Abstract

Chapter I is the introduction which deals with the geographical, historical and political factors of West Asia, which had enabled the growth and sustenance of several religions. Among these innumerable religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam became successful and lasting religions. It is believed that the Jews carried in to exile a spiritual fatherland. Wherever they went, it became a fundamental part of their religious belief that they would return to their fatherland. Although the Jews were the main element in the population of Judea/Palestine region, after the wars of AD 70 and AD 135, much of the Jewish population got scattered all over the world. The Jewish population was only 56,000 in Palestine (Israel) at the time of Balfour Declaration. It was in the 20th century that Jewish population began to increase due to immigrations.

The second chapter deals with Judaism in the historical setting. The triangular relationship between god, people and territory has been crucial to the Jewish faith. The land was considered to be the divine gift to be nation and the nation was considered to be custodian of the divine habitation. The Jews were also not a homogenous groups. Historically they were divided in to Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes and Essences several centuries before the rise of Christianity and Islam, there existed Jewish settlement in Asia and North Africa. According to inscriptive sources, there were Jews in South and North Africa we have inscriptive evidence of the existence of kings of Himyar of Jewish origin, along with the evidences from Beyt shearim near Haifh. In fact during the early centuries of Christian era, the Jewish leaders in South Arabia tried to prevent the spread of Christianity in those areas.

The third chapter deals with the minor Jewish communities of Israel, who were beyond the mainstream. They are considered to be the marginal Jewish sects. The Karaites were one of the leading marginal sects, who were ousted by the mainstream sects, because of their dissent. Another sect was the
Samaritans. The Samaritans were always looked with disdain by the mainstream Jews. As far as the Karaites are concerned, they formed a distinct sect in Judaism. The return of their basic motions about the nature of religious law differed from those of the mainstream or Rabbinate Jews. The relations between the Karaites and the Rabbinate Jews have not been constant. Period of alienation and even mutual hostility have alternated with period of tolerance and even attempt at reconciliation. The religious practices of the Samaritans differed in many details from in those of the Jews.

Fourth Chapter focuses on Christianity in West Asia. Christianity rose out of the Jewish apocalyptic revelations of the coming kingdom. It derived its impetus from the personality and vision of Christ; its strength from the belief in his resurrection and the promise of eternal life; it received its doctrinal form in the theology of St. Paul; it grew by the absorption of Pagan faith and ritual; it became a triumphant Church by inheriting the organizing pattern and gamins of the Roman Empire.

Christ’s achievements lay not in the ushering of a new state, but in outlining an ideal morality, different from that of the Pagans (Romans) and the conservative Judaism. Christ advocated a life of simplicity, piety, moral integrity, gentleness, justice and peace. In a world of revenge, killing and retaliation, Christ advised his followers to turn the other cheek to the enemy, which was the further most degree of non-violence. He wanted his followers to be pure in heart and advocated strict celibacy in a world of immoral practices.

The Fifth Chapter “Christianity Under Islamic Rule” 641-1800 discusses the divisions within Christianity on the basis of different dogmas and belief early Christianity had spread to Judea, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Ethiopia Arabia, Greece, Rome and other areas of empire. During the period of Chalcedon, real division had taken place among the Christian of Syria, Coptic Christians of Egypt and the Greeks. The Asian and the North African Christians,
the Greeks as their enemies and the Arabs as their friends. During the last years of the Byzantine rule, the Arabs brought total turmoil, politically and socially. In fact, native Christians did not regard Islam as other than a powerful and noxious Christian heresy. Thus, the Arab conquest was followed by a long period in which the relations between native Christians and the Muslim rulers in the Middle East remained cordial. In the early years, Christians with their higher social and cultural level, were indispensable in the administration but this honeymoon did not last long. Rigorous Islamization started in the following centuries.

The sixth chapter deals with the question of the creation of Israel, the Jewish state, in the midst of an Ottoman empire which was getting disintegrated. By 1880s the growth of multi-semitic feeling in Germany and Austria as well as presentations of the Jews in Russia convinced a large section of the Jewish intelligentsia that assimilation was no longer possible. They came to realize that the Jews were not only a religious group, but also a separate nation bound by common faith and sentiment rather than by land. Thus, Dr. Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, insisted that the Jews should be granted 'Sovereignty' over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirement of a nation. The chapters deal with problem of the Ottoman policy towards the immigration and the purchase of lands by the Jews in Palestine with the support of the European powers.

The seventh chapter is the concluding one. The findings of the individual chapters are given here. The question of the two major minority communities, vis-à-vis the Muslim majority and the ruling regimes has been explained in the light of these findings.