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RELIGIOUS CONVERSION: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

CONVERSIÓN RELIGIOSA: UNA NUEVA PERSPECTIVA

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INFORMACIÓN DEL ARTÍCULO	ABSTRACT/RESUMEN
<p>Recibido el: 31/07/2023 Aceptado el: 30/08/2023</p> <p>Keywords: Metanoia, religious conversion, self-realization, (in)authentic life, revelation, ontical existence</p> <p>Palabras clave: Metanoia, conversión religiosa, autorrealización, vida (in)auténtica, revelación, existencia óptica</p>	<p>Abstract: In the world of philosophy, the concept of 'religious conversion' is clearly visible to us under philosophy of religion, where the meaning of religious conversion is taken from self-realization, change of heart, life transformation and attainment of supernatural or divine life etc. But the word conversion itself is confusing and ambiguous. The reason is that on the one hand, where in the world of philosophy, its meaning is taken in the context of self-realization and life transformation, on the other hand, it is also synonymous with 'proselytization', which means leaving one religion and accepting another. Various religious philosophers have presented appropriate discussion on this subject from time to time, especially Western philosophers William James and J.B. Pratt have presented a detailed discussion of this concept. However, in this context, almost all philosophers support the definition of religious conversion given by William James, according to which - "Religious conversion is indicated by various terms such as revival, receiving grace, permission of religion, obtaining assurance, etc." Therefore, it also takes the meaning of religious conversion in same term. It is worth mentioning that various religious philosophers and theologians have mentioned the factors which induce religious conversion in different ways, after studying which some such questions arise in front of us, the answers of which are being tried through this research paper. Thus, the aim of this research paper is finding some fresh approaches in new perspective.</p> <p>Resumen: En el mundo de la filosofía, el concepto de 'conversión religiosa' es claramente visible para nosotros bajo la filosofía de la religión, donde el significado de la conversión religiosa se toma de la autorrealización, el</p>



	<p>cambio de corazón, la transformación de la vida y el logro de la vida sobrenatural o divina, etc. Pero la palabra conversión en sí es confusa y ambigua. La razón es que, por un lado, donde en el mundo de la filosofía, su significado se toma en el contexto de la autorrealización y la transformación de la vida, por otro lado, también es sinónimo de 'proselitismo', lo que significa abandonar una religión. y aceptando a otro. Varios filósofos religiosos han presentado discusiones apropiadas sobre este tema de vez en cuando, especialmente los filósofos occidentales William James y J.B. Pratt han presentado una discusión detallada de este concepto. Sin embargo, en este contexto, casi todos los filósofos apoyan la definición de conversión religiosa dada por William James, según la cual - "La conversión religiosa se indica mediante varios términos tales como reavivamiento, recibir gracia, permiso de la religión, obtener seguridad, etc." Por lo tanto, también toma el significado de conversión religiosa en el mismo término. Vale la pena mencionar que varios filósofos y teólogos religiosos han mencionado los factores que inducen la conversión religiosa de diferentes maneras, luego de estudiar cuáles de estas preguntas surgen frente a nosotros, cuyas respuestas se intentan a través de este trabajo de investigación. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este trabajo de investigación es encontrar algunos enfoques nuevos en una nueva perspectiva.</p>
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Introduction

After studying the concept of religious conversion, I found that there is a lot of work left on this subject, especially from the Indian perspective. Whatever work has been done on this subject, in fact, only the description of the opinion presented by the Western philosophers is visible. Therefore, it seems necessary that keeping the concept of religious change in a new perspective, its critical study should be presented. Focusing on the above opinion, in the core of this paper some important points related to the concept of religious change are being underlined in the form of questions and their answers. Considering this, an attempt will be made to gain knowledge of some new aspects related to this concept.

In philosophy, we can clearly see the concept of religious conversion under philosophy of religion, where religious conversion is taken to mean soul realization, heart transformation, life transformation and attainment of supernatural or divine life, etc. To give more confirmation to this concept of 'religious conversion', William James explains the conversion in his book 'Variety of religious experience' very briefly "Conversion may mean a rebirth, regeneration transformation from an unorganized to organized and organized integrated life conversion is that experience of assurance in which a self-

hitherto divided and unhappy becomes unified with firmer hold upon religious realities.” (James, 1911, p. 189)

The meaning of religious change is 'Rebirth' ('Dvija' in Hindi), restoration, change from disorganized life to systematic and integrated life, orientation towards advanced (sublimated) social life from indifference or neutrality, understanding life as meaningful and valuable, going beyond merely worrying level to complete and prosperous 'Folk-life' or 'Practical living'. Religious change calls for past power. Also, a similar conversion is mentioned by J. B. Pratt in “Religious Consciousness”. In his words, "The transformation of the natural man into the 'new soul' is possible, it happens." (Pratt, 1924, p.160)

It is noteworthy that Treadwell Walden (1896) has used the term *Metanoia* in the context of religious conversion. “Metanoia” is a Greek word made up of two words “Meta” + “Noew”. Meta means “After / Beyond” or “to think” and “Noew” means “Mind and Intelligence”. Thus T. Walden has used the term Metanoia for changing your mind or to think Intelligently, which refers to the change in our thoughts.

Symptoms and factors of religious change

Various religious Philosophers and Theologians have mentioned in different ways the factors that induce religious conversion, for example, a person experiencing religious conversion should have a sense of his own incompleteness, insignificance or inferiority and should have ego or self-superiority and according to Professor Luba (1896, p. 309) “The feeling unholiness, of moral imperfection, of sin, to use the technical word, accompanied by the yearning after the peace of unity.”

The person who is eager for religious change has two things in his mind, the present imperfection or sin that he wants to avoid, and the second thing that he wants to avoid. In this context, we can refer to the following statement of Starbuck quoted by William James "To begin candidate for conversion: First the present incompleteness or wrongness, The ‘Sin’ which he is eager to escape from; and second the positive idea which he longs to compass.” (1911, p. 209) What lives in his mind is the emotional ideal that he wants to imbibe. with, there are two things in the mind of the in this way, William James gave a special place to the functioning of the unconscious mind. It was also said

that in religious conversion, there is a sudden mutation in a person by the past truth. In his word - "*A Mutation of life as it through a transcendent reality*". (Masih, 2011, p. 341) This view is also supported by Starbuck. According to him- "A process of Struggling away from sin rather than of striving towards righteousness." (Starbuck, 1899, p. 64)

Again, some religious philosophers believe that a person oriented towards religious change should have curiosity about his existence, aspiration to know and understand the deep secrets like 'कोऽहं' and 'कस्त्वम्' in Hindi text which means 'Who am I'. In this context, according to some *Dharmacharyas* (PRIEST), religious change is not possible in the absence of God's grace, therefore, after worshipping God in such a person, some questions arise before us, such as:

- Is religious change not possible in the life of an atheist?
- Is it possible to experience religious conversion in people who are attached to any kind of emotional ideal?
- Is it possible to experience religious conversion even in people who lead an ordinary practical life and are completely detached from any kind of philosophical contemplation and curiosity about esoteric secrets?
- Can't a person satisfied with his life's work also get the feeling of religious transformation?
- And what can be done in ordinary practical life for a person who has experienced religious conversion? Is it possible to return?

In fact, a detailed research work is needed to answer these questions, so that this subject can be given completeness, but according to me, to some extent, we can find the answers to these questions in the philosophical thoughts based on other subjects of philosophy, especially in the thoughts of the famous existential philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, and Martin Heidegger.

Like our first two questions that, *is religious conversion not possible in the lives of atheists?* and, *is it possible to experience religious conversion in individuals separated from any kind of affective norm?*, we can find the answer of these two questions in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, where he presents the "*Three Stages of Existence*."

(2004, p. 156) According to Kierkegaard, there are three existential options that can be present before a human being:

- (1) Emotional status
- (2) Moral status
- (3) Religious status.

We all know that sensual pleasure is momentary and temporary. So later doubts arise in the mind about such pleasure. And in the end this type of doubt generates despair. This despair compels man to go from emotional state to moral state. It is noteworthy that this situation equally affects the life of all human beings. It seems necessary to quote the thoughts of William James in this context, whether the person is a theist or an atheist. According to him "Some person for instance never are and possibly never under any circumstances could be converted. Religious ideas cannot become the centre of their spiritual energy." (James, 1911, p. 206)

In this way, we get the answer to our first question that the reasons which are responsible for triggering the feeling of religious change in the life of a theist person, the same reasons can also make an atheist person oriented towards religious change, that is, the feeling of religious change is possible in the life of an atheist person. In this context, it is also necessary to mention the following statement of Dr. Leuba, quoted by William James (1911) according to that "Conversion which are purely ethical containing as recorded no theological belief whatever." (p. 208)

Kierkegaard was not satisfied with the moral status of man either. According to him, it is a situation of duality between 'Ideal' and 'Reality'. The ideals of morality are abstract, which are difficult to implement in practice, in special circumstances it is difficult to decide which action is moral or unethical. This failure of rules also creates a despair in the human mind. A higher position is needed to remedy this gloom in the moral situation. Which is a religious position. It is worth mentioning here that the religious position propounded by Kierkegaard is completely different from the generally prevalent religious position. Generally, in modern life what man gives the name of righteousness is not different from morality. Here the meaning of religion is taken from some basic rules and ideals and living according to them is given the noun of righteousness. But according to

Kierkegaard this outer shell of righteousness is not the real righteousness. Real religiosity is the inner feeling of religion in which one transcends all institutional, moral, or religious injunctions. According to Kierkegaard, this is the level of intense faith where all kinds of religious orders become insignificant for the human being. This is the situation of religious change where the feeling of despondency towards social and moral life and the duality of reality and ideal underlying them motivates our heart and conscience to accept a new change. Thus, the feeling of religious change is possible in the life of a person who believes in real life separated from any kind of emotional ideal.

Similarly, we find the answer to the third question in the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1927). In his philosophy, considering the life of a person who lives an ordinary practical life, completely detached from any kind of philosophical contemplation and curiosity of esoteric secrets, he called 'Inauthentic Existence' (Steeves, 1997) for it, considering it to be the main characteristic of "Empty Curiosity". According to Heidegger, this type of person lives an artificial life away from humanity. In this, that person also gets temporary satisfaction, and he also thinks himself safe and secure, but this is his "Ontical Existence" in which his relationship with persons and things remains, but due to human existence "Ontological Possibilities" definitely exist in him. If these existential possibilities are awakened If given, we can easily move from an unauthentic life to an authentic life, that is, we can achieve a state of religious transformation. That is, one can attain the stage of religious transformation.

In this regard, we render the opinion of Shankaracharya in Indian philosophy. Commenting on the first sutra of the Shankaracharya's "*Brahmasutra Bhashya*" (Basu, 1952, p. 25) which is "*Athato Brahma Jigyasa*" (means- '*Now is the time to inquire about the Absolute Truth*') he writes that the curiosity about Brahman can be awakened in a person who is neither completely knowledgeable nor completely ignorant. Therefore, it is also clear from this that religious conversion is also possible even for an ordinary person who is completely beyond any kind of philosophical thinking and curiosity about esoteric secrets.

Again, our third question is: *can a person who is satisfied with his life's work also get the feeling of religious change?* He finds satisfaction and tries to do it. The constant

effort to make his satisfaction more satisfied brings him closer to the feeling of religious conversion. The famous psychologist Starbuck has given some examples to explain the conceptual or Volitional type of Conversion, the first example of which is a runner- "An athlete ... sometimes awakens to an understanding of the fine points of the game and to the read enjoyment of it, just as the converted awakens to an appreciate to install actions of religion." (Starbuck,1899, p. 64)

Thus, in the life of a person who is satisfied with his life's work, sometime there must be a moment where he finds himself in the extreme state of satisfaction and realization of the Ultimate Reality becomes possible. This is the stage of religious conversion.

Finally, our last question is *whether it is possible for a person who has experienced conversion to return to normal practical life?* Before answering this question, it seems necessary to clarify the meaning of the word "ordinary practical life". It is notable that here the meaning of ordinary practical life is not the daily activities or personal tasks of a person, but his behavior by which he discharges each of his tasks. It is clear from the above explanation of religious conversion that there is a radical change in the life of a person who has converted to religion. In fact, there has been a specific discussion of every meaning of change of religion, whether it is in the context of change of heart, change of conscience or mental and spiritual change, therefore it is natural for human behaviour to change after experiencing this mystery. After all, because of change in behaviour, the life of a man never remains normal, but he becomes somewhere becomes more specific and systematic. William James has described this situation in his book that "Conversion is not the putting in a patch of holiness: but with the to convert holiness is woven into all his power, principles and practice He is a new Man, Creature". (James,1911, p. 228)

Therefore, after the experience of change of religion, a person from his ordinary practical life attains a far better state, due to which there is no point in returning to normal life does not remain the same.

Conclusion

It is clearly visible in the light of various references presented in the above research paper that the concept of religious conversion is very wide and universal which affects all types of people equally, no matter what kind of conduct, thought, behaviour, work, and field that person may be related to. At the same time, while touching the ground of psychology and ethics, it also provides solace to our intellectual appetites and due to which its importance is revealed more.

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