

Homo sapiens in their incessant quest for knowledge, raised questions not only about the world around them but also fundamental questions regarding meaning of their life, right and wrong, problem of suffering, life after death, and spiritual realities. They sketched answers to such fundamental questions in religious terms, revealing that *homo sapiens* are also *homo religious*, that religious dimension is fundamental and universal to human beings. Anthropologists are yet to find a people with no religions at all. Myths shared and celebrated in tribal religions, wisdom of the Vedas and the Upanishads, teachings of the Buddha and the Tirthankaras, the paths of Confucius and Lao-Tze, the preaching of Moses and prophets, life and message of Jesus, the tradition of Muhammad, and the teachings of Guru Nanak and others are examples of the religious traditions that shaped millions of people for millennia, and they continue to influence the life of the people today.

Religion and education, two of humankind's most ancient endeavours, have long had a close relationship. Various religions have influenced education, with personnel and institutions, and they contributed both to the spread of religious knowledge and knowledge in other branches of knowledge. In many cases, religious monasteries produced and promoted knowledge, and later evolved into universities. Priests and monks were the most learned people and they conducted and guided research in all branches of knowledge. Seeking and sharing of knowledge was an integral part of religious traditions. The most authoritative Hindu scriptures are the Vedas, a word that comes from the Sanskrit root word *vid*, which means knowledge. Learning is the foundational stage in the Hindu scheme of life. Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhist path of life, often is called Buddha, the enlightened, promoted learning essential for attaining the Buddhist goal of

enlightenment. Buddhist monasteries emerged as centres of education, not just for monks but also for laypeople. Jewish tradition promoted literacy and the Torah obliges parents to educate their children. Christianity promoted knowledge societies; most of the universities and centres of learning in the West were from Christian monasteries. The first word of the Quran is *Iqra!* which means 'read!' obliging Muslims to pursue knowledge in order to better understand God's revealed word and the world. Baghdad's House of Wisdom, Cairo's Al-Azhar University, and other universities to nurture and advanced scholarship both in religious and secular fields.

Later, however, most of the education promoted by religious monasteries was primarily religious, because religious wisdom was considered superior to other forms of knowledge. Many scholars in the academia, on the other hand, considered religion to be a liability than a contributor towards knowledge societies. They envision that science would eventually replace religion, or religion would remain only as an ornament. They argue that human beings have come of age and need to go beyond religious myths and explanation. With the help of logic and reason, science and technology, they are attempting to derive normative principles of behaviour without recourse to the sacred.

The core values of human life - truth, love, justice, etc. - do not necessarily need a religious back up, it was argued. Evolutionary biology and psychology attempt to answer fundamental questions regarding the origin of life, freedom of will, etc. scientifically. Science and technology, economics and commerce, politics and media dominate many aspects of our lives to such an extent that we are tempted to relegate all forms of knowledge other than those of the sciences and technology to the realm of fantasy and to reject and deny all the projects that do not have an economic and commercial value as unnecessary and ornamental. In such a climate, it is tempting to treat religion, religious beliefs, practices, and values as products of fiction, attributing to them only an emotional value, as part of a history about which we cannot be proud of. The presence of religion is often treated as a negative influence on the society and a threat

to peace and harmony because of the inter- and intra-religious conflicts and wars. It puzzles, however, the academia especially in the west that overwhelming majority of the people still belong to one or other religious tradition. A comprehensive study of more than 230 countries and territories conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life estimates that 84% world population are religiously affiliated.

Homo sapiens realise that "even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched."¹ As Wittgenstein noted, "The use of the word 'science' for 'everything that can be meaningfully said' constitutes an 'overrating of science'.²

Besides, "To believe in a God means to understand the question about the meaning of life. To believe in a God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter. To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning."³ All aspects of human life - birth, education, marriage, family, death, etc. - have a religious dimension. And as Pope Paul VI observed, "All things human are our concern. We share with the whole of the human race a common nature, a common life, with all its gifts and all its problems."⁴ At a time when the convictions of millions of believers do so much to shape the geopolitics and the survival of humanity on the planet, it is not wise to discount religious beliefs and traditions as misguided delusions. Listening to great experiences and insights of religious traditions of humanity is a source of knowledge and to ignore it would be an unacceptable policing by academia, economics, and politics.

Religion and science could be compared to fire; both are vital for human life, enhancing the quality of life, but can also

provoke hatred and destruction. Humanity cannot choose between science and religion or displace either of them. We need both science and religion "to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace."⁵ As religion is part of our natural history, religion has come to stay as long as we live and make sense of our life here on earth, contributing also towards the noble goal of knowledge societies.

The first essay, "William James and Seon Master Daehaeng's Pragmatic Approach towards Religion and Science" by Chae Young Kim draws a parallel between William James, a scientific philosopher, and Seon Master Daehaeng, a religious leader, in order to establish a thought involving the science of psychology within a religious context of human experiences, to help us achieve a better understanding of the world, and move forward towards a knowledge-oriented society. A fundamental compatibility towards knowledge societies would seem to be possible if we can determine how determinations of meaning in one discipline or perspective is found not to be in conflict with the determinations that belong to another point of view. Both, in some way, exist together. Having these two points as the base of the research, the author is examining the perspectives of William James and Daehaeng to form a synthesis that would help human society to move towards societies that are guided by knowledge.

Environmental concerns, which are grave to the world at large, need a multidimensional outlook that would make for a larger contribution to meaningful sustenance. Academic engagement centring the role of religion to environment in general, Buddhism in particular, has been in the foray for about a half a century. Abhinav Anand and Amrita Singh highlight a more popular strand of Buddhist literature, i.e., the *Jātakas*, to widen the scope for an ecological inquiry, in their paper titled, "Stories, Salvation and Sustenance: An Ecological Study of the *Jātakas*." The study adds nuances to the existing scholarship and

¹Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden, London: Routledge, 1922, 6.52.

²Wittgenstein, *Nachlass*, The Bergen Electronic Version, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, MS 134, 145.

³Wittgenstein, *Notesbooks 1914-1916*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961, 74.

⁴Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, 97; <http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html> (1 June 2019).

⁵The Earth Charter <<http://www.earthcharter.org>>

broadens the understanding of the knowledge society of an early Indian religious tradition.

Despite predictions that modernization would threaten the existence of religion, Korean religions have thrived throughout the process of modernization. Unlike many Western countries, where Christianity is the principal religion, multiple religions and beliefs have co-existed in Korea since antiquity. Thus, even if social change brings the downfall of one religion, another religion takes its place. Although Korea has never historically seen the decline of religion, a decrease in the religious population has been observed since 2010. Young-Jun Lee and Jong-Oh Lee in their study, "Secular or Post Secular? Korea as a Multi-Religious Society," argue that this is attributable to the secularization of institutional religions rather than as evidence of the decline or deterioration of religiosity, Korean religions are going through the post-secularization process, wherein people seek out their own individual spiritualities. Based on Western theories of secularization and post-secularization, the authors examine the changes in Korean religious diversity, and discuss the challenges they face, and what Korean religious institutions have to do for Korea to find their way into religion again.

Nourah Alhasawi in her paper, "UNESCO Knowledge Societies and Hadith Knowledge Societies: Where Each Stands from the Other?" presents Hadith knowledge societies as religious knowledge societies, and explores the possibility of religious knowledge societies to accept and be accepted according to the UNESCO's vision and characteristics of knowledge societies. This qualitative study thematically analyzes hadiths to point out the features of Hadith knowledge societies. The results of data analysis show that there are several common points between UNESCO and Hadith knowledge societies. Also, there are points considered by UNESCO crucial to its knowledge societies, while Hadith knowledge societies puts some restrictions on them and vice versa. Due to their tendencies to be normative and have their own value systems, religious communities might have challenges in being part of Knowledge Societies as they are

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introduced by the UNESCO. The UNESCO, on the other hand, seems to have its own criteria by which it welcomes diversity.

Since 2018, the decision of the Japanese government to include 'moral education' as an official school subject has stirred various controversies. From a historical perspective, according to critics, moral education as a school subject in the pre-Pacific War era in Japan was at the centre of the militaristic educational program of the country. Further issues involve objections against the contents of the Japanese moral education and controversies surrounding the method of evaluating students learning the subject. Kim Dohyung surveys the process in which moral education developed in Japan during the Meiji Era, as well as, the 'moral training debate' surrounding the contents and methodologies of moral education, to provide implications about the controversy, in the paper, "Moral Education Debate of Meiji Japan."

The focus of the paper "Interreligious Dialogue for Living Together in Harmony" by Jude Nirmal Doss is to show that the object of the interreligious dialogue is not aiming at the religious tolerance, *au contraire*, is fostering the religious friendship in order to live together in harmony. Interreligious dialogue, which is much spoken in Indian context, is the need of the hour. Dialogue does not mean that one gives up the identity as belonging to one particular religion. On the contrary, dialogue would mean being firm in one's own belief, as a result, being open towards understanding others' belief. Basing on this understanding, new proposals for the fruitful dialogue for living together in harmony are made in this paper. Every human being is a social being and every experience of human being is a dialogue with the reality.

This issue of the *Journal of Dharma* on "Towards Knowledge Societies: Religious Perspectives," thus, explores the contributions of religions to promote knowledge societies, and their religiosity. With sentiments of gratitude to all the collaborators may I have the privilege of presenting to the readers this issue of the *Journal of Dharma*.

Jose Nandhikkara, Editor-in-Chief