

M. Amin

## RELIGION AND LANGUAGE

In the history of modern philosophical thought the Logical-Positivists maintain that all the religious assertions or theological statements are meaningless on the grounds of their criteria of verifiability.

Let us first discuss the nature of religious language.

(a) Religious language is symbolic and by symbolic I mean that the meanings of the words are a little bit different from merely the literal meanings and these symbols are illustrated and elaborated within the context by analogy or using religious terminology. Religion has adopted this way of expression to beautify the language and making it more appealing even to the heart.

(b) Religion has used the method of analogy and sometimes this analogy has been developed into a small story or tale which has some results concerning human individual behaviour or collective behaviour. These analogies or allegories are easily understandable for a man who has some knowledge of religious terminology.

(c) The religious statements are mostly moral assertions concerning the human behaviour, the attitude and the patterns of life, or a general policy about life.

### Language and Logic :

Historically language is prior to logic and it is a fact that every language has got its own logic which is nearer to human nature and this kind of logic can be found in the syntax, the way of expression and the grammatical rules of that language. No body can deny this fact that the logic of language is different from the logic of inference. The logical structure of the language lies in the sentence pattern and the way in which they use the words. Mr. Chomsky, a modern linguist, believes that language is

something biological and the general principles which determine the grammatical rules are to some considerable degree common to all human languages. So it is the temperament of the language which determines the meanings of an assertion in which language the assertion is made. The principle of verifiability is not applicable in this respect.

### **Religious statement and verification.**

Every science has formulated its own methodology of study. The methodology of history is different from the methodology of philosophy and the methods of study of history cannot be applied to philosophical problems. In this way religion has also formulated its own methodology and we cannot say that the methodology of religion is illogical.

Secondly the nature and the characteristics of the religious language or theological assertions are to some considerable degree common to all the religions of the world which entails that these assertions can be verified by the principles formulated on the basis of religious methodology.

Views of some modern philosophers :—

1. David Cox holds that the regulations of the religion are formal in nature and based on religious terminology which can be understood by knowing the terminology of that religion, and the general beliefs are testable by human experience. According to David Cox religious assertions can be verified on emotive grounds because they are generally emotive in nature.

2. R. M. Hare put forward the theory of bliks in defence of religion. He says :—

“Suppose we believed that everything that happened, happened by pure chance. This would not of course be an assertion, for it is compatible with anything happening or not happening, and so, incidently is its contradictory. But if we had this belief we should not be able to explain or predict or plan anything. Thus, although we should not be asserting anything different from those of a moral belief, there would be great diffe-

rence between us, and this is the sort of difference between us, and that there is between those who really believe in God and those who really disbelieve in him.”

Therefore according to Hare religious beliefs should be treated as *blik*.

3. R. B. Braithwaite discussed the same problem in his essay on “An empiricist’s view of the nature of religious belief.”

Braithwaite does not accept the emotive theory and holds the opinion that the religious assertions are rather conative. Primarily the religious statements are declarations of adherence to a policy of action, declaration of commitment to a way of life. In a way religious assertions have a moral function. But there is an important difference between religious and purely moral principles. Religion concerns not only external but also internal behaviour.

4. In the opinion of John Hick “verifiable prediction is conditional. There is a table in the next room, entails conditional prediction of the form; if someone goes into the next room, he will see etc. But no one is compelled to go into the next room. Now it may be that the prediction concerning human experience which are entailed by the proposition that God exists are conditional predictions and no one is compelled to fulfil those conditions.”

Thus the religious or theological assertions are conditional to human experience. John Hick also refuted the principle of verification on the grounds that it is in-itself vague and ambiguous. It is not purely logical but also psychological. Its being psychological is sufficient justification of the possibility of theological statements. Lastly in case of the language of Quran, I would dare mention that the Islamic theologians and Muslim Thinkers have formulated the methodology concerning the study of Quran, language, philology and etymology, logic, argumentation and terminology which are discussed under different topics like *Lughat-ul-Quran*, *Elmottafaseer*, *Usulutafaseer* and *Tarikh-ul-Quran* etc. I will discuss this problem in another essay on “The logic and language of Quran.”

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