

An Inquiry into Knowledge of the Existence

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Abstract: *While at the same time we accept the existence of a supreme power that controls us, we are divided on opinions and understandings of that entity. That entity called here as “Divine supreme” is the basis of all religions, no matter whatever way it is conceived symbolically or picturesquely. It is the differences in this understanding that unifies people as well as divides. The knowledge of existence of the Divine supreme is time immemorial. Beyond what is possible for man’s capability and control was attributed to a power beyond us. The notion of supernatural in ancient societies is refined as Divine supreme in modern society. Men often wonder how to define it. How to establish its presence? Yet everybody take some private-time to worship its glory in the form of prayer. Institutionalized religions have grown to regimentation by chalking out time, place, mandatory attendance and prepared prayers for worship whereas open religions are flexible on the time, place and modalities of worship. Often there is the presence of full time intermediaries called priests who extend worship services for others. “Knowledge of Existence” here refers to our understandings of the presence of Divine supreme. This paper is an attempt to systematize our inquiry on the knowledge of Existence. Four major approaches are discussed. A holistic application of these approaches can result in improved understanding of the Divine supreme.*

Keywords: Existence, Divine supreme, Religion, Worship, Articulation, Perception

1. Introduction

Our knowledge of “Existence” of “Divine supreme” is time immemorial. Beyond what is possible for man’s capability and control was attributed to a power that pervades everywhere and man started to worship it. In the modern parlance it is omnipresent and omnipotent. Ironically enough, we fail to notice the presence of the Existence and tend to think that he dwells in worship places. Saints believe that he is present in every living being and all objects of his creation – animals, nature, whatsoever – reveal his presence. Imagine the wings of a butterfly or the sky during sunset at the beach. Even the most talented painter cannot picture a marvel just as this. Is it all by chance or is it the power of nature, sounds a sensible question here. The dullest among animals has also an excellent camouflage to provide it security and it has ways to secure its prey. From this to the mystery of presence of living beings similar to humans in other unseen planets still stands as a realistic probability. Religions use images or symbols to represent this divine power in varying forms. According to ancient texts, Hinduism in India conceives three different deities for creation, maintenance and annihilation. In this context when we use the word “Existence” it stands to unify all to represent the only one called here as “Divine supreme”.

2. Religion, Faith and Morals

Religion plays an important role in the lives of every individual. We are born into a religion, preserve faith in it and follow its etiquette. Among the various etiquette that religion demands is prayer and worship. Worship has two components namely prayer and rituals. Communicating with the Divine supreme is often known by name as prayer. Prayer usually takes the form of praises describing the glory and elegance as well as admitting the existence of the supreme, and self as a product under supreme control of the divine. Two questions arise here. Why praise the God? Why should he like it? Usually verses are sung to describe each and every of his charm. It is expected that in this process the

Divine supreme realize that the devotee has almost closely discovered him and his presence. In other words the Divine supreme likes to remain invisible, but makes his presence felt everywhere and in everything. Only those who look for him will find him. Just for instance, he comes in front of you almost every day in the form of food. But you fail to realize that. Food is basic to survival of life and virtually all our endeavour boils down to satisfy this requirement. The entire economy revolves around production and distribution, work, job, earnings and ultimately food is at the bottom most of motives for fulfilment. On the contrary, all problems spring from poverty – an absolute deprivation of food. For other living forms such as animals, food itself is the primary instinct, sex is second and sleep is third. They are limited to all these three instincts primarily.

In primitive as well as civilized societies of modern times, religion maps the conduct of the individuals in a manner that certain of his actions are moral and certain others are immoral interestingly morality as we understand in today’s parlance is mostly portrayed as interaction between sexes outside a marriage relationship that is legalized. But morals include quite a lot of messages contributing to rightful living. They are lessons to be learnt to lead a fit life. Faith connects individuals with religion and religion with morals. It is the intermediary that binds the individual to the religion and sometimes blinds him too. Looking beyond the boundaries set by ones faith, is a prerequisite to improved understanding of the Divine supreme.

3. Approaches to Understanding of Existence

Worship as a practice is time immemorial. Early days men used to worship Sun, Wind, Fire, Water, etc. and believe that they are powers which are by themselves divine and represented by a God who control them. People lived at the mercy of the rain or fire as they had little control over it. So they worshipped it as divine power as if there is somebody representing them who control it. Our understanding of the Divine is rooted in religion. All religions tells us to follow

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certain righteous way of living-right and wrong, good and evil etc.-rooted in the faith that they are the guidelines that the Divine supreme would like us to live our life. However when it comes to the image that represent the Divine supreme, we are divided. Most religions such as Hinduism, Christianity etc. use human like appearance to represent the Divine supreme because they believe he has created man in his own form. So, understandably man is a look alike of the Divine supreme. Religions like the Hinduism in India have

many numbers of images such as Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma etc. In Hinduism, Even a single one among them would be represented in a different forms depending on their stage of growth (age) such as baby, child, adult etc. represented by Krishna in Hinduism, parental role such as mother, brother (Devi as Amma, Ayyappa as brother), or even posture (Bhava), for example as Kali (anger), Bhadra (annihilator), and Lakshmi and Saraswathy (sober).

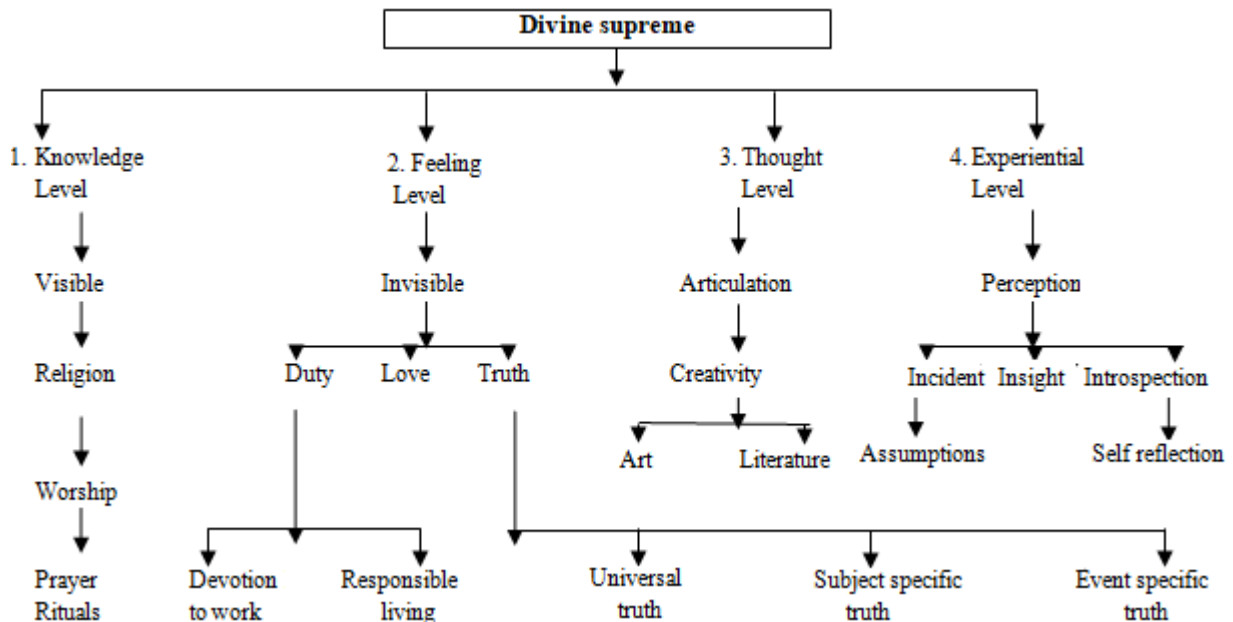


Diagram 1: Approaches to Understanding of Existence

Certain religions may not have an image to depict the Divine supreme as they believe he cannot be depicted in picture. Yet they use some symbol to connect with him. Understanding is linked to some image or what could be called the “visible”. Some form of visible expression to represent the invisible is the basis to understanding. Prayers and rituals are an integral part of worship practices and they are dictated by religion. Chanting prayers usually praising the qualities, beauty, valour, or glory are admirations in the form of prayer. The essence of it is that the Divine supreme become pleased that you recognize and admit his presence and that you are close to discovering him. The entire life is long pursuit to discover the Divine supreme. It is meant to realize his existence and discover his invisible form.

At the feeling level the divine supreme is conceived as invisible but perceived through three levels of character – Love, Truth, Duty. The expression of love is universal. It manifests in all human interactions in different forms. It is like a food that gives different taste at different times, yet there is obviously a taste that fills our heart to feel gratified. An irresistible attraction between man and woman may be biological, but it soon transforms into love and becomes psychological attraction. It quickly turns into emotions and become social, resulting in desire to live together without parting with. There is another form of love which seeks no returns. The love for all beings is absolute love when it is applied to animals, plants, river, forest and the whole environment. Love for money is greed, while love for sex is lust. Love for one’s own pleasure is selfishness while love for kin is role relationship. Whatsoever, love fills the heart

and gives meaning in all what we desire. Loosing love after you obtain what you loved is unsustainable love. Role relationships such as parent, son, brother, friend etc. are built to reinforce the stability of love in relationships. Love of Divine supreme is a sublime. It may overcome the narrow motives of prayer and elevates to a higher level of closeness with the Divine supreme. One learns to treat other individuals and objects with respect through applying love. In real life it avoids exploitation of all forms by placing superiority for others interest above self interest.

There are three forms of truth-The universal truth, the subject specific truth and event specific truth. Every incident happen based on causation, but the exact nature of the cause is often obscure. We search for cause, but perceptions deceive us and take us to erroneous guesses. Different people perceive different ways on how a certain incident has happened. Proofs are shaky too. But truth remains same always. Philosophy is the translation of the truth from abstraction to the purview of human understanding. Subject specific truth tells us the story about subjects and objects – what they are, unlike what they appear to be. It could be a watch, motor car, soil, or river. Subject specific truth reveals how it has come into the present form, its value, cost, possession, use, change, disposal, etc. unlike both the above is the universal truth. It is the oneness of all truth put together.

History says that Budha meditated under the Banyan tree to know the truth in life when he was moved by the sight of a weeping family due to a death. But eventually when he got

enlightened, he not just got the answer to this question that deeply worried him to think and meditate, but obtained answer to all questions about human existence. That truth is the universal truth. The universal truth for instance include a wide verity of questions such as why there is a rat race among people for money, why ethics are abandoned, why people dislike and hate each other, quarrel or kill. It can cover questions such as when did life begin on earth, who gave life to objects, what happens to a human life when it is departed from the body, is there somebody who controls the universe and if so where he is and who it is. It can also cover why spiritualism is above materialism to satisfy the needs of the soul. Meditation is about seeking to get answer from unknown source. This unknown source is considered as the Divine supreme.

The third aspect is Duty. What is meant by Duty? Duty is not just about responsibility in delivering ones job, but a devotion in the service no matter whatever task one is engaged. Duty applies to many aspects of life such as duty of a father or son etc. where it refers to unrewarded obligations. It is a moral responsibility. Texts say that duty is itself the Divine supreme and itself the worship, both combines. Discharging duty gives both reward and satisfaction, the reward as a means of livelihood and satisfaction as a meaning in what one is doing. Duty fulfils societal expectations and converts man into a performing unit in social life. Duty as responsible living brings discipline in life through harmony in actions. This gives the feeling that you are contributing to the purpose for which you stand for, purpose for which you are born. Detachment from work as opposed to devotion is manifestation of a sense of alienation, or loss of interest by the person who performs a work and result in deterioration of quality and output.

At the thought level, the existence of the Divine supreme is explored through articulation or self discovery of one's own potential. The pursuit for art leads to unlimited happiness and literature transforms a person as a creator. Elevating to the position of the creator the person lifts his spirit to the level of Divine supreme. Art could be music, painting or dance. Classical Indian dances known variously as Bharathanatyam, Mohiniyattom, Kuchipudy have emerged from worship turning to art. Other art forms such as Kathakali, OttanThullal, Chakyarkoothu, Koodiyattom, Theyyam, Komaram are all linked to temple and worship of deity.

We perceive the presence of the Divine supreme at the experiential level too. There are three ways by which this occurs. Some incidents in life lead us to believe that there is a super-power above all of us. Dramatic recovery of a dangerously sick person, escape unhurt miraculously from an accident, rescued by chance by a stranger from a life losing fall, unexpected wealth coming to hands, new found treasure, a fulfilling partner getting united in life etc. are all examples of few of many such incidents. Introspection is a product of self reflection. The great psychologist Sigmund Freud for instance, many of his revelations about human mind are from his own analysis of himself. Insight is inward looking but still different. It is about reading between the lines. Usually you see, but fail to observe, the so called

optical illusion. But when you see and see even more than what you see it is an insight. Insights are ideas that come through experience of discovering the inner world of things that occur around us. The whole of external world is fed into the inner self of internal world and answers emerge from clarified understandings.

4. Conclusion

Our understanding of Divine supreme referred to as "Existence" here comes from four major levels – Thought level, Feeling level, experiential level and Knowledge level. At the knowledge level we have a certain conception of Divine supreme transmitted through religion. This is basically learned information where he is believed as existing in certain forms or figure. Religion is a major vehicle for imparting this knowledge. At the feeling level, he is invisible and distinguishable through certain intangible traits such as love, truth and duty. Everything has a truth and all that innumerable truth put together is the whole body of larger truth. Pursuit for truth often tries to seek answers to the question 'what is the purpose of life of each person' the basis of which is that there is a meaning behind each creation. From birth to death is a long and inevitable journey throughout which each one is tempted to ask himself this very question "What is the purpose of my life". The increasing association of spirituality with aging point to this. At the experiential level perceptions are drawn from incidents, introspection and insights. This varies from person to person. Adding new learning to the already learnt is the outcome of this. This is a mental process free from external commands. The thought level results in articulation of one's own creativity. Art or literature, for instance stimulates the person into discovering himself. Creativity is synonymous with visualising the creator. The approach to understanding of "Existence" is complex, and both means and end reinforces the other.

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