A Study on the Concept of Trinity in Christianity and Hinduism

Abu Sayem Siddiquee
Department of Philosophy, B.H.College, Howly

To make an honest and impartial comparison is really a very hard task in the field of comparative religion. Because the study of comparative religion needs a through and an all inclusive analysis about the different religions of the world. In spite of this in the present paper an attempt has been made to focus some light on the concept of Trinity that appears in two major religions viz. Hinduism and Christianity. Here the Hinduism is the world's most ancient religion and Christianity is the largest religion of the world. In Christianity, the Holy Trinity consists of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit while in Hinduism, the concept is analogous to Trimurti. Another subject that can be reflected in these religions is the concept of afterlife. Overall, the main similarities between Hinduism and Christianity are typical of the similarities between Eastern and Western religions. Hinduism and Christianity both present a Trinitarian view of God. In both religions, the Trinity consists of three beings who are co-equal and internal. In Christianity, God is described as three persons (*God, the father, God, the son and God, the Holy Spirit*), but with a single divine nature. In Hinduism, the three beings are *Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva*; they are distinct but are one substance. In Hinduism, the three beings are the "manifestation of Brahman, or Godhead" while in Christianity they represent the one, true God. The slight difference between the two religions lies in the roles played by the three beings. For instance, the Hindu Trinity brings both joy (the good) and destruction (the bad), but the Christian Trinity brings only joy. The two compliment each other, which explains why Shiva and Brahma are inseparable. Some scholars argue that Brahma and God the father share similar attributes unlike Shiva and the Holy Spirit who are different. This is the case because the two perform distinct roles: Shiva is the world's destroyer while the Holy Spirit acts as the comforter. Life after death is a fundamental belief in both Hinduism and Christianity. They both agree that actions, rather than beliefs, are the key determinant of fate. Hindus believe that after death, they will attain new lives. Simply put, the actions in the previous life determine the type of life one will inherit next. According to White et al. (2019), Karma, which represents the sum of actions (good or bad), is used to determine the type of rebirth; good karma means better rebirth. Christian beliefs about life after death are deeply embedded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Similarly, the notion about heaven and hell represents the basic belief that there is life beyond the grave. Christians agree that after death, they will be taken in the presence of the Supreme Being and judged for their actions. The Roman Catholic Church believes that there is a place after death where the sins are purified (state of Purgatory). However, the purification of sin is not for everyone. Overall, the two regions believe in life after death where the actions committed during one's lifetime determines their next life.

Trinity in Christianity:

Christianity as preached by Jesus Christ is truly an egalitarian religion which makes no distinction among human beings on the basis of religion, race, skin, colour, gender or material wealth. In fact according to Jesus Christ, the poor and wretched as specially blessed.[3] It is well known that in Christianity also the concept of Trinity occupies a very important position. In Christianity it means the One God appears as three distinct but equal individuals. They are – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Here God the Father means the Almighty, the creator of Heaven and Earth. He is

the Father of Christ and indirectly the Father of all. He is the foundation of life and from Him the Holy Spirit proceedes. God the Son is the Living Ward of God. God the Son lived on Earth amongst human beings. God spoke to us through His begotten Son Christ. [4] In the Earth, Jesus Christ lived and paid for our sins with his blood. He is the mediator between God and us and speaking to the Father in our defence. The Sonship of Jesus to God declares Him as a personal manifestation of the invisible God. Thus belief in the Son means believing that God is capable to manifest Himself. Through the Son it is possible to know God. Again God the Holy Spirit means the God who gives us life. Just as life proceeds from the root of a tree into its branches, similarly the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Father into the Son. Believing in the Holy Spirit means believing in the Spirit of God who has the power and might to work among human beings.[5] Thus in Christian Trinity God the Father means the origin of everything, God the Son means the ward (the Son) is begotten from the Father and declares Him. Again God the Holy Spirit means the Spirit of God who gives us life and helps us to live holy life with love and peace.

Though the doctrine of Trinity occupied the central position in Christianity, yet this doctrine of Trinity is not clearly present anywhere in the Bible. Prof. Erickson remarks that the teachings of Trinity is not present in the Bible, but arose when Biblical thought was passed into foreign mold (of Greek concepts).[6] The new encyclopedia Britannica in its article on Trinity, explains : "Neither the word Trinity nor the explicit doctrine appears in The New Testament…..The doctrine developed gradually over several centuries and through many controversies. It was not until the 4th century that the distinction of the three and their unity were brought together in a single orthodox doctrine of one essence and the three persons"[7] Inspite of these controversies the doctrine of Trinity is considered as the most widely accepted doctrine in the present period which is indispensible from the Christian faith.

Concept of Trinity in Hinduism :

Hinduism as a religion is mainly based on the ancient reveled texts called the Vedas and the Upaniṣadas having no special founder or source. The central theme of this religion is the divinity of all beings and that God is present everywhere- both animate and inanimate.[1] Within Hinduism, we get the belief of many Gods and Goddesses. Hence sometimes it is called a polytheistic religion. In the Puraṇas also, there are references about three main Gods. The Puraṇas describe it as Trinity (also known as Trimurty). Trinity is a Sanskrit word, where 'Tri' means three and 'Murty' means figures. So, etymologically Trimurty means the three Gods- Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva. Brahmā is taken as the creator of the universe. He is the physical aspect (Viraj) of Īśvara and enjoys a unique place as the highest in the pantheon. The second God of the Hindu Trinity is Vishnu. He is the preserver of the universe. He has a supreme authority on the past, present and the future. According to Hindu philosophy, He will reincarnate to defend and destroy the evil forces so as to maintain and preserve the universal order. Shiva is depicted as the destroyer or the transformer or the purifier of the universe. He has supreme authority over death, rebirth and immortality. The Trinity in Hinduism do exist in space and time, though it is very difficult to explain the nature of this existence as they belong to the very highest realms of creation. Though the three deities in Trinity have three different powers yet they are considered as only the three parts of Brahman. They share the same essence viz. Brahman. Brahman is the only Reality which exists before the creation and after the dissolution of everything. The three Gods are nothing but the three aspects of the same Supreme Spirit. The Creator God (Brahmā), the Preserver God (Vishnu) and the Destroyer God (Shiva) are nothing but the three different shapes of this Single Brahman. The One Undivided Brahman taking shapes in different forms to carry out different functions. Thus it is seen that though Hinduism is considered as a polytheistic religion for its belief in many Gods and Goddesses, yet it ends up with a monotheistic tone.

Comparison between Hindu and Christian Trinity:

Though the concept of Trinity is present in both Hinduism and Christianity, yet a close scrutiny shows that their way of accepting the concept of Trinity is different. The following analysis shows that the Hindu concept of Trinity is not the same as the Christian concept of Trinity. In the Hindu concept of Trinity, the essences of the three Gods are not the same. Their essences are different from one another. The essences of Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva are different. They are considered as three different Gods

having three different functions. But the three persons in Christianity share the same essence. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit always work together. Moreover the three persons of Christian Trinity are nothing but the three aspects of the same God. They are three persons in one God. But the three Gods in Hindu Trinity are three different Gods having three different powers or function. Again in the Hindu concept of Trinity if we look at the process of creation, only Brahmā is responsible for the creation of the Universe. So the three Gods in Hinduism do not work together. Brahmā creates the universe and Vishnu and Shiva performs the functions of preservation and destruction respectively. But in Christianity the three persons always participates in the process of the creation of the Universe. Father moves to the Son and Son moves to the Holy Spirit in order to create the universe. So, it is seen that though the concept of Trinity is present in both Hinduism and Christianity, yet their ways of analyzing the concept is different. But it is also true that on this ground we cannot say that the two concepts are mutually opposed to each other. Though in an apparent view Hinduism turns out to be a polytheistic religion, yet at the same time it is also stated that within Hinduism the three Gods are nothing but One Undivided Brahman. Brahman is considered as the Absolute existence, the ultimate and unchanging Reality behind all things. The three Gods exhibits different powers of the one Undivided Brahman. The Ṛg Veda also proclaim this Oneness of Brahman as "Ekam sat, Viprā Bahudhā Vadanti"(There is only one truth, only men describe it in different ways). We call the same God sometimes as Brahmā, sometimes as Vishnu or sometimes as Shiva. But the three refer to the same Illumining Principle and that Principle is none other than the Brahman. Similar statement is found in Christianity also when it is stated that the one God exists in three persons. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are three separate persons but is still a single God. There is one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Christianity, the holy Trinity and One God is showed with the help of an analogy-just as the Sun consists in its circular shape, rays and warmth within itself, similarly the three Gods viz. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are always within One Substance. It is claimed within Christianity that the Father is divine, the Son is divine and the Holy Spirit is also divine and the whole is One God. So the charge that is brought against Christianity as a polytheistic religion for its belief in the Trinity is not true. Such controversy occurs on not understanding the concept properly. Thus in Christian Trinity we get a clear indication of One God.

Thus from the above analysis it is clear that both Hinduism and Christianity end up with a monistic note. Though their ways of explanation are different, but they both move towards the same goal, i.e., to show the Oneness of God who is the Supreme Being. Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva or God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are nothing but the expressions of a single entity who is the one True God being everything. So, at the end we can say that in the field of pure metaphysics we can place the Hindu concept of Trinity and the Christian concept of Trinity in one and the same place. i.e., Monotheism.

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