



## **ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF CLASSICAL RELIGIOUS FAITH IN NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT**

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Religion has made a significant contribution to shaping human nature throughout the entire civilization. The teachings of classical religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam have been transformed over time due to the social, cultural, political, and economic mobilizations. In the digital age, the transformation of religion has been shaped by the ideologies of non-religious, atheistic, pragmatic spiritual life, and secularity. The impact has been propagated as a New Religious movement (NMR). Such neo-tradition of religion has evolved as alternative spirituality in the community. Considering this significant transformation of religion, the respective study evaluates the distinction between the classical religion and new religious movement and the impact of classical religious teachings in shaping alternative spirituality. This study is qualitative and within the content and comparative analysis doctrinal and fundamental teachings of both religious traditions have been evaluated. The classical religious teachings have been illustrated from theistic and atheistic perspectives. Buddhist teachings have direct individuals act with free will and experience the supreme bliss with a meditative pathway in an atheistic orientation. Then, the theistic traditions of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam have prescribed that the individual act according to the virtue and make devotion to the experience of supreme bliss. The spiritual perceptiveness of the New religious movement is transforming the religious teaching to achieve prosperity in secular living, religion for the promotion of well-being, and experience bliss through meditative practices. From a comparative viewpoint considering philosophy and practice of alternative spirituality represent the values and practices of classical religion and indicate a utilization of classical religious teachings for secular prosperity and experience the supreme bliss or divinity by using meditation practice realistically exceeding the borders of the classical religion holistically. Therefore, contemporary new religion of alternative spirituality originates as a combination or transformation of classical religious teachings to experience prosperity in secularity and experience bliss of spirituality in a transcendently.

Keywords: classical religion, new religious movement, spirituality

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### INTRODUCTION

Religion has crafted human nature throughout the entire human civilization. Examining the historical evolvement of religion it's indicated that religion has experienced transformations and transitions in its existence. The result of these changes was religion aside from its foundational teachings and presented with a new faith and traditions (Hart, 2006). This changing phenomenon is a common characteristic of the global major religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. However, examining findings of scholars in religion and spirituality have recognized every individual in society belongs to or represents one of the religions or any sort of faith system according to their social and cultural identity but in contemporary society, individuals are willingly away from their inherent religious identities and indicated a gradual transformation of religious faith. This recognized movement in the religious society has shown that people are becoming non-religious and religion is disappearing from their self-identity (Marshall & Olson, 2018). Moreover, several studies related to religious populations reveal that in the future the religious representation by the youth population will decrease there will be a transition of the religious faith among the community, and atheists will grow in high demand. Due to the rise of the atheist movement, there will be transformations in human spiritual life and the facts that have affected the belief system of the classical religious faith (Nuwer, 2014).

This human movement was strange in the entire human civilization because religion contributed in several ways to formulating the individual personality. Majorly the individual morality-related personality dimensions are developed by the religion of the respective culture and society. This critical consideration has made question the researcher's mind that non-religious society will be absent of the values of the religion (Guyau, 2015). Then, the scholars recognized people are away from the classical religious faith and become non-religious, but they have represented their dimension of religion as the "spiritual but not religious". Later, scholars defined this contemporary faith of religion as the New Religious Movement (NRM). Further, this has been highlighted as an extension of the non-religion or secularism. The nature of the non-religious movements presents an innovation of the religious tradition which is away from the faith and teachings of the classical religions. In addition, the new religious movement represents the person-centered a common religions that every individual can take part in without any discrimination. According to this evidence, it indicated that contemporary society has formulated a new cult of spirituality as the alternative spirituality, which was away from the classical religious teachings (Enroth, 2005).

Therefore, examining the above-illustrated facts indicates that in the contemporary world as a result of the social economic cultural and scientific revolutions comparison of the world's four major religions and new forms of religions and experience of spirituality has been formulated. Considering this distinction between the classical religion and the new religious movement, the research problem for the study is whether the new religious movement is distinct from the classical religious teachings and philosophy. The objectives of the study are to examine the spiritual dimensions of classical religions and new religious movements. To evaluate the representation of the classical religious features in the new religious movement. Religiosity and spirituality is an essential need of the human life. Since every individual life is directed towards the self-actualization (Maslow, 2013). This self-actualization is present the both levels of achieved in secular and sacred living. Individuals can fulfill the secular



prosperity in their material life but are unable to achieve the sacred realization. This sacred realization only can be achieved through the teachings of religions. Contemporary society to fulfill this essential need of life has been away from classical religion and has utilized alternative or new spirituality; the foundation of this new spirituality has been developed through classical religions and makes a greater contribution to the development of the human sacred living.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative. The data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources belonging to the respective classical religious traditions. Based on the collected data and doctrinal teachings of the religion, the theory has been unpacked according to the analysis approach of the content and comparative analysis. The analysis majorly focused on themes of exploring the spirituality-related teachings of the classical religious tradition and new religious movements. After the exploration of each tradition comparatively the study has directed attention towards recognizing the roots of the new religious movement according to the doctrine teachings of the classical religions. Then the formation of the alternative spirituality based upon the classical religious teachings has been evaluated. The findings of the study have been presented under three themes those are: Dimensions of spirituality in classical religions, the spirituality of New Religious Movements, and The roots of classical religions in alternative spirituality.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Dimensions of Spirituality in Classical Religions

Every individual in the society represents an identity of religion or any other faith existing in the culture or society. The religious tradition can be divided into theistic and atheist religions, western and Eastern religions, or based on culture, but contemporary numerous changes are visible and a better way to illustrate the essence of these teachings is to redirect to the fundamental teachings of religion (Martin, 2007). The Buddhist teachings have away from the faith of the seeker and the teachings of Buddha enable the individual to act according to their free will. According to Buddhist teachings, individuals the responsible person for the consequences of their actions and the negative and positive consequences may lead to the existence of *samsara*. The teachings of Buddha have given ethical or moral living for a positive lifestyle and given a meditative path for the experience of mental relaxation and intellectual transformation (Harvey, 1990). In comparison to Buddhism, Hinduism is a theistic religion, a religious faith that makes the devotion towards the supreme personality. The teachings of Hinduism are directed to a positive lifestyle through its teachings. Hinduism has prescribed individual to have an ethical lifestyle in their personal and social life. All the actions of the individual need to be a service or duty towards the Supreme Being. Further, the spirituality of human existence has been highlighted under the practice of yoga. The supreme experience of Hinduism is union with god. The pathway of *bhakti* and devotion may lead an individual to divinity (Lipner, 2010). The religion of Christianity is also a theistic religion, which has been oriented toward the faith of the god or divinity. As a religion Christianity has been formulated with the teachings of Jesus and evolved with numerous cultural and social influences making devotion to the divinity make individual purified and supreme unity within the divinity. In addition to devotion, individual responsibility is following the divine command. One example can be given as the Ten Commandments and ethical, social, and religious law (Robinson, 2019). Then the religion of Islam also a faith-oriented religion towards god and Prophet Muhammad shared the message of god. The major religious activities performed by the Islamic religion are making devotion to the god and performing the virtues for the betterment of society. The performance of the five observances shapes the major religious outlook. The spiritual life of Islam is known as Sufism and individual truth for the god in word and action to reach the god (Sodiq, 2010). These teachings indicate the orientation of the world's major religions and they indicate that religion has empowered individuals to have an ethical lifestyle and make an intellectual transformation or experience the divinity as the spirituality of the religion.



## The Spirituality of New Religious Movement

The New Religious Movement (NRM) shows a change or conflict between religious faith and an organized change in the religions. Another way of defining the new religious movement is the new cult of the religion, god, and spirit. This new cult of religion may represent the features of the quasi-religion is more oriented towards secularism and represents an own religious faith developed by the individual or group. This is distinctive from non-religion and quasi-religion is the basis of the religion is secularism and represents a negating aspect of religion with negating religion via a philosophical principle overlooked. Further, this is the representation of liberal humanism (Abe, 1984). The major factor that influenced the formation of the new religious movement was social change. This formation has occurred as a result of the response to the social transformation or the stressful condition of the society and culture in the East and West continent (Beckford, 1986). Moreover, thoughts of modernization have led the individual existence into a more secularized outlook. This has been further evolved with the esotericism movement in the Western world. Since, as a result of modernization public was not bound to one faith and was present with diverse religious identities and faiths. The consequence of all these movements was the formation of self-religion rather than being in a common faith that came to action after 1960 or a period of counterculture (Arweck, 2002). The spiritual features that are present in the new religious movement are holistically individuals are engaged in devotional practices towards the god of any religion. Religious outlook formulated the individual potentials of free speech, freedom of religious expression, individualism, the experience of diversity, and freedom in secularity and religious freedom. Further, throughout the religious life of the seekers in the new religious movement expect to develop physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual development in the engagement of the religion (Urban, 2015). This highlighted that without any discrimination people are enrolling in the practice of yoga and meditation practice for the mind-body relaxation, resilient and conscious experience. However, the secularized religion has majorly ignored the god of the supreme in the atheism or agnosticism movement, but the significance of the new religious movement is individuals ignore the god from a religious perceptive and accept the god from a spiritual perspective. The consequence is people are not engaged in activity in the institution's religious place but they keep their faith in god. Another significant feature is individuals enable the spirit as their life force in the spiritual life. Scholars who have explored the spirituality of the new religious movement further indicated the features of the lifestyle free from egoism through adapting the true essence of spiritual nature to experience a higher realm (Heelas, 2002). In addition, people are experiencing the indigenous approaches of spirituality such as crystal, aroma therapy, and astrology, which are drawn from the Eastern.

## The Roots of Classical Religions in Alternative Spirituality

The new religious tradition has formulated a new trend of the religion as the alternative spirituality. Several social cultural and many other factors have been influenced for this formulation. This may represent a new cult of religion. However, examining the outlook of the new religious movement has transformed and refined the classical religious teachings according to the secular lifestyle. The first characteristic that may present in the alternative spirituality is individuals do not accept the divinity of the Supreme Being and give the recognition of their own free will, independence, and freedom. This has been a major feature that has been taken from Buddhism because the teachings of Buddhism have ignored the creation and existence of the Supreme Being and elaborate that each individual has the potential to perform their work and achieve the expectation for the betterment comparison to the alternative spirituality (Keown, 2005). One of the features of the new religious movement is people are more concerned about secularity rather than the sacred lifestyle. In here enhancing the well-being has become one of the major needs of the present individuals and they have fulfilled these needs through the enrollment of several practices of the Eastern religions. One of the major practices is yoga and individuals practice yoga for their physical and mental wellbeing. Further enroll in other yogic practices such as devotional and sound-related yoga practices for the experience of consciousness (Saliba, 2004). All these approaches have taken from the roots of Hinduism and yoga. In addition,



people who take part in the new religious movement also experience spirituality and consciousness through enrollment in Buddhist meditational practices. Contemporary, the evolution of technology and science has been criticizing the theistic religion. The major criticism that has been directed was the question of the existence is god. This has been negatively affected to the human faith. The most critical moment was when people moved towards a non-religiousness. However, the new religious movement has not ignored the concept of god or being non-religious. Under the alternative spirituality people have accepted the concept of god in the new religious tradition can transform the reaching of divinity through divine intelligence and conscious light. Therefore, alternative spirituality has not ignored the god in their movement and theistic religion has emerged as the new conscious religion (Herrick, 2004). Considering these points it uniquely shows that alternative spirituality has been formulated from the roots of the classical religious traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. The fundamental teachings have been transformed according to the needs of the new age and formulated a self-spirituality.

## CONCLUSION

Contemporary religion has evolved as a transformative approach to or new culture. This significant movement of the religion is known as the new religious movement. Religion majorly facilitates the individual need for spirituality and matter of existence. The new religious movement has away from the teachings of the traditional religion and formulated a new movement of the religion under the concept of alternative spirituality. Alternative spirituality has been formulated as a new revolution in spirituality. This has not ignored the teachings of the classical religion or been non-religious it has formulated the religious teachings in a more secularized manner. The teachings of Buddhism majorly give recognition for the human potential of free will and intellectual freedom for individual living. This has been the major theme of the alternative spiritual or new religious movement. In comparison to Buddhism, other religious traditions are theistic or faith-oriented religious traditions. The essence of the religious teachings is majorly oriented towards the divinity or the Supreme Being. Modernized period the concept of god has been criticized. However, under the alternative spirituality the concept of divinity not has been terminated and reshaped in a more spiritual perspective. Individuals have been led towards the experience of divinity with the conscious. In addition, the individual has utilized the meditation practices which have been illustrated in Buddhism and Hinduism. These foundations show that alternative spirituality is a personalized experience of the spiritualized which has been developed with the collective principles and the practice of the major four religions. Therefore, the foundation of alternative spirituality is rooted in the teachings of the classical religious teachings more oriented towards utilizing the teachings of the classical religion towards the posterity of secularity and experiencing sacredness with a shared approach of a combination of Western and Eastern religions. Thus alternative spirituality is a new religious tradition formulated through the classical religious teachings applicable to the modern age.

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