Chapter 6

RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE
6.1. Introduction.

Religious Discourse: A Study.

I want to show how the use of language in religious contexts is an effective process to control others. This is done through deception and manipulation. The expression of religious facts should be clearly stated. By truly using the language to inform, we will get a correct picture of reality. My intention on studying spiritual discourse is to show how preachers have mass following and are great opinion makers. In a religious context, “religious discourse”, is explained as a means of strict logical presentation. I have stressed that the power of such discourse is valuable and worth pursuing.

6.2. The Rational of Study.

There are several reasons why such discourse is worth pursuing. Since religions deal with imaginary subjects, and prescribes a code of conduct for people to follow, there is a great demand now to read various religious texts. Secondly, debates on faith leads to dissent and a rational –study can minimise conflict and history of communal violence.

In India, a country that has such discourse could be very valuable. This research has really enriched my thought, this journey is meaningful and the experience makes me realize that beyond the religious issues, there is a need for leaders who can build inter-religious dialogues and morale.

6.3. Use of Rhetoric.

All religions try to use language to persuade them for a set of beliefs. There is need for overstatement, and a story-line for engaging the followers in a particular direction. It is debated that in religions, people maintain a rigid stand and hardly change their convictions. Such stretch it to a fantastic level and preach animosity. People play on
religious beliefs, convictions, and sentiments. I have selected famous books that all agree to have a great religious strength.

6.3.1. Reinterpreting the Myth.

Mythologies are reinterpreted. The great epics, The Gita, The Ramayana and The Mahabharata have been reinterpreted in the of new knowledge and beliefs. Television serials, present episodes in a new style. There is a mass- appeal for them.


I like to demonstrate how people understand various meanings, associated with religious narrative. I deal with written texts. Examples are drawn primarily with a kind of issue that influence the readers.

Religious discourse contains stories, supernatural characters, myth, ornamental images and sometimes difficult logic. I observe that the religious texts are filled with metaphor. I would suggest, that metaphors differently interpret the text, “Christ is God and man,” .. The metaphor is constructed to be interpreted in one way rather than another.

Relations among words lend to fuzziness. Metaphors lead to additional layers of meaning. Religious texts are full of paradoxes. Multiplicity of meaning is encoded in the religious texts. Ambiguity is often found in religious texts. The word “God” has many meanings. God is benevolent, or malignant, kind, or cruel, a person or a symbol, etc.

Religious contexts can be revealing Ritual speeches slokas as display a degree of repetition esoteric vocabulary, unusual intonation mark the discourse. John Du Bois (1996) identified some of the features of Religious language:

(i) Use of rituals
(ii) Archaic elements
(iii) Euphemism and metaphor
(iv) Semantic opacity
(v) Unusual fluency
(vi) Magic words
Certain other features include the following: (believe in the supernatural skepticism, recognition of more than one system, use of distinct colloquial language. Deliberate obscurity, use of rhetorical questions, proverbs, understatement, allusive reference, euphemism).

6.4.1. Ideological Position of Religious Texts.

There are examples of repetitions. It has a clear design to mystify a topic. Preachers adopt a stand and stick to it. They change the word order and sentence-pattern to get the desired effect.

6.4.2. Types of Texts: Parables.

Parables are stories with a moral. They are instructive in nature. Devotees ask questions and clear their doubts. The use of simple-language, scholarly reasoning help in creating mass following. They give sermons, I notice that the difficult meanings explained lucidly by giving concrete examples.

6.4.3. Study of Religious Discourse is an Interpretive Device.

Many contrasts, proverbial statements add to the density of information in the religious texts. Religious discourse is not simply talk about the gods in an otherwise secular context. It is the use of a certain rhetorical style, a style that conforms to certain rules of underlying structure but that communicates only to the extent that this structure is appropriate for the uses to which it is put.

6.4.4. Persuasive Discourse and use of Metaphor.

Some features are widespread in the use of first person plural pronouns, simple attitudinal adjectives, direct reference type of repetition, and causal conjunctions. In terms of speech acts, the findings revealed that there is a propensity to use representatives, most particularly, ascertain, information and descriptive examples. Directive is another feature
of the persuasive function. Persuasion is further realized in terms of paralinguistic features, specifically suprasegmentals, i.e. intonation, pitch, stress and length.

6.4.4.1. Use of Metaphor.

Metaphor as a stylistic trick to beautify sacred texts but also plays a fundamental role indispensable for thinking about religious experience.

“Metaphors are so common place we often fail to notice them.” Lakoff and Johnson discuss also conceptual metaphor which forms the basis of metaphorical use of language. It combines two different conceptual domains: source and target ones. It means that some experience can be understood in the categories of different experience belonging to different conceptual domains. For example, in the metaphor “Time is money” we deal with abstract notion of the time concept using more specific concept from the field of finance and the practice of everyday life. As a rule, target domains are more abstract in comparison to source domains. Thanks to that, abstract conceptual domains are anchored in empirical experience, becoming more comprehensible and understandable. In other words, a metaphor can have a cognitive function as well: “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. However, the process of creating metaphors is not limited to understanding or explaining some fields of experience. Metaphor can transform experience, totally changing the nature of its character. It is a tool used for creating some aspects of the reality, especially those which are dependent on language and thoughts.

This does not mean that all expressions of religious language are metaphorical. It seems to be that religious discourse does not have any clearly stated borders in that sense. Metaphorical expressions are present in both kinds of religious reality. The other hand, in the field of religious discourse where communication of cognitive and directly concerning reality concepts take place, metaphorical language use seems to be non-specific and can be compared to analogical use of metaphors in everyday language. Moreover, it co-exists with literal way of speaking that cannot be always distinguished from metaphorical language.

From the philosophical point of view, a language use that refers to transcendent dimensions of religious world view seems to be the most interesting. This area of religious
world is the most problematic. Yet, is it possible to talk about reality that is neither accessible for immediate experience nor can be reduced to such experience? Why does it happen that religious language presents ideas that are beyond human cognitive abilities, and that can’t be described due to its nature? Why does a religious man ascribe special truth to religious statements? Theologians and philosophers studying religious beliefs and utterances have been troubled by such questions for ages. Many of them concluded that religious speech is not possible at all or it has to make use of negation, contradiction, or paradox. Others referred to symbolic and metaphorical character of religious language that enables us to grasp reality that can’t be grasped literally in any other way. Irrespective of the above mentioned opinion I must agree that religious language is based on contain assumption that a religious man is making a claim while speaking. He is convinced that his words have certain sense and relate to some kind of transcendent reality (that is beyond human cognitive abilities and abilities of human language). A domain of discourse is the mysterious world which a religious man wants to make contact with, using human language only. How it is possible to comprehend religious experience is a moot question. The answer is: thanks to metaphor. As stated before, metaphor combines a target domain, which is usually less defined and more abstract, and a source domain, which is more specific and easier to grasp in experience. In religious discourse the source domain is the domain, viz., the reality to which religious people ascribed, generally speaking, the superhuman power.

6.5. Religion: Positive Aspects.

Imagine if all of the religions of the world were to annually focus upon a specific issue of human concern, with the intention of collectively making significant progress on that issue. For example, if 2014 were the year in which every religion focused upon poverty, or on literacy or on religious toleration, such a collective focus could potentially have a huge impact. Imagine the power that would be exerted by a universal declaration that terrorist attacks upon civilians were totally and unequivocally condemned by every religious leader in the world, speaking with one voice. Many terrorists think that their religions sanction such behaviour and indeed promise them an afterlife in paradise for the suicidal sacrifice of their lives to make a political point. No doubt there are topics on which universal agreement would be impossible to achieve, but until such an attempt is made, who can say?
6.5.1. God’s love is Central.

Religion is love that never ends. Jesus set some priorities: Love God with your whole heart and love your neighbour as yourself; do unto others what you would have them do unto you and respect every person as a unique creation of God. Jesus reminds us that those who keep God’s laws are not far from the kingdom of heaven.

6.5.2. Unselfish Living.

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are always central topics in Buddhism. Buddha prioritized “enlightened living” under all circumstances: alone in community, rich or poor, good health or bad. Dharma teaches equal opportunity for all, guides personal efforts, advocates peace through appropriate organizations and always focuses on beneficial actions for others. Sangha means joining in community for self-awakening and to help others. Buddhism’s focus is always on helping “both” oneself and other people. That leads to maximum happiness in “this life and the next,” Buddhism recognizes the sufferings of life and acknowledges that we are all flawed by “ignorance” of nirvana (ultimate reality). Buddhists should become teachers through daily right actions. Sharing matters most, especially with those who are needy. Everyone can help someone with “right effort.” Children’s education emphasizes self-sacrificing stories of Buddha in previous lives. These “tales” teach Buddhism’s biggest lesson: unselfish living.

6.5.3. Love GOD and Others.

The core of our religion is the gospel or “good news”: a perfect atonement that will redeem all from death and reward each according to his or her works. Commandments from our loving Heavenly Father provide direction on how to live happily in this life and prepare for the next. Two great commandments stand out: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

BRIDGING GAP Religion is a path to God. “Human faith is never final, never an arrival, but rather an endless pilgrimage, a being on the way,” said Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. It’s ‘spiritual technology’ that bridges the gap between humanity and divinity, concentrating on morality, ethics and even the laws governing human/divine partnership. It helps us reach beyond ourselves by asking questions and answering with sacred
narratives. What is God like? Where is God? What must we do to merit divine attention? What practices help us be more compassionate toward people and ourselves?

Religion binds us together as a community of seekers, even when we disagree. It provides joy and company for the journey. With our priorities configured that God is love, and when as our Patriarch Bartholomew said, people and the welfare of human beings truly matter, and when the sacredness of human life is our priority, we’ll learn how we can make a difference in our world.

6.5.4. Changing Hearts and Minds.

Current social issues demand a radical transformation of our hearts and minds in recognition that humankind is one interdependent whole. We must delink from both political and religious partisanship and foster the consciousness that “the Earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.” Helping others create a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life. Recognize and realize equality of woman and man. Realize world’s interrelatedness. Promote the teaching of spiritual virtues, the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude to eliminate the extremes of wealth and poverty.

6.6. Religion-Negative Aspects: Hate Speeches.

There are of course cases including this sample extract where religious discourse plays an important role. Study the use of hate speech made by Owaisi, which is “waging war against the state, sedition, promoting enmity and malicious acts to outrage religious feelings. His arrest gave birth to a fresh debate in India regarding who would decide the fine line between ‘free speech’ and ‘hate speech’. Faith-politics is taking an ugly turn; be it forced conversions, or converting to other religion by offering bribe,

“If you make hate speech illegal, you make free speech illegal. Book Owaisi for making violent threats,” TaslimaNasreen had stated it. Hate speeches by different orthodox groups spread venom in society.

See the force of another quote: “the 25 crore Muslims will take care of the 100 crore Hindus if only the police was removed for 15 minutes”, Deliberate and malicious
propaganda themes are freely used. Instead of promoting, peace and harmony, hate-speeches all groups pose a great threat to the unity of the country.

“Should the case of Owaisi be an example to drill fear into the hearts of hate-mongers?” , can there be a deterrent punishment for this?

. "Any hate-monger cannot be accepted by the Indians, politicians and the media fraternity." Strongly commented by Sidharth Nath Singh, a BJP, MP.

Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan, editor 'Mill! Gazette' favoured equal treatment. "We want justice and equal treatment. You can't make an example of one individual. No action has been taken on the 'Owaisis' on the other side. I want one rule for the whole society. I see no action on the other side.” Hate speech of the religious leader Akbaruddin Owaisi, outside the law, vilifies the public, used by him to create polarisation in the community. Power of the establishment and the main-stream media over the control of the nation’s narrative cannot be ignored.

Some countries are declared as theocratic state; others identify the states as secular. This fight over secular and communal creates a major division in the society. Overall, a narrow view of religion disturbs the balance in the community.


“Hindu religious leader jailed for hate speech by Indo Asian News Service / IANS India Private Limited - Mon 14 Jan, 2013” . Some religious leaders like, Swami Bharati was sent to jail making a hate speech. The president of Hindu DevalayaParirakshanaSamithi, a committee fighting for protection of Hindu temples, has been charged with promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, language and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony.”. Bharati on Sunday night in Srisailam town of Kurnool district being had allegedly made a venomous speech against the Muslim community while addressing a rally in the city on Jan 8, got arrest by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of Hyderabad.”. Thus religions control the minds of the people, “as Cases were hooked against him in Mir Chowk and Dabeerpura police stations in the old city on the complaints lodged by some organizations including MajlisBachaoTehrcek (MBT) and Human Awakening Society, an NGO as
Bharatiwas alleged that Bharati made an inflammatory speech aired on some television channels to create communal disturbances in Hyderabad. He had made the remarks at a rally which was organised to condemn Majhs-e-IttehadulMuslimeen (MIM) leader AkbaruddinOwaisi’s hate speech against Hindus. Owaisi was arrested last week.”Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other rightwing Hindu groups have condemned Bharati's arrest. They alleged that he was arrested on Sankranti day when he had gone to the pilgrim town of Srisailain for performing some rituals.”

6.7. Contemporary Religious Thinkers.

I now analyse some representative views on religion. Encounter the Enlightened’ is one such book, detailing how the force of logic plays a crucial role in influencing people. SadhguruJaggiVasudev, writer of the book, is a profound mystic of our time. He believes that there is a science behind spiritual science. Experience of God which is absolute truth cannot be shared. If you need to experience Grace, your vessel has to become totally empty.’’, the web of bondage is constantly created only by the way you think and feel. You are limited by your sense perception. God is inner realization not outer manifestation; see the powerful quote, “Budha spent all his life demolishing all Gods. The moment he left, people made him into God…. love cannot be broken; promises can be broken”.

God according to Sad guru is ‘pure love’…. ‘if you want to make an investment out of it, love will vanish and ‘extraction’ will remain, you lost love and lost joy in the process. Talking about karma yoga, he says, if the body is used for growth, if the mind and intelligence are used, it is called gyana yoga. If emotion, devotion and love are used, it is called bhakti yoga and if you transform your energies and growth, it is called kriya yoga. Hence difficult concepts are explained in a simple way.

Religions are based either on mystery or myth; fundamental goal of the spiritual path is, when a person experientially realizes that, everything is transient. He is not stuck to anything, and then he can withdraw from everything. Thus Sad guru analyses all divine concepts in a logical way.
Sad guru’s teachings are outpouring of his inner being and care little for scholarly views. He writes, ‘where have I come from?’ Where do I go hence? I stumbled with confusion. He examined critically the delusion and distortion of mind.

6.7.1. **The God Hypothesis.**

God can be given any meaning. God is benevolent, God is malignant. God is kind, God is cruel. God is present, God is absent. God is energy. Religion is based on faith, not on knowledge. Behind anything, that our mind cannot grasp. God is superhuman and supernatural.

Arguments for God’s existence. (Richard Dawkins)

(i) Nothing moves without a prior remover.

(ii) Nothing is caused by itself.

(iii) Properties, normally, ascribed to God: omnipotence, omniscience, creativity.

(iv) God loves you. How would one become heartless?

(v) God is necessary for us to be good. Does it mean that, people are good only, because they fear punishment? One can continue to be good without God’s /divine surveillance.

The contrary view is that religion poisons everything. Chritopher Hitchens, presents a mock heroic picture of God, and writes, why, if God was the creator of all things, were we supposed to praise him. If Jesus could heal a blind person, then why not heal blindness. He is dismayed at the prospect of the world turning to be a graveyard because of intense religious fight.

The most important book about God in our times is ‘How to know God’ by Deepak Chopra. To him, God isn’t a process, God is process. He settles all our doubts. He is infinite intelligence. He represents empathy, insight, tolerance, forgiveness, reverence and compassion.

Every person is entitled to some version of God. In all religions, God is described as infinite and unbounded which creates huge problems. He transcends nature. God as protector; peace, redeemer, creator, pure being.
God has all the power. God is manipulating. God is calm, understanding, meditative, detached. God as redeemer has following qualities:

Understanding

Tolerant

Forgiving

Non-judgmental

Inclusive

God has following power:

Generous

Control over space and time, God is unborn

Undying,

Unchanging,

Unmanifest,

Intangible,

Invisible,

Infinite,

God - belief creates reality.

Deepak Chopra explores the above way to experience God. He charts a fascinating course as he explores mysticism, ecstasy, telepathy and multiple personality.

God does not matter. Deepak Chopra forwards reasons as to way we need no God. He writes, “We don’t need new religions, better scriptures, more inspiring testimony to God’s greatness; you can’t rebuild God who never existed”.

109
‘The God delusion’, a slogan from a band of militant atheists who are enemies of
faith. Dawkins is proud to be intolerant. Dawkins proposes spiritual nihilism, but, Deepak
Chopra justifies God. ….. (Like the night bird gazing at the passing moon, o! my beloved,
comeback. Faith must be saved, and it is to survive, can only be restored through a deeper
exploration of the mystery of existence.

‘Conversations with God’, written by Neale Donald Welsch, deals with the
universal truths of the highest order. Welsch mystifies saying, many aspects of the
physical, non-physical and the metaphysical. He talks imaginatively to God with clarity,
and is bestowed with extraordinary insight. He talks about controlling mind, because
creative thoughts help one to develop peace of mind and reactive thoughts, envy, jealousy
ruin people.

Welsch strongly opined that, we are all ‘mental lepers’, thing everything
negatively. Think positive and you become that. Defining religion, Welsch observes that it
is religion which has burdened man with worries about God’s anger, to have intermediary
to reach God. It is pity that we have created ‘power hungry God’, who does not like to
share power but exercise it, God is absolute power which demands absolute nothing. His
conversation with God and God’s replies from an interesting paradigm.

God’s answers: patience, all good things come to those who wait …when you want
something, give it away. You will no longer be ‘wanting it’. Present time is witnessing
confusion in accepting god and religious texts as sacred. Many thinkers make a distinction
between divinity and spirituality. Divinity to them is a source of mobility and inspiration
for all time to come. God is a symbol of enlightenment. The practitioner
emphasizing spirituality, prescribe a code of conduct for leading a life of virtue and
preaching peace and amity among all. Here, I like to cite the examples of His – Holiness
Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, who propounded a philosophy of “The art of living”. He has provided
hope for many people who struggle for daily living. His language is to touch the common
people with rare show of simplicities showed a clear understanding of the principles of
truth and nonviolence. And at the same time protesting social evils, such as
untouchability, gender disparity. His smile could cheer majority of the flowers and his kind
look quickly drew many towards his great charm. His simple saying is to face problems of
life with courage and share each other’s miseries that can never break them. While
explaining various difficult ideas like creation and consciousness, he stated with such joys
that everybody understood it. He could be accepted by all, round the world because of his
plain English and sense of humour. ‘Smile’ continuously worked as a metaphor to cure all
the problems of the existence. He is very much in love with the idea of love, and human
dignity. He rushes to any pocket of violence and tries to restore peace, in other words, his
preaching new type of religion where he could rid people of stress and inspires them with
happiness. He gave relive to all, where he is making a difference from the conventional
religious preachers. His thought about the world as a family removes all the barriers and
biases from narrowly following any specific tenet of religion. He became a new incarnate
in the sense that, he honoured all cultures and religious traditions.

We see a very disturbing trend in religion these days. There is concern about the
spread of religious phanaticism and fundamentalism in society which had removed the
positive aspects of religion. In this process religion was being driven out of social life.
There is an attempt to snub mysteries, miracles and magic’s as subjects of superstition.
Marx has stated that the abolition of religion was necessary for happiness of people. The
world of science opened new challenges to religion. AT this critical point religion is
destined to disappear, or there was something eternal about its role in maintaining peace in
the society. Now a day’s people are fighting for their religious identities. The “clash of
civilization” thesis is propounded by both the militant Mohemedan and Christian
followers. On the contrary public visibility of religious celebration is on the rise. If
religion survives today whether as personal faith or defender of human rights, it is due to
impact of the language for persuading or rejecting, what about the case might be.

On the contrary, Osho, uses story- telling method, mostly citing examples from
Upanishad, give a new interpretation of religious thinking. He assigns a great role to
meditation. By deep thinking, one can develop power of concentration and power of
fusion; getting calmness and teaches us to be engaged in daily work joyfully. He therefore
stresses upon, using the lessons of the subconscious mind or facing the hard realities of
everyday life. So, according to him, we both need materialism and mysticism. Falling in
love in the language of religion is the ability to share without demanding anything in
return; the tree and fire images justify these. In many scriptures the stories of nectar and
poison belong to the same almighty. These experiences clearly indicate that there is a
greater understanding of the cycles of birth, death and growth, which according to Osho is
a real religious experience. Religion is a source of knowledge. Osho makes alive the debates of “nature and nurture”, because he believes in the power of intuition, which helps us to think things beyond our normal limits of understanding. He suggested that through analysis and reasoning, one can understand the ultimate truth. He gives a beautiful analogy, 'spiritual growth means we stop moving in circle and remain centered'; learn to remain calm in all situations. He is bit of mystic and in away logical and sometimes contradictory, “if I cannot sing when there is death, then I cannot sing in life because is a continuous death.’

Osho, like many, understands the nature symbolism; “River stands for movement and for flower, there is no imitation, no competition and no jealousy, the red flower is just red and happy being red”. This is a great lesson to man. He is a great optimist. He introduces laughter to religion. A “laughing Buddha” is an example of eternal happiness. Osho, in his book, “A cup of tea” writes how eyes filled with tears of love can see God. He is not passionate about GOD, but about existence.

Any reading of Osho, is a challenge to our mind. He looks at religion, of the point of view of changing one’s life style. His images, analogy, wit and suggestions are sources of great wisdom in the world of religion.

6.8. Conclusion.

Chapter –6, is concerned with religion and raises some interesting questions of how language is used to influence the ways in which people think and persuades people for particular point of view. The chapter also looks at the kind of language choices like metaphor, and other linguistic elements the writer uses to construct the world around us. The positive and negative aspects of religion are discussed through extracts and quotes, from eminent writers. Statements and comments are deconstructed to reveal hate-ideologies, of different religious groups.