

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN VARIOUS RELIGIONS INCLUDING SIKHISM

ARTICLE

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INTRODUCTION

In the present day, many people believe in God, which most consider to be some kind of mystical force. The ancient Egyptians first practiced monotheism. The ancient Egyptians believed in one God, the creator of the universe. The ancient Egyptians also believed in the afterlife and that their God would judge them according to their deeds in this life.

In monotheistic thought, God is usually viewed as the supreme being, creator, and principal object of monotheistic faith. In polytheistic thought, a god or a deity is "a spirit or being believed to control some part of the universe or life and often worshipped for doing so, or something that represents this spirit or being." The concept of God as the supreme spirit and the ultimate creator appears to be about 4000 years old.

Jainism

Judaism also has its roots in the ancient Near East. The Jewish people believe that one God is the creator of the universe. Judaism also teaches that there is an afterlife and that God will judge each person according to their deeds in this life. Judaism includes some of the oldest monotheistic traditions in the world. Jewish monotheism is a continuation of earlier Hebrew henotheism, the exclusive worship of the God of Israel as prescribed in the Torah and practiced at the Temple of Jerusalem. Strict monotheism emerges in Hellenistic Judaism and Rabbinical Judaism.

Christianity

In Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity describes God

ABSTRACT

Early humans worshiped various gods or spirits for certain gains, and the gods and spirits varied from region to region. The concept of monotheism is complex and nuanced. The concept of one omnipotent God as the creator exists in different major religions, including Sikhism. However, there are many similarities in the concept of God in various religions, and there are also many differences. This article focuses on the concept of God in Sikhism. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, describes God as 'Nirankar' meaning "formless", 'Akal' meaning "eternal" and 'Alakh' meaning "invisible", 'Agam' meaning "inaccessible", 'Agochar' meaning "incomprehensible". God is said to be pervading everywhere and in all beings. According to Sikhism Guru is a vehicle to realize the concept of God being everywhere and in everyone. Most important fact perhaps is that there is no concept of Angeles or of Heaven or Hell like that in Islam or Christianity.

as one God in the Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Son of God, who died for the sins of humanity and rose from the dead. The Holy Spirit is the presence and power of God in the world and in the church. The church is a community of believers who follow the teachings of Christ. Baptism is the sign of commitment and initiation into the Christian faith. The concept of sin in Christianity is important and the sin is considered as an immoral act that violates God's will and law and separates humans from God. Sin is a result of human free will and a corrupt heart that is inclined toward evil. Sin also offends and harms other people and dishonors God's name and nature. Christians believe that only God can redeem humans from sin and only through Christ.

In Christianity, 'Heaven' is often described as a place of eternal happiness, peace, and union with God, while

'Hell' is seen as a realm of punishment and suffering for those who reject God. The Bible contains many references to both Heaven and Hell, and the teachings of the Bible about life and death can be summarized by explaining about Heaven and Hell. However, the concept of Heaven and Hell is complex and can be interpreted in different ways by different people. Some Christians believe that Heaven and Hell are physical places. Some of the modern theologians believe that Heaven and Hell could be states of mind. The spatial language in Scripture used to describe Hell (and Heaven) is usually thought to be symbolic rather than geological or astrological. Instead, Hell and Heaven are ultimately thought to be spiritual rather than physical.

Islam

Islam's most fundamental concept is a strict monotheism with the rejection of any lesser gods. God is described as the One, the Eternal, the Absolute; He begot no one, nor is He begotten, and no one is equivalent to Him. Muslims deny the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and divinity of Jesus, comparing it to polytheism. In Islam, God is beyond all comprehension and does not resemble any of his creations in any way. In Islam, the message of God is carried by angels to 124,000 messengers, starting with Adam and concluding with Muhammad. God is described and referred in the Quran by certain names or attributes, the most common being Al-Rahman, meaning "Most Compassionate," and Al-Rahim, meaning "Most Merciful."

Akhirah is the word Muslims use to refer to life after death. Belief in an afterlife encourages Muslims to take responsibility for their actions. They know God will hold them accountable and reward or punish them accordingly. When a person dies, their soul is said to be taken by Azrail, the Angel of Death. God sends two angels to question the waiting soul. If the questions are answered correctly, the good soul then sleeps during Barzakh. If the questions are not answered correctly, the soul is tormented by angels, known as punishment of the grave. Most Muslims believe that after death, the soul will enter Barzakh, a state of waiting until the Day of Judgement.

There is a strong concept of Heaven and Hell in Islam. Heaven is described in the Qur'an as a beautiful garden. Jannah is Paradise, where those who have been good go. It is described in the Quran as a "garden of pleasure". Those who obey the rules Allah (God) set are worthy of

heaven. Muslims believe that they will be sent to Hell if they reject the teachings of the Quran or take no responsibility for their actions. Either of these would mean that they had failed Allah's test.

Hinduism

God in Hinduism is viewed differently by diverse strands of the religion, with most Hindus having faith in a supreme reality (Brahman) that can be manifested in numerous chosen deities. Thus, the religion is sometimes characterized as Polymorphic Monotheism. Henotheism is the belief and worship of a single god at a time while accepting the validity of worshipping other deities. Monolatry is the belief in a single deity worthy of worship while accepting the existence of other deities. Brahman is also commonly understood as the Trimurti – three gods with three key functions: (1) Brahma – the source of all creation. (2) Vishnu – responsible for keeping all good things on Earth and bringing harmony when needed. (3) Shiva – assists in the creation of new things, as some things must end for others to begin. In Hinduism, the atman (soul) of each of us may also hold a spark of Brahman. For most Hindus, Brahman is present in the lives of all living things. The concept of reincarnation is very prevalent in Hinduism, and 'Karma' is the good or bad deeds done by beings that are said to result in how one is incarnated in new life after death.

As per Wikipedia in Jainism, godliness is said to be the inherent quality of every soul. This quality, however, is subdued by the soul's association with karmic matter. All souls who have achieved the natural state of infinite bliss, infinite knowledge (*kevala jnana*), infinite power, and infinite perception are regarded as God in Jainism. Jainism rejects the idea of a creator deity responsible for this universe's manifestation, creation, or maintenance. Instead, souls (in this case, *devis* or *devas*) who have reached Heaven for their merits and deeds influence the Universe for a fixed period until they undergo reincarnation and continue the cycle of enlightenment. According to Jain doctrine, the universe and its constituents (soul, matter, space, time, and principles of motion) have always existed. All constituents and actions are governed by universal natural laws and a "perfect soul" (an immaterial entity that cannot create or affect a material entity like the universe).

Buddhism

Buddhism, often considered a spiritual philosophy, places great emphasis on the complete alleviation of suffering, known as nirvana. The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, commonly known as the Buddha, refrained from presenting any specific view on creation, stating that questions concerning the origin of the world were essentially valueless. Although Lord Buddha did not explicitly deny the existence of God, he advocated that individuals could attain enlightenment through personal effort, adherence to a code of conduct, and mental discipline. The teachings in Buddhism revolve around the understanding of suffering and the pursuit of enlightenment.

There have been and presently are many other preachers and religious strands that describe God in different ways; some call it pure love, while others call it the incorporeal soul with the maximum degree of spiritual qualities such as peace and love.

Sikhism

In some ways, the concept of God in Sikhism has some similarities to that of other religions. However, the concept differs in many other ways.

As per Guru Nanak (the 1st Guru of the Sikhs), *God is inaccessible and incomprehensible (beyond perception), with no form or feature.*

ਅਗਮ ਅਗੋਚਰੁ ਰੂਪੁ ਨ ਰੇਖਿਆ ॥

Agam agochar rūp na rekhāṁā.

AGGS, M 1, p 838.

The preamble of the Sikh holy scripture, Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) is as follows:

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ

ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ AGGS, page 1.

Ikᵒaᵒnᵒkār saᵒ nām kartā purakhᵒ nirbhāᵒo nirvair akāl mūraᵒ ajūnī saibhāᵒn gur parsād.

One God is a true reality, a creative being who is without fear or enmity, and He is Beyond Birth and Self-Existent. The knowledge of God is bestowed by the Guru.

ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚੁ ॥

ਰੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 1. p 1.

Āᵒ sachᵒ jugāᵒ sachᵒ.

Hai bhī sachᵒ Nānak hosī bhī sachᵒ. ||1||

His existence is True from the Primal Beginning and throughout the Ages.

He is True Here and Now and O Nanak, will Always be True.

||1||

The word 'True' here means something authentic/real.

God is considered limitless, profound, all-powerful, all-knowing and merciful. Words "ਬੇਅੰਤ, ਬੇਅੰਤਿ, ਬੇਅੰਤੁ, ਬੇਅੰਤਾ" occur close to 100 times in the AGGS and mean infinite or endless or limitless. Words "ਅਥਾਹ, ਅਥਾਰਾ, ਅਥਾਹਿਓ, ਅਥਾਰੁ, ਅਥਾਰੇ" occur 59 times and it means unfathomable, immeasurable. Words "ਸਮਰਥੰ, ਸੰਮ੍ਥ, ਸੰਮ੍ਥੁ, ਸਮ੍ਥੁ, ਸਮ੍ਥ, ਸਮਰਥਹ, ਸਮਰਥਾ, ਸਮਰਥੇ, ਸਮਰਥੇ, ਸਮਰਥੇਹੰ, ਸਮਰਾਥ, ਸਮਰਾਥਾ, ਸੰਮ੍ਥ, ਸੰਮ੍ਥੁ" occur 46 times and mean capable or all-powerful. Words "ਸੁਜਾਣ, ਸੁਜਾਣਿ, ਸੁਜਾਣੁ, ਸੁਜਾਣਾ, ਸੁਜਾਣਿਆ, ਸੁਜਾਣੀ, ਸੁਜਾਣੀਐ, ਸੁਜਾਣੇ, ਸੁਜਾਣ" occur 83 times and mean all-knowing.

Words like "ਕਿਰਪੰਗਨਾ, ਕਿਰਪੰਤ, ਕਿਰਪਨ, ਕਿਰਪਾਈ, ਕਿਰਪਾਏ, ਕਿਰਪਾਸ, ਕਿਰਪਾਧਿ, ਕਿਰਪਾਨ, ਕਿਰਪਾਨਦ, ਕਿਰਪਾਰੀਆ, ਕਿਰਪਾਲ, ਕਿਰਪਾਲਿ, ਕਿਰਪਾਲੁ, ਕਿਰਪਾਲਾ, ਕਿਰਪਾਲੇ, ਕਿਰਪਾਵਤ, ਕਿਰਪੀਸ, ਕਿਰਪੇਨ, ਕਿਰਪੈਨ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਣੇ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਨ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਫਾ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਲੇ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਨਿ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਰ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਰਾ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲਿ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲੁ, ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲਾ, ਦਇਆਰ, ਦਇਆਰੁ, ਦਇਆਰਾ, ਦਇਆਲ, ਦਇਆਲਿ, ਦਇਆਲੁ, ਦਇਆਲੰ, ਦਇਆਲਾ, ਦਇਆਲੀ, ਦਇਆਲੈ" occur many times in the AGGS and mean 'merciful or compassionate'.

ਆਪੇ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਦਇਆਲੁ ਹੈ ਆਪੇ ਦੇਇ ਬੁਝਾਇ ॥

Āpe parabhū ᵒaᵒāᵒl hai āpe ᵒeᵒe bujhāᵒe.

God Himself is Merciful, He Himself bestows understanding.

AGGS, M 3, p 37.

ਹੁਕਮੈ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਹੁਕਮ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥

Hukmai andar sabhᵒ ko bāhar hukam na koᵒe. *Everything is subject to His Command/Laws; nothing is outside it.*

AGGS, M 1, p 1.

ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ ॥

ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੇ ਮੰਦੇ ॥੧॥

Aval alah nūr upāᵒāᵒa kudratᵒ ke sabhᵒ bande.

Ēk nūr ᵒe sabhᵒ jag upjiᵒā kaᵒun bhale ko mande. ||1|| *In the beginning, God infused the light (of life) (to create*

life) thus, all human beings are his creation. The entire creation has come out of one light. So, who is good, and who is bad? ||1||

AGGS, Kabir, p 1349.

As per the above statement, all human beings are God's creation; thus, there is no room for discrimination.

In almost all religious strands that originated from the Indian subcontinent, there exists the concept of reincarnation (of being reborn after death) and of Karma, which means that our deeds during this life will determine our rebirth. This concept is accepted in Sikhism. However, in Sikhism, there is a concept of ending the cycle reincarnation with the right spiritual practice.

ਸਚੀ ਕਾਰੈ ਸਚੁ ਮਿਲੈ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਪਲੈ ਪਾਇ ॥

ਸੇ ਨਰੁ ਜੰਮੈ ਨਾ ਮਰੈ ਨਾ ਆਵੈ ਨਾ ਜਾਇ ॥

Sachī kārai sach milai gurmat palai pā^oe.

So nar jammai nā marai nā āvai nā jā^oe.

By true actions (good deeds) through the Guru's teachings, the True One (God) is met, and then one is not subject to birth and death, and the coming and going through reincarnation ends.

AGGS, M 1, p 19.

DISCUSSION

Except for some similarities, the concept of God is somewhat unique in every religion. In this paper, I have discussed the concept as noted in the Sikh scripture, the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (also described as Adi Granth). Concepts from other religions are also presented for comparison.

CONCLUSIONS

In Sikhism, God is noted to be that mystical force that has always existed and will always exist, and it is the source of everything and permeates everything and every being. God is invisible, inaccessible, incomprehensible, infinite/limitless, all-powerful, all-knowing, benevolent, and without malice. Although there is some mention of heaven and hell in the AGGS, it mostly is about the human condition and is not about that concept of Heaven, Hell, and angels that exists in Christianity and Islam, where your soul is assigned to after death. However, the concept of reincarnation, which is a core philosophy of most religious thoughts that originated in the Indian subcontinent, is accepted. According to Sikh

philosophy, the universe works according to God's command/laws. The aim of human life is to understand all this and to live a truthful life with honest work ethics and practices that include the service of others. We are guided to control lust, anger, greed, attachment, and ego/vain behavior. Meditation by remembering God is considered very helpful with spiritual goals and in achieving a blissful mental state of being one with God.

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