</sup> Source: <http://psychidlibrary.com/beyondBooks/spirituality/>

cognizance. Organizing congregations many a times leads to spiritual and/or physical healing. Few others explore their spiritual face through the process of meditation, performing yoga, praying or even going out for a stroll to gather know-how on the gifts of nature. In the present generation there are many psychics and healers whose work rests on the spiritual foundation. They give comfort to the people as well assists them in their times of deluge. Spirituality raises the curtains to realize that that extrasensory phenomenon and the belief in afterlife subsists in the world. Therefore, people start to believe in the concept of after-life. Spirituality is an inner realization which is believed to be shared in a loving and soothing way. It does not seek to convert others to its way of thought. It is open to anyone. In the words of Alan Shelton Spirituality brings meaning as well as a purpose to the life of the human beings. People develop wisdom through the expansion of one's spirituality within oneself. French philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin observed, "We are not physical beings having a spiritual experience, but spiritual beings having a physical experience."

**Healing:** Traditionally, medicines were considered to be the source of healing of the individuals. People who used to treat people through traditional medicines were known as healers by profession but in the modern century the biomedicines are considered to heal the patients through its scientific calculations. The amalgamation of science and medicines has made the psychology of the physicians that they are curing patients out of their illness through biomedicines. Thus, the focus has shifted from "care" to "cure". The role of the physicians has turned to "curer of the diseases" from the "healer of the sick" (Cassell, 1976). In the words of Mary Maddux<sup>4</sup>—

***"Healing is a spontaneous event that comes about through a kind of grace. It can happen anytime, and in any place. Healing can happen on many different levels. Sometimes our healing is not what we expect. We need to be open to the gifts which life is always ready to give us. It may be that a physical problem heals, but it may also stay awhile to teach us something. Sometimes a health challenge is a doorway to a deeper healing, a cry from deep within for attention to some part of us that has been unloved and feels separated from the Whole.***

***"Regardless of whether our focus in healing is on the physical, mental, emotional or spiritual level, all levels are invariably touched by the process, and none can be separated out from the rest."***

Thus, the role of the traditional healers is extremely important as they used to provide both physical and mental healing. They used to give social support for the victims, thereby encouraging them not to turn their faces away from life instead kindled the spirit of hope for surviving in the social whole with rejuvenated spirit. According to the anthropological dimension, healing is of two types—

- Community Healing Systems<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Source:-- [http://www.heartofhealing.net/about/What\\_Is\\_Healing.html](http://www.heartofhealing.net/about/What_Is_Healing.html)

<sup>5</sup> Community healing addresses the bodily ailments in social seclusion.

- Humoral Healing<sup>6</sup>

There are different types of healers who are associated with healing, such as, midwives, bonesetters, shamans or shamankas (healers who arbitrate between humans and the spirit world), chiropractors, general practitioners, psychiatrists, herbalists, hospice care providers, and dentists. Therefore, Healing can be defined as process by which a nexus between body and mind is created. It creates integration among the people in the society.

**The concept of Faith:** The literal meaning of the term faith implies that to have total trust on something or someone. Faith is a sanctified, bottomless, sensitively involved based on trust. Whenever a person's faith is broken, one is hurt deeply in his cognitive level. Despite a person being hurt for entrusting his faith on something, he/she doesn't stop in laying his faith on any other thing. Though faith is central to all religions still different religion imparts different views on the notion of faith.

The Hindu view of faith is at variance from the other religions. In Hinduism faith is not regarded as a stationary situation; instead, it is continuously intensifying through individual knowledge and development. Quoting Saint Augustine: "Faith is to believe what you do not see. The reward of faith is to see what you believed." This concept is associated with the old saying of the people that "Seeing is believing". Faith is called 'astikya' as well as 'shradha' in Sanskrit and is regarded as the fourth out of the ten spiritual practices called niyamas, which means "to unleash." The niyamas are moral and the various religious practices liberate as well as nurture one's inner qualities. It is these observations which grip "the second limb of the ashtanga" ("eight-limbed") yoga system, which is codified in several Hindu religious scriptures. Therefore, it is believed in Hinduism that entrusting faith leads to one's enlightenment.

In the Islamic religion, faith is known as Iman. Faith in Islam is a complete state of contentment which is gained by means of constructive actions and beneficial ideas. It involves the self-motivated and effective procedures. According to the holy Quran, true faith holders are those people—who entrusts their faith "in God, His angels, His Books as completed by the Qur'an, His messengers with Muhammad being the Last of them all, the Day of Final Judgement, the absolute knowledge and wisdom of God; who trust God always and enjoy unshakable confidence in Him; who spend in the way of God of what He has given them in the form of wealth, life, health, knowledge, experience; who observe their daily prayers regularly as well as the weekly and annual congregations; who pay their religious taxes (alms or Zakah) to the rightful beneficiaries (individuals or institutions); who enjoin the right and good, and combat the wrong and evil by all lawful means at their disposal; who obey God and His Messenger Muhammad" (Cited, IslamAnswering.com, 2009). Therefore, Faith makes Islam penetrate deeply and constructively into every aspect of life.

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<sup>6</sup> **Humoral healing** is based on a philosophy of balance among certain elements within the body and within the person's environment. Diseases were thought to be the result of bodily imbalances. It is practiced in Middle East, the Mediterranean.

In Christianity, Faith is not just a means to salvation but also a means to all our promises in Christ. The subject of faith is very crucial to a believer because every spiritual experience rests upon it. It is faith alone and only faith which connects a believer to God. Therefore, one must have proper know-how on the notion of faith in Christian religion. It is believed that God can witness our Faith on Him; faith is considered to be audible as Jesus can hear our pray, cry and pleadings; faith is mobile in nature because no individual is born with faith but one inculcates the notion of faith upon him through proper socialization of the values and ideals of Christianity; faith is like an open door which is the key to the wisdom and secrets of God. It must be noticed that faith is a blessing upon human beings as it is the sole key to have an entry into the domain of Christian life. As is noted below—

*“So then those who are of faith are blessed. Faith is a bridge to God’s blessings. It is a blessing to believe God”. --- Galatians 3:9<sup>7</sup>*

*“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him”—Hebrews 10:38<sup>8</sup>*

*And Jesus said to him, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.”— Mark 9:23<sup>9</sup>*

**Understanding Health and Biomedicine:** Health care in the traditional period was carried out by different types of healers who used to dig out ideas related to healing of the sick. People in this period used to fear the unknown and had no clue on how the people became sick and succumbed to their sickness, therefore the concept of spiritual healing and faith healing had their rise. By the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, the European society changed which thereby affected the rest of the world. It was René Descartes (1596–1650) who argued that the body is a part of the physical world and the mind was the part of the spiritual world. Notwithstanding the connection between body and mind, they are two separate entities and must be dealt separately. It was this particular idea which paved the way for medical science which later led to the rise of “bio-medicine”. Biomedicine rapidly came to dominate approaches to health care over the course of the nineteenth century. The body was seen as a machine whose dysfunctions could be treated by bio-medicines. The materialization of the “**Germ Theory**”<sup>10</sup> made a strong foothold in the society to establish the bio-medical model. Though sociologists argue that illness is socially constructed, still it can’t be denied that health of the people was largely affected with the introduction of bio-medicine.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://biblehub.com/galatians/3-9.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Source: <http://biblehub.com/hebrews/10-38.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Source: <http://biblehub.com/mark/9-23.htm>

<sup>10</sup> It is an explanation which identified micro-organisms as the essential agent for particular infectious diseases.

**The connection between Health, Healing and Spirituality:** Health of an individual is in majority of the cases determined by one's religious and spiritual status. Corley (2003) has provided with a relation among the three dimensions that is health, healing and spirituality. He has related the relationship with that of the petals of a lotus flower—



**Fig: 2**

Here, spirituality can be witnessed as attaining the middle position between health and healing. One can view that beliefs and behaviors of an individual is centered at the heart of the flower. Spirituality is based on the beliefs and behaviours of the people. Health and healing of an individual is surrounded by spirituality. Belief in the supernatural and the faith of the healing techniques provided by the religions of the world is the only way that a person can get back to the normal functioning of the society. For example, if an infertile couple suffers from the social stigma of not being able to have a child then it is religion after biomedicine which can provide the couple with complete security and can heal them out of their mental suffering. Numerous evidences speak in support of the positive effect of spirituality and religion on the psychological wellbeing. Religion often serves as a 'coping mechanism' and can provide alternative treatment approaches for pathology. Spirituality too has been shown to influence the process of recovery from chronic illness. Therefore, we find a close connection among health, healing and spirituality.