
Names of World Religions

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“*Surely the religion with Allah is Islam.*” (The Holy Quran 3:18).

“*He (God) has named you Muslims.*” (22:78)

There are countless religions in the world, and accordingly there are countless names of religions. However, if every true religion is of Divine origin, as is the principle laid down by the Holy Quran and Islam, the name should be the same as well. Undoubtedly, the religion brought by the Holy Prophet Muhammad is the whole and perfect Islam, yet the religions before it must be components and parts of this whole. The verses quoted above are conclusive, and in the Quran the religion of every prophet and his followers is called *Islam*. Even the religion of the disciples of Jesus is described in their own words as:

“And bear witness (O Lord) that we are Muslims” (5:111).

Muslims accept this fact which has been explained by the Holy Quran. But are other religions of the world prepared to accept it? It would be an act of coercion if we force them to acknowledge this fact, unless we can make them admit it on the basis of their own religions. In that case, their own faith and sense will be the compelling factor. They will have no choice but to accept the verdict of the creed and faith which they believe to be from God.

Correction of a mistaken idea about names

Shakespeare has written: What is in a name; a rose would smell just as sweet by any other name. It is also said that if a good name is given to a bad thing, it would still remain bad. Nonetheless, a good name does go some way to show the goodness of a thing. A good name is regarded with approval and a bad one with disapproval. Sometimes a good name is bought for millions, and one having a bad name suffers more than one who is actually bad.

It is a fact that no religion other than that of the followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad is known as *Muslim*. The ancient religion of India is Hindu dharma; the Iranian is called Zoroastrian or Parsee; the predominant religion of China and Japan is Buddhism; and a great religion of the world is known as Christianity. Every religion claims that only *it* is the true religion, and that there is none other whose foundation was laid by God Himself. The

reason for this is the difference in the beliefs and concepts of the various religions. The principles of the religions are so different, one from another, that it is almost impossible to consider them as having the same source, even though this may be true. Our discussion here, however, only concerns the names of the religions.

The Hindu religion

The religion of India has been known as Hindu. It is claimed that despite being ruled by foreign religions for centuries the Hindu nation, its culture and religion still survive. The question may be asked, What is Hindu culture and society? If it is the caste system, the separate *dharma* and duties for the four castes, the worship of idols, saints and millions of gods, and the making of sacrifices to attain their pleasure, then these beliefs have been receiving great shocks in the past century, and have been rejected by educated Hindus.

The question is, What is the name of this religion? The Arya Samaj says, and rightly so, that their name Hindu is not found anywhere in the Vedas or the authentic shastras. They say that the word *Hindu* really means a slave and a thief, and that it is really a term of abuse applied to them by their enemies or the Persians, which has been accepted by them due to a submissive and servile mentality. Swami Dayanand, founder of the Arya Samaj, has furiously condemned the name *Hindu*, and urged that it should be dropped in favour of the term *Arya*.

In response to this, the traditional Hindus rectified their name by calling themselves *Sanatan Dharmi*. Now *Sanatan* means 'old and ancient', and it is obvious that this name can only be given to a religion when it has been in existence for a long time. It cannot be the name when the religion came into being, and moreover, this name is not to be found in the Vedas, just as the name *Hindu* is not found therein.

As to the name *Arya*, it is obvious that it is the name of a nation, not that of a faith. Included among the Arya people are the English, Germans, Dutch, Scandinavians, etc. Most importantly, the term *Arya Dharma* is nowhere to be found in the Vedas. According to reliable lexicons, *Arya* means 'owner' or 'master', or the progeny of an owner or master (see *Nirkut*). So, even according to its linguistic meaning, *Arya* cannot be the name of a religion. It can be applied to a ruling nation, indicative of its position, but not to a *dharma* or religion. If the name Hindu must be given up because it does not occur in the Vedas, the name Arya suffers from the same disadvantage.

It is argued, however, that the name Arya is preferable because it refers to a noble, ruling nation. But those who have read the Vedas know that *Arya* most definitely does not mean righteous, noble and God-fearing, as there are scores of *mantras* in which the Rishis prayed to be safe from Aryas in the same way as they prayed to be safe from *Dasyus*, which signifies robbers and malicious men. For example, it says in the Rig Veda:

“O brave Indra! kill both the enemies Dasa and Arya, as the wood is chopped with the sharp axe.” (*Mandal 6, Sukt 33, Mantra 3*).

“O You who are praised by many! may the Arya or Dasa who dares us to war be thoroughly crushed by us, may we kill these enemies in war with Your help.” (*Mandal 10, Sukt 38, Mantra 3*).

“O Lord of the brave! may we kill these enemies, Aryas and Dasa.” (*Mandal 6, Sukt 6, Mantra 6*).

Even a little consideration of these *mantras* shows that the *Rishis* of the Vedas looked upon the Aryas as their enemies like the Dasa robbers. If the meaning of *Arya* had been ‘noble and righteous men’, how could the Vedas teach prayers for their destruction? In the light of these two facts, firstly, that the Vedas give no name for the religion or *dharma* of these people, and secondly, that neither of the words *Hindu* and *Arya* mean good and religious people, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that *Hindu* was the name of a people living by the river *Sindu* (Indus), and a certain race was known as *Arya*. With neither of these names is the word *dharma* (religion) used in the Vedas.

The Jewish religion

It is clear that the basis of the Jewish faith is the law of Moses, but the Jews have been named after Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob. *Jew* is not a Divinely-revealed name, but is a family name connected with Jacob, and they are generally called Israelites. No law was revealed to Jacob, and therefore *Israelite* is a family name, not the name of a faith. So there is no name for this religion which God may have given to it in the Bible or ordered to be used for it.

Buddhism

Buddhism is also a religion, but it does not say anywhere in the teachings of Buddha that his followers should be called *Buddhists* or that the name of their religion is *Buddhism*. The reason is that even before the *Gautama* Buddha there had been many men who were given the name Buddha. These have been mentioned by Buddha himself. If the followers of the previous Buddhas were

not called Buddhists, there can be no authority for applying this title to the followers of the *Gautama*. This too is a fictitious name.

So it is a fact which cannot be denied that the Israelites are called after Jacob, who was given the name Israel by God, the followers of Buddha are called Buddhists, the adherents of Zoroaster, the prophet of Persia, are named after him, and the Hindus are named after their land and country.

The followers of Christ

The strangest riddle is that of the name given to the followers of Christ. In the first place, the name given to a religion stays the same in any language or country, except for some slight change in one or two letters due to the different rules of various languages. So *Hindu*, *Buddhist*, etc. are substantially the same in any language, whether English, Persian etc. However, the name of the followers of Christ is different in almost every country. There are scores of names such as Christian, *Masīhī*, *‘Īsā’ī*, Jesuist, Nazarite which they apply to themselves. Their real name is a mystery. The personal name of the Messiah was *Yasu*. The name *Christ* was added long after the events of the crucifixion. Matthew records that an angel appeared to Joseph, the husband of Mary, saying:

“She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus.” (1:18–21)

Luke, however, records that the angel went to Mary, and said to her: “Thou shalt call his name Jesus”.

According to Matthew, it is the father who would give the name *Jesus* to his son, and according to Luke it is the mother who would do so. In any case, it was not God Who gave him this name or ordered that this name be given to him. Even disregarding the conflicting accounts, it is clear that his personal name, as related by the angel, was *Jesus*. Therefore this faith should have been named after *Jesus*. But instead, followers of this religion are known by various other names such as Christian.

Names Christ and Messiah

The word *Christ* does not belong to the native tongue of Jesus. It is from the Greek word *Christos*, which is said to be synonymous with *Messiah*. It is obvious that the followers of Jesus must have referred to the name of their mentor, when necessary. But they could never have been known as Christians after his name because the word *Christ* was not used during his lifetime. His name

was *Yushu*, pronounced in Hebrew and Aramaic as *Yoshua*. There had been many people before Jesus who bore this name. For instance, the military commander appointed by Moses was given the name Joshua, son of Noon. He was accorded this name because of his conquest of Canaan, meaning *liberator*, whose wisdom and spiritual strength combined to raise the Israelites from a demoralised, slave people to a triumphant and victorious one.

Likewise Jesus was given the name *Messiah* by God. But never could he dare proclaim it because of the intense opposition of the Jews and the weakness of his own followers. So when one of them plucked up the courage to call him the Messiah, at a secret gathering, Jesus told him to keep it concealed and hidden. And this happened in the last year of his mission:

“Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him; and he asked them: ‘Who do the people say that I am?’ And they answered, ‘John the Baptist; but others say, Elijah; and others, that one of the old prophets has risen.’ And he said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ And Peter answered, ‘The Messiah of God.’ But he charged and commanded them to tell this to no one...” (Luke 19:18–22)

It was only Peter who called Jesus as the Messiah, about whom Jesus himself said: “Get behind me, Satan, you are a hindrance to me” (Matt. 16:23). Considering that Jesus himself feared trouble if he was called the Messiah, and urged that it should be kept a secret, how could it be possible that his followers could be called *Masīhī* (followers of the Messiah) during his life? Hence during his life they called one another brother, believer, chosen one, disciple, friend, poor one, etc. What they were *not* called was *Christian* or *Masīhī*. God had given him the name *Yushu*, and that was what his parents had named him. He had himself strictly forbidden the title *Messiah* to be used about him. It says in the Encyclopaedia Biblica:

“According to the same (Luke’s) Gospel, he does not himself lay claim to the name Christ till later (9:20), and even then wishes it to be kept secret, and further that, according to the same author (Acts 11:26), the name ‘Christian’ did not arise till a considerable time after his death.”

It is also acknowledged that the name *Christ* was proposed at the time when the Christians were mixing with pagan people, and it is most probable that this name originally was applied to Christians by the pagans. It cannot be

from the Jews because they are awaiting the Messiah till today. That event is recorded in the Acts as follows:

“For a whole year, they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.” (Acts 11:26)

In the translations of the Gospels into eastern languages, the word *Christians* here has been rendered as *Masīhī*. It is a wonder of the scholarship of the translators that they rendered *Masīhī* as *Christian* or rendered *Christian* as *Masīhī*. No proper noun is ever translated into another language. If *Christian* is a proper noun, why was it translated as *Masīhī*? And if the original name is *Masīhī*, derived from *Messiah*, why was it translated as *Christian*? The incident at Antioch allegedly happened 43 years after Jesus. Even if it did happen, no historian used this name till 150 C.E. So this name is not to be found in the writings of Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Hermas etc. It is found later in the writings of Justin Martyr etc. If the decision at Antioch was a collective one, why was it not acted upon till 150 C.E, and why did the Christians of the East continue calling themselves *nasārā*?

To sum up, according to the Gospels Jesus kept his claim of Messiahship concealed till his crucifixion, and strictly prohibited this title to be used for him in public. For 43 years after him, it occurred to no one that his followers should have a name. In fact, till 150 C.E. no writer called this faith and people as Christian. The claim about the name Christian being first used in Antioch is a hypothesis, merely on the basis that, as there was now a non-Jewish following of Jesus, they must have been given a name, and that name can only be Christian. Obviously this hypothesis does not amount to certainty, and the fact that Eastern Christians have always called themselves *nasārā* shows it to be completely mistaken.

Birth-place of Jesus

According to the Gospels, Nazareth of Galilee was the home town of Joseph and Mary. Jesus lived there before his baptism (Matthew 4:13, 21:11; Mark 1:9; Luke 1:26, 2:4,39,51 and 4:16; John 1:46; Acts 10:38). It is also written that this was why Christians were called *nasārā* (Nazarites). It is then curious that in this birth-place of Christianity no one became Christian for 300 years, and it remained a purely Jewish town. During the Crusades, its name was used to rouse Christians to fight the Muslims, and it acquired a significance. But it is doubtful whether this is the same Nazareth where Jesus was born, or it was

another town to the south of the present Nazareth in the valley of mount Kafsia.

Was there in fact a town called Nazareth which ever existed? Two references from the Gospels themselves raise doubts about it. Matthew 2:23 says:

“And he [Joseph, along with Mary and Jesus] went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’.”

This reference is utterly wrong. In no book did the prophets say that the coming one will be called a Nazarene. The references to the book of Judges and to 1 Samuel 1:11 which are cited in this respect actually mention people making a vow not to shave the heads of their children. And all John 1:46 says is:

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Why Nazareth is given as the home town of Jesus is impossible to answer. The account in Matthew that Joseph, the father of Jesus, went to live in Nazareth for fear of the king, does not make that place the home town of Jesus. Then there is the point that Joseph and Mary journeyed to Bethlehem from Nazareth in order that Jesus should be born there in accordance with a prophecy of the prophets. This too is wrong because according to Luke (2:1–5) they went there to be recorded in the census. History has shown that this census was held either eight years before the birth of Jesus or six years afterwards. How could they have gone there six years before the census in order to be recorded in it?

Why his followers are called Christians?

In Christian writings, Jesus is generally referred to as *Jesus Christ*, as if the name *Jesus* takes precedence over the name *Christ* or *Messiah*. It has been explained earlier that the name given to him by his parents, or by the angel, was only *Yushu*. That name is the basis of the Christian religion. By descent, he belonged to the Jewish race. His parents did not possess wealth and riches or fame. In his youth he worked in his parents' house as a carpenter (*najār*). Thus it appears from Matthew 13:54 that when he went to his native land, people said: Is this not the carpenter's son? In other words, in his home town he was known as the son of Joseph the carpenter. This is borne out by Luke 4:22, but the words of Mark 6:3 are as follows:

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?”

So according to this, Jesus himself was a carpenter. In Hebrew the words *našar* (š being the letter *šād*) and *nasar* (s being the letter *sīn*) are synonymous, and the word *nāshar* means *to saw wood*. Therefore, by Jesus of Nazareth (*Nasāra*) is meant Jesus the carpenter (*najār*). From the Acts we learn that the Jews used to refer to this new religion as *najarānī*, or the faith of carpenters (Acts 24:5). The ancient historian Tertulian has also supported this, and written that the Jews used to curse this name three times daily in their prayers.

When Jesus grew up, became a teacher, started preaching, and attracted disciples, he faced intense opposition from the people, so much so that his followers were terrified to utter his name. On taking his name, they were beaten and persecuted. Not only could they not call him *Messiah*, but even taking his own name *Jesus* was forbidden. The hatred and opposition was not only against his office and position, but his personal name as well. This is what we learn from the four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. Sending his disciples to preach his message, he gave the following instructions:

“I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake,... you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.” (Matthew 10:16–22; see also 24:9; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:12)

After Jesus, the oppression of his followers continued. Let alone calling themselves Christians, they could not even take the name of their teacher:

“So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” (Acts 4:18; see also Acts 5:40; 2 Cor. 11:24–25; 1 Peter 4:16; Revelation 2:10–13)

In conclusion, the name of the religion of Jesus was neither *nasārā*, nor Christian, nor yet *Masīhī*. Just as the name *najarānī* was given to this faith contemptuously by its Jewish opponents, similarly *Christian* was a name proposed by the heathens. As the Encyclopaedia Biblica says:

“In fact, it is probable enough that the name came from the heathens themselves in the first instance. With such a view of its origin, Acts 11:26 fits in very well.” (p. 753)

How remarkable that just as the Hindus accepted the name applied to them by their enemies, so did the followers of Jesus willingly take the name given to them by their inveterate opponents.