Editorial

THE DANCE BETWEEN SACRED INCONSISTENCIES AND PROFANE CONSISTENCIES

Religion and ethics are intrinsically interconnected. The essence of religion is compromised in the absence of ethics, and without a religious foundation, ethics becomes susceptible to destructive tendencies, partisanship, bias and arbitrariness. Similar to how agricultural crops thrive in open fields and trees flourish in designated spaces, religious belief and ethical values flourish within the parameters of human societies. Away from societies, ethics may lose its role as the custodian of moral norms, and religion, built upon the bonds of relationships, could potentially lose its significance. The current issue of the *Journal of Dharma* delves into a herculean task of analyzing the ethical interface of religious societies primarily due to the ambiguity surrounding the notion 'religious society'. Some scholars view all religions as societies, while others perceive sects within established religions or associations operating in tandem with religions as societies. Further, scholars occasionally encounter difficulty in distinguishing between systems and structures within a religious framework, causing confusion regarding the inherent connection between moral and spiritual dimensions. In our research, the term is employed in a broadly inclusive manner, encompassing all societies dedicated to promoting religious doctrines, morals, and principles as well as those actively striving to foster harmony and interconnectedness among the realms of God-Humans-Nature.

Religious societies, characterized as sacred companies (N. J. Demerath III et al, 1998), prioritize the well-being of humanity and nature, focusing on divine experiences rather than profit-making. In the contemporary landscape, the term 'network' has gained prominence, signifying a fundamental shift in how entities

and systems operate. An ethico-religious network encounters a delicate interplay of 'sacred inconsistencies' and 'profane consistencies,' highlighting a contrast that prompts contemplation of paradoxes within sacred and secular spheres. This interplay suggests a nuanced dance between the transcendent and immanent, the mysterious and the rational in the human experience. Individuals navigate a complex array of beliefs, values, and practices to find meaning amid the dynamic interplay of sacred and profane elements. This encourages a subtle understanding of the human-eco systems, acknowledging a constant negotiation between sacred-spiritual mysteries and profane-worldly certainties. Further, the juxtaposition of the 'sacred-unknown and secular-known' engenders a profound exploration of the intricacies inherent in the human experience, urging individuals to transcend the mere state of becoming and navigate towards the realm of Being.

Sacred inconsistencies thus refer to the paradoxes and mysteries within religious doctrines and beliefs that create intellectual and spiritual tensions. In the sacred realm, inconsistencies may involve apparent contradictions or mysteries within religious beliefs, doctrines, or practices. Many traditions grapple with counternarratives, moral dilemmas, and unanswered questions, considering these inconsistencies as aspects of divine mystery. For instance, the tension between promoting inclusivity and preserving doctrinal purity can be seen as a sacred inconsistency. Balancing diverse perspectives while maintaining fidelity to sacred teachings in a religious interface requires a nuanced approach that respects religious diversity without diluting core tenets. Again, the coexistence of an all-powerful, benevolent deity with the existence of suffering and evil world poses a profound theological inconsistency. Yet, within religious frameworks, these inconsistencies are often regarded as rewarding tests of faith or divine invitations to explore deeper spiritual truths.

'Profane consistencies' imply regularity or predictability within the secular or non-religious aspects of life. In the profane world, consistency is associated with mundane routines, social

norms, and scientific principles governing daily existence. These consistencies offer order, reliability, and understanding in contrast to the mystique of the sacred. The term 'profane' (*pro+fanum*= outside the temple; hence not sacred) doesn't inherently suggest negativity but refers to everyday, mundane, secular aspects (laymen's perspective) characterized by adherence to consistent patterns and rules. In the secular sphere, profane consistencies manifest as reliable structures governing daily lives, such as ethical guidelines, community standards, and content moderation policies. These consistencies are crucial for building trust and reliability within the matrix of virtue based religious community. However, the challenge lies when these profane consistencies align with the values of religious societies. For example, striking a balance between universal ethical standards and the diverse moral landscapes of different faiths requires careful consideration and continuous dialogue. Consistency should not stifle the unique expressions of religious beliefs but rather provide a common ground for respectful engagement.

Religious believers perceive space as heterogeneous, with sacred spaces holding unique significance, exemplified by Moses being commanded to remove his shoes on holy ground. This concept contrasts sacred spaces, rich in structure and meaning, with non-sacred spaces lacking such distinctions. This non-homogeneity (inconsistency) is considered a primal religious experience preceding theoretical reflections on the world. *Hierophanies* - manifestations of the sacred - disrupt space's homogeneity (consistency), revealing the presence of an absolute reality and providing a foundation for the world. Recognizing the 'chaos in homogeneous profane space', religious believers strive to establish their abode at a fixed point, the centre, through rituals and sacred space construction. In contrast, non-religious individuals perceive space as geometrically homogeneous and neutral, lacking inherent structure. For them even in a secularized world, remnants of religious behavior endure; consequently, certain places can retain a sense of the sacred even within a profane existence.

Emile Durkheim introduced the sacred-profane dichotomy (1912), making religion its central focus, wherein the ambiguity of the sacred encompasses both pure and impure elements. Despite being a fundamental feature in Durkheim's work and other scholars' discussions of the sacred, as well as evident in social practices, the impure sacred is often overlooked or incorrectly treated as profane. This oversight, found in interpretations of Durkheim and cultural sociology, has negative consequences for the study of culture in contemporary society. Rudolf Otto, in his 1917 work *Das Heilige* (*The Sacred*), offered a distinct perspective on religious experience, delving into the analysis of its modalities rather than focusing on theological ideas. As a theologian and historian of religions, Otto explored the irrational aspects of religion, highlighting the awe-inspiring and terrifying nature of the divine. He identified the *numinous* (derived from the Latin *numen*, God), arising from the revelation of divine power, as the core of religious experience, transcending natural realities and challenging the limitations of human language.

In the dialogue between sacred inconsistency and profane consistency, an open invitation is extended to set the priorities for promoting a culture of sacred-secular ethical talk. The article titled "From God to Humanity: Reconstruction of Islamic Theology in Contemporary Era" by Kasno, Nazar Husain Hadi Pranata Wibawa, and Ahmad Khoirul Fata advocates for a paradigm shift in Islamic theology from theocentric to anthropocentric themes and promoting a praxis-oriented approach in the theological process. In the second article, "Self-Protected Communities Towards Relational Communities: An Appraisal of Relational-Ethical Model for Social Concern" by Zhengcan Huang and Enguo Wang, the focus is on the relational-ethical theory concerning social and religious life, exploring horizontal and vertical human relations. Benaouda Bensaid, in the article "An Overview of Muslim Spiritual Eco-Education," proposes an eco-environmental education rooted in Muslim spirituality. The article "An Approach Towards Ethical Body: Relativizing Social and Religious Morals in Chinese History" by Xin Zhang and Lei Zhang critically examines missionary

enterprises in China from an ethical standpoint. Nicholas Onyemechi Alumona and Grace Ogelenya, in "Phenomenological Ethics in A Multi-Religious Society: Nigeria as a Case Study," advocate for phenomenological ethics as a means to resolve conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.

The article "Spreading Religion and Culture through Internet Memes" by Navrang Rathi and Pooja Jain critically analyzes the prevalence and impact of memes in religious and ethical contexts, suggesting their potential as a contemporary tool for disseminating religion and ethics in the digital world. Sudeshna Das and Payel Dutta Chowdhury, in "Ethical Foundations of Srimanta Sankardev's Ekaśaraṇa Dharma and Its Contemporary Relevance," examine Srimanta Sankardev's religious philosophy, emphasizing its principles in fostering an all-inclusive society and addressing conflicts prevalent in the digital world. The final article, "Eco-Ethics or Theo-Ethics? Situating Sītā in and out of the Vedic and the Post-Vedic Societies" by P S Dwivedi, Priyanka Tripathi, and PK Verma, revisits female divine figures symbolizing nature in Vedic and Post-Vedic societies, exploring how theo-ethics embodied in Sītā differs from eco-ethics necessary for contemporary sustainable societies.

There are also serious concerns which are to be addressed when we think of an ethico-religious interface design. Contemporary religious publications and media outlets have shifted focus towards self-promotion, neglecting the core values of religions and ethics. Headlines often highlight the blessing of new worship centres and prayer halls, laying foundation stones for buildings, promoting charitable initiatives, and seeking financial support for ongoing projects. To maintain the integrity of such interfaces as well as to curb the dissemination of extremist ideologies and hate speech, strict and consistent content moderation policies are necessary. An ethico-religious interface is a platform for constructive engagement, not a breeding ground for discord. Transparency in algorithmic processes is also imperative to counteract biases and ensure fair representation. Empowering users to tailor their digital experience based on their religious preferences is another crucial aspect of ethico-religious

interface design. Customization options allow individuals to express their identities authentically while controlling the visibility of their beliefs. This autonomy fosters a sense of ownership and belonging within the digital space.

Non-discrimination forms the bedrock of any ethical framework. An inclusive interface, in which every flesh and blood reality feels valued and respected, promotes an environment of sacred and secular dancing together. Such an ambience stimulates intellectual curiosity, fosters spiritual growth, embraces diversity, facilitates meaningful dialogues, allows for the evolution of belief systems, and nurtures compassion and open-mindedness within religious communities. Let us not forget: A more profound and enriching spiritual odyssey revolves around an ethico-aesthetic allure towards the realms of the sacred and the profane.

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