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Karma-Dharma Dynamics: Rethinking Religion in "Yatri," "The Brave Little Parrot," and "If Not Higher"

Nabaraj Dhungel
Bishwa Bhasa Campus, Tribhuvan University

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Email
nabarajdhungel2020@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article presents a humanistic analysis of Laxmi Prasad Devkota's poem "Yatri," Rafe Martin's retelling of the Buddhist legend "The Brave Little Parrot," and Isaac Leib Peretz's story "If Not Higher." It argues that these works champion the idea that true *dharma*—or religion—is grounded in *karma*, the practice of humanity. The texts suggest that the essence of being human lies in treating others with compassion, dignity, and respect, without discrimination or dehumanization. When religion is reduced to rituals and temple visits, while ignoring human suffering, it loses its spiritual core. The article contends that failing to act humanely, even under the guise of religious duty, betrays the very foundation of *dharma*. Drawing on the philosophies of humanist thinkers such as Auguste Comte, Jeaneane D. Fowler, and Jim Herrick, the research emphasizes that selfless service to the helpless and marginalized transcends religious boundaries and embodies the highest moral calling. Devkota, Martin, and Peretz all highlight that genuine spirituality lies in aiding others without bias or expectation. Their stories urge a shift from orthodox practices to acts that preserve and uplift humanity. The article reveals that in a world rife with division and dogma, recognizing humanity as the truest form of religion is both a moral necessity and a universal truth. This perspective calls for a transformative understanding of religion—one rooted not in doctrine but in action, empathy, and the shared responsibility of sustaining human dignity.

Keywords: *dharma*, humanity, *karma*, religion, rethinking

Introduction

The misconception and misbelief of religion have divided the whole world into different extremist fragments, destroying humanity from the human world. People follow diverse religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity with their many sects. They have created their own religious philosophies, theories, rules, practices, systems, and notions regarding God and the human. They have established various styles of worshipping gods and celebrating festivals in the name of God. Moreover, people have established temples, monasteries, masjids, churches, and synagogues with the idols of their own gods to worship every day. Furthermore, people also regard their own religion as superior to others, which is a hierarchizing, discriminating, and dehumanizing attitude that has destroyed humanity. Because of the otherizing practices prevalent in the world, humanitarian norms, values, faiths, and practices have been vanishing day by day. The world is gradually becoming devoid of humanity. The sense of humanity has died, and people are living a hypocritical and pompous life. They seem to

know everything about different religions but do not know about humanity (*dharma*) as the only religion necessary to regenerate the religiously discriminated and degenerated world.

It is the *dharma* of humans to remain human and to treat other humans as humans without otherizing, dehumanizing, or negating them. If a human does not treat another human as a human, even within a religion, that is not the *dharma* of the human; rather, it is religious orthodoxy that destroys humanity and the entire human race and civilization. If people bypass humans and only focus on worshipping God, it challenges human civilization. Instead of going to the temple, offering fruits and food to God, and sacrificing animals to God, humans must serve the needy people begging in the streets. Helping the needy is more meaningful than worshipping idols in the name of God in the temple. Serving the needy without religiously discriminating against them and preserving and advancing humankind is the greatest *dharma* (religion) of the people, which should be realized and applied practically in life. In this sense, religion needs to be redefined in a humanitarian context. Regarding religion, Ronald Dworkin (2013) asserts: "Religion is an interpretive concept" (para. 5). This means religion needs reinterpretation as times change.

Auguste Comte, the founder of sociology, positivism, and the history of science, founded a new religion: the "religion of humanity," through his book *System of Positive Polity.* For real humanists, religious orthodoxy divides the world, but humanity—the only true religion—unites and harmonizes it. The true religion is humanity itself that sustains life. Bikash Mukharjee (2016) claims: "Humanity is the true religion of mankind. There is no difference among the people. All belong to the one category that is human, the human race. MANABDHARMA IS MAHADHARMA" (para. 1). Mukharjee further explains, "Anything that creates discord, split and disharmony and foments hatred is Adharma. Dharma is the cementer and sustainer of social life. The rules of Dharma have been laid down for regulating the worldly affairs of men" (para. 4).

All humans are equal; there are no races but only one human race. Humanity is the greatest and the only religion in the world. Anything that hierarchizes, discriminates, dehumanizes, and creates disorder is *adharma*; the promotion of love for all life is *dharma*. We need to unite our positive forces to counter all negative forces, beliefs, or distorted ideas that make humans turn against their fellow humans, no matter which sect, dogma, or religion they belong to. Such a positive force will create a beautiful synthesis of the true messages of all religions and establish a new universal religion—"humanism"—based on the principles of ultimate truth, love, compassion, and unity in diversity.

Humanity is divinity. A human is God, the earth itself is heaven, and humanity is the religion of the world. Shakespeare (2003), through his character Hamlet in the play *Hamlet*, acclaims: "Hamlet: What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals" (Act 2, Scene 2). Humans possess creativity, infinity, supreme rationality, heavenly beauty, and divinity. All good deeds like compassion, patience, sacrifice, love, kindness, cooperation, and generosity are religious activities. Therefore, helping the helpless selflessly is more meaningful than worshipping God in a temple. Regarding a happy human life, Robert G. Ingersoll (1937), in his *Ingersoll's Humanist Credo*, writes: "Justice is the only worship / Love is the only priest / Ignorance is the only slavery / Happiness is the only good / The time to be happy is now / The place to be happy is here / The way to be happy is to make others so / Wisdom is the science of happiness" (p. 603). If we do justice to lives on this earth, it is our worship of God and the source of happiness. Edwin Markham (2010) expresses some of the key concepts of Humanism in simple and unsophisticated language in his poem "Earth Is Enough." Thus he asserts:

We men of Earth have here the stuff

Of Paradise - we have enough!

We need no other stones to build
The Temple of the Unfulfilled -
No other ivory for the doors -
No other marble for the floors -
No other cedar for the beam
And dome of man's immortal dream. (lines 1–8)

Markham (2010) asserts that the resources and experiences found on Earth are sufficient to fulfill human potential and create a paradise on Earth. The poet contrasts this idea with the traditional belief that otherworldly realms or external materials are necessary for transcendence. Heaven is on Earth, and the human with humanity is God. Italian philosopher Marsilio Ficino states: "Know thyself, O divine lineage in mortal guise!" (qtd. in Gaarder, 1996, p. 109). Therefore, we should promote the human heart instead of searching for God and heaven in airy nothing. The study of humanity is also associated with the theory of humanism. Humanism focuses on human life in harmonious societies. Highlighting the meaning of humanism, Fowler (1999) mentions:

> Humanism seeks to underpin political theories with a focus on what is right for individuals and society, but it is not allied with specific political theories. The humanist vision of society is one in which the "good life" is available for all individuals and therefore for society as a whole. This is a society that will create the kind of conditions to promote the freedom, prosperity, creativity and fulfilment of all individuals within it, democratically, whatever class, colour, race, sex or status a person has. It has a vision of high standards of living, world democracy, peace, and a flourishing economy. (p. 175)

Humanism promotes a democratic political philosophy for a prosperous and harmonious human society in the world. Humanity is also associated with morality or ethics. It keeps humans at the center, presenting them as a measure of all things in the universe. British humanist leader and writer Andrew Copson (2015) affirms that man is all in all. He acclaims: "In humanism, man is all things: he is both the expression and the master of the creation" (p. 6). For Copson, humans are the masters of all creation and therefore are divine gods. "Humanist ethics is also distinguished by placing the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfilling the will of God" (p. 4). It is the ethics of humans not to fulfill the will of God, but to perform good deeds for the welfare of humanity. Regarding humanity, humanists, and happiness, Jim Herrick appreciates the deeds of the humanists as they invoke human happiness in large amounts. He asserts:

> The utilitarian aim of creating 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' is often invoked by humanists … [but] the calculation of the greatest happiness of the greatest number misses out the individual qualities, such as a passion for justice, courage, artistic brilliance, and generosity … [Humanists] have principles to guide them and ideals to aspire to" (qtd. in Copson, 2015, p. 44)

The humanists possess the principles and ideals to lead human qualities toward harmony in society. In the humanist light, Devkota's "Yatri," Peretz's "If Not Higher," and Martin's"The Brave Little Parrot" challenge the traditional religious notion and practice of going to a temple to worship God. For them, such practices are hypocritical, pompous, and humanity-destroying, leading to the collapse of the whole human civilization and desertifying the human world. Therefore, they attempt to prevent such foolish practices of people and regenerate the religiously degenerated land, irrigating it with the idea and practice of humanity, dismantling all the hierarchical discriminations and divisions among people. The present research endeavors to explore and analyze their effort to dismantle the traditional notion of religion and establish humanity as the only new religion necessary for today's world.

Research Objectives

The objective of the research is to find out how Devkota (2010), Peretz (2013), and Martin (2013), through their texts, subvert the conventionally established and practiced notion of religion as the root cause of the death of humanity and establish

humanity (*karma*) as the only religion (*dharma*) in the religiously divided and deteriorated human world. It also forcefully establishes that there is no other *dharma* than helping the helpless selflessly and removing all the barriers of religious divisions.

Methodology

This study is a library-based literary analysis that employs the method of textual interpretation. Devkota's "Yatri," Peretz's "If Not Higher," and Martin's "The Brave Little Parrot" serve as the primary texts for examination. These works collectively seek to position humanity as the highest form of religion in human civilization. The central aim of this study is to demonstrate how Devkota, Peretz, and Martin challenge traditional conceptions of religion and advocate for humanity as the sole path to human advancement, harmony, and prosperity. To support this argument, the study draws on the ideas of prominent humanist theorists: Auguste François Comte, Jeaneane D. Fowler, and Jim Herrick. In *System of Positive Polity*, Comte (1875) introduces the concept of a new religion centered on humanity. Fowler (1999) conceptualizes humanism as a political theory, while Herrick emphasizes the role of humanists as champions of happiness through humanitarian values.

Textual Analysis

The notion, philosophy, beliefs, and practice of religion—Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Islam, etc.—prevalent in the world have divided and hierarchized the world instead of uniting it. The religious practice of only going to the temple, worshipping God, and offering sacrifices to God, rather than helping helpless humans, has destroyed the human inside human beings. When the inner human dies, a human does not behave toward another human as a human but worships idols in the name of God, which leads to the death of humanity. This bitter reality provides a ground for the necessity of following humanity (*karma*) as the only religion (*dharma*) for preserving the human inside the human.

Realizing the same, Devkota, Peretz, and Martin put their effort into demolishing the dividing and discriminating hypocritical religions of the world and establishing humanity as religion through their texts "Yatri," "If Not Higher," and "The Brave Little Parrot," respectively. In "Yatri," Devkota requests all people to serve the needy instead of going to the temple to worship God. Similarly, Peretz, in "If Not Higher," asserts that helping the helpless instead of participating in the penitential prayers of the synagogue is far better than worshipping God. Likewise, in "The Brave Little Parrot," Martin initiates that the helper of the helpless is the real God.

Dworkin (2013) writes: "Religion, we should say, does not necessarily mean a belief in God. Social institution divides godly and godless religion—the science of godly religion—is not as important as the faith in value that unites them" (para. 5). For Dworkin, godly religion is not important for human beings. In the same line, Devkota, being a humanist, struggles to establish humanity as a religion, challenging the traditional notion of religion in "Yatri." He appeals to the *yatri*, the pilgrim in search of God, not to search for God outside in the shrines and temples but to look inside where God dwells. He claims that humanity is divinity, and so we should search for God inside. He means that the human inside is God. The whole human body itself is the temple where God lives. Devkota acclaims:

> The beautiful pillars of the bone, the walls of the flesh
>
> The golden roof of the brain, the door of the sense organs,
>
> The waves of river-veins, own self the vast unbound temple,
>
> To which temple do you go, you pilgrim? (self trans., lines 6–9)

The whole human body is the holy shrine in which the human-god dwells and reigns. The bones are pillars, the flesh the walls, the brain the roof, the sense organs the doors, the veins the rivers, and the blood the water, all of which form a temple with God inside. It means that the real God

is the human inside the human, and the outer body parts are different contributing components of the temple. For Devkota, it is not necessary to go to the temple to worship God, as God is inside us. Rather than searching for God outside, we should enter the depth of ourselves and worship the human within us, i.e., a sense of humanity. By presenting the human body as a temple and the human inside the human as a god, Devkota proves humanity as the only religion (*dharma*).

Devkota glorifies the philosophy "work is worship" through his "Yatri." God is not found in the temple, and He doesn't become happy with the worship by humans. Rather, God becomes happy only when humans serve other humans who are in problems, needs, and sufferings. Instead of praying to God with offerings, therefore, we should focus on *karma*, which is the real *dharma*. Focusing on *karma* as *dharma* and humanity as a real religion, Devkota subverts the traditional notion of religion. He acclaims:

> God walks together, with the friend pilgrim in the street
>
> The god kisses the hand , with the golden work
>
> He touches with divine magic , the head of the server (self trans., lines 10–12)
>
> The god sings in the street, with the rhythm of the birds
>
> The god voices in the human, songs of pains and sufferings. (self trans., lines 18–19)
>
> To which temple do you go, you pilgrim? (self trans., line 21)

God is always with humans on the earth, neither in heaven nor in the temple. The earth, with humans who carry the human inside—to help and respect other humans without otherizing, dehumanizing, and discriminating—is the real heaven. Moreover, humans with the human inside are the real gods, as God always dwells on the earth with good humans. God always helps those who help others, believing that working is worshipping. He blesses the working hands, as they are golden and invaluable. God never lives a sophisticated life in a decorated temple; rather, He is always with the humans in the street, singing about the pains and sufferings of humanity in the voice of the birds. It means that the human is divine, the human body is a temple, work is worship, and the earth is heaven—all of which prove that humanity is the best religion.

Devkota destabilizes the religious philosophy of going to the temple and touching the feet of God to make Him happy and to receive blessings, affirming that touching the feet of wounded people is more meaningful than touching the feet of God. The poet glorifies the tendency to worship humans rather than God, which proves him to be a humanist. He appeals to all the people of the world to change the direction of their journey toward the temple, as God is everywhere with us:

> Return! Return! Go and touch, the feet of the humans.
>
> Keep ointment to the burning, wounds of the injured.
>
> Be human and make the divine face of god smile
>
> To which temple do you go, you pilgrim? (self trans., lines 15-18)

The poet requests all people to be human first and to regenerate the degenerated human inside. By focusing only on ritualistic activities and practices, the world has become a desert of humanity, as people have killed the human-god within themselves. They can sacrifice anything in the name of God, but they never help the needy. Rather, some people even exploit the helpless and homeless, dehumanizing them. Devkota, therefore, appeals to people to return from their journey of searching for God and divinity, as humanity is divinity. He advises people to go to the helpless, touch their feet, and help them survive. Only such action can be divine, and God smiles upon seeing it. It means that God doesn't become happy by being worshipped; rather, He becomes happy seeing humans help other humans in pain and suffering.

Devkota, through this poem, establishes humanity as a divine religion, dismantling the traditional religious notion, philosophy, and

practice of worshipping God, which is prevalent in the world, as it only kills humanity and the human god and creates a desert land leading to the collapse of the whole human civilization. Therefore, he suggests we preserve humanity and civilization by helping the helpless selflessly, which is the real *dharma* of human beings.

Like Devkota, Peretz, through his text, destabilizes the idol-worshipping tendency of religious philosophy and establishes the human-helping tendency as the real *dharma*. He promotes the humanistic philosophy of preserving humanity, civilization, and the human race as a whole. Serving needy people rather than making prayers in the synagogue is the real *dharma* for him. It means the real *dharma* is *karma* itself. The God-worshipping practice divides the world, whereas the human-worshipping system unites and harmonizes the world, leading to human advancement. Vishwajeet Singh (2023) claims: "The fear of God no longer holds sway as they attribute their successes and failures more to their own actions and decisions rather than divine intervention. They often ponder, 'What does God do for them when they are the ones shaping their destinies?'" (para. 3). He means to say that success and failure do not depend on worshipping God. We can find solutions to problems without religious guidance: "finding solutions to their problems without necessarily turning to religious beliefs for guidance" (para. 2). This shows that the traditional religion of worshipping idols as gods in the temple cannot solve the problems of needy people.

Peretz's "If Not Higher" carries the humanistic philosophy, highlighting work as worship. In the story, a Jewish man, the Rabbi of Nemirov, disappears every Friday during the penitential prayers. Everyone is surprised by where he goes. Keeping the matter mysterious, he goes to the jungle, cuts wood, and serves an old, helpless Jewish woman in a small house. Seeing all the Rabbi's activities in secret, Litvak becomes his disciple, though he used to mock him in the beginning. Litvak claims that the Rabbi goes even higher than heaven by helping the helpless selflessly. By showing the Rabbi as the real god and Litvak as his follower, Peretz dismantles the traditional system of worshipping God.

Peretz's "If Not Higher" magnifies humanity as the best religion by depicting servers like the Rabbi, who applies ointment to the poverty-stricken wounds of the old Jewish woman. Helping poor people survive in the world is much more meaningful than worshipping God through prayers in the synagogue. The Rabbi disappears from the penitential prayer with the motive of promoting humanity. And so, he goes to the old woman with a bundle of firewood. Peretz, being a humanist, plays an exemplary role in establishing humanity as a true religion (*dharma*). He proclaims:

> In the gray light of the early morning, he sees a poor room with broken, miserable furnishings. A sick woman, wrapped in rags, lies on the bed. She complains bitterly, "Buy? How can I buy? Where will a poor widow get money?"
>
> "I'll lend it to you," answers the supposed Vassil. "It's only six cents." "And how will I ever pay you back?" said the poor woman, groaning.
>
> "Foolish one," says the rabbi reproachfully. "See, you are a poor sick Jew, and I am ready to trust you with a little wood. And I am sure you'll pay. While you, you have such a great and mighty God and you don't trust him for six cents."
>
> "And who will kindle the fire?" said the widow. "Have I the strength to get up? My son is at work."
>
> "I'll kindle the fire," answers the rabbi. (Peretz, 2013, p. 17)

The old, sick Jewish woman lives in a small hut with poor furnishings, and she is wrapped in rags. She is suffering from illness, old age, and loneliness, as she is alone at home. Therefore, the Rabbi shows his humanitarian virtues to her. When the old woman says that she has no money to buy firewood, he says that he will lend it to her. When she says that she can't pay the money back, he responds that he trusts her and that she should trust

the Great God Almighty. Again, she reiterates that she can't kindle the fire. Then, the Rabbi kindles the fire for her. The Rabbi is happier serving the woman than praying to God in the synagogue. By projecting such humanitarian qualities within the Rabbi, Peretz deifies humanity as the greatest *dharma*.

The writer centers more on humanity than on god-worshipping traditional religions. Regarding religion, Banda (2007) acclaims: "It is beyond dispute that religion can, and indeed often does, play a disempowering, impoverishing, and oppressive role in society" (para. 3). The traditional religion of depending on God in the temple is against humans. So, it should be redefined by highlighting humanity. Though Peretz also talks about prayers even in serving people, his concentration is on service to the poor, sick, and helpless people, symbolized by the old, lonely Jewish woman. Burning the fire for the helpless woman in the story represents the good deed of humanity, which is more rewarding than worshipping God. Peretz (2013) asserts:

> As the rabbi put the wood into the oven he recited, in a groan, the first portion of the Penitential Prayers. As he kindled the fire and the wood burned brightly, he recited, a bit more joyously, the second portion of the Penitential Prayers. When the fire was set he recited the third portion, and then he shut the stove. (p. 17)

The Rabbi recites the penitential prayers not in the synagogue but in the dilapidated house of the emaciated old woman, who is waiting for her son, who is at work for survival. He associates the reciting of prayers with kindling the fire, valuing the act of helping the poor woman even more. The three steps of burning fire—putting wood into the oven, kindling the fire, and putting it out—are followed by the three portions of the penitential prayers. Though he recites the prayers, he believes that service to the poor is worshipping God and making Him happy. This shows that humanity is the ultimate religion for the betterment of humankind.

Heaven is on Earth, the human inside is the real God, the human is divine, and selfless service to the helpless is true worship. The real worship of serving the sufferers may be mocked or unaccepted at first, as the majority of people are intentionally or unintentionally hypocritical. They are under the illusion of religious practice, worshipping idols in the name of God while forgetting the ultimate reality that serving is worshipping. But eventually, true selfless help can inspire people, and they can change by embracing a new philosophy of religion, i.e., humanity. Peretz (2013) states:

> The Litvak who saw all this became a disciple of the rabbi. And ever after, when another disciple tells how the Rabbi of Nemirov ascends to heaven at the time of the Penitential Prayers, the Litvak does not laugh. He only adds quietly, "If not higher." (p. 17)

When the Rabbi serves the old woman, Litvak secretly observes him from beginning to end. He transforms himself and becomes the Rabbi's disciple. He mocks him at the beginning but ultimately becomes his follower. Thereafter, whenever other people insult the Rabbi for how he ascends to heaven at the time of the penitential prayers, he uses the phrase "if not higher." This means that the Rabbi reaches higher than heaven and achieves divinity through humanity.

Peretz highlights the service to the helpless in the slums instead of praying to God in the synagogue. He attempts to dismantle the traditional religious practice of worshipping God in the temple and to establish humanity as the best religion to unite the world for the betterment of the whole human race and civilization. Moreover, he forcefully institutes the philosophy that work is worship or *karma* is the real *dharma*.

In the line of Devkota and Peretz, Martin challenges the godly superiority and god-worshipping tendency of human beings. He suggests that people serve selflessly rather than worship God selfishly, as the former unites and harmonizes while the latter divides and degenerates the world, hindering human civilization. Through the story "The Brave Little Parrot," Martin questions the so-called superior, civilized godly power and its worship. The worship of God is nothing more than

slavish submission to power. Martin emphasizes action rather than suggestion in the story. Using the little parrot as the main actor, Martin proves the philosophy of humanity as the real *dharma*.

Martin emphasizes the philosophy that "nothing is impossible if we have willpower and life force," or "where there is a will, there is a way." In the story, though the parrot is very small, he shows his courage and confidence to extinguish the great fire blazing in the dense forest during stormy times. All the other birds fly away to protect their lives, but the small parrot decides to sacrifice himself for the sake of others—saving the lives of the animals and putting out the blazing fire. After continuous effort, he is ultimately supported by the gods and succeeds in extinguishing the fire and saving the animals and the jungle. Depicting such a situation, Martin tries to justify that helping the helpless selflessly is humanitarian and ultimately rewarded. Martin (2013) narrates:

> Then the little parrot once more flew back through the flames and smoke to the river, dipped himself in the cool water, and flew back again over the burning forest. Back and forth he flew, time and time again, from the river to the forest, from the burning forest to the river. His feathers were charred. His feet were scorched. His lungs ached. His eyes, stung by smoke, turned red as coals. His mind spun dizzily as the spinning sparks.
>
> But still the little parrot flew on. (p.11)

The parrot, though very little, holds a great heart. Firstly, he courageously decides to extinguish the great fire. Secondly, he continuously flies to the river, dives into the water, and sprinkles water in the jungle, flying back to it. Thirdly, he never gives up, though his lungs ache, feet are scorched, eyes sting, and mind spins dizzily. His continuous effort to extinguish the fire and save the lives of the animals is praiseworthy. The parrot that believes in *karma* for *dharma* is God in the true sense.

Martin, focusing on selfless help to the helpless, deconstructs the traditional religious idea of worshipping God and initiates humanity as the greatest religion.

Martin questions godly compassion, cooperation, justice, and civilization by presenting the gods as laughing at the parrot, calling its effort absurd and meaningless. He stands in favor of the parrot—i.e., action—criticizing the humiliating nature of the gods. For him, 'no words can overcome the action.' 'Action is far better than prayers during difficulties.' This philosophy is humanistic, affirming life rather than worship. Even the gods' eyes are opened when a little parrot requests help instead of the advice the gods were giving him, calling him a fool. This shows that Martin demolishes the conventional religious practice of praying to God in difficult times and emphasizes supporting hands to solve problems and save lives. He utters:

> "I don't need a great, shining eagle," coughed the little parrot, "to give me advice like that. My own mother, the dear bird, might have told me such things long ago. Advice! (cough, cough), I don't need advice. I just (cough) need someone to help." (Martin, 2013, p. 12)

The small parrot gives a great lesson to the so-called magnificent and glorious gods. The parrot's effort to save the lives of other animals is more invaluable than the suggestions of the gods to fly away and save their own lives without thinking about others. This is also a great irony to the great-hearted god. Though the gods insult him, laugh at him, call him foolish, his task absurd and meaningless, and suggest he save his own life, the parrot becomes ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of others. It projects that Martin questions the so-called civilized gods and religion and supports humanity as the best religion.

Helping is worshipping, as it is supported and rewarded ultimately. Humanity wins eventually. When the parrot gets support from the eagle-disguised god, the great fire is extinguished because of the heavy rainfall from the eagle's tears. Thereafter, all the animals are revived in perfect condition. They dance joyfully as they have survived, though they had lost hope. They respect the parrot as their savior. There is no other god than the parrot for them, as it saves them from the blazing fire. The selfless help of the parrot

is eventually sustained and rewarded. Martin, through this depiction, claims that humanity is ultimately honored and accepted universally as the best *dharma*.

All the animals looked at one another in amazement. They were whole and well. Not one had been harmed. Up above in the clear blue sky, they could see their brave friend, the little parrot, looping and soaring in delight. When all hope was gone, somehow he had saved them. "Hurray!" they cried. "Hurray for the brave little parrot and the miraculous rain!" (p.13). The survival of the animals becomes possible only through the sacrifice, devotion, dedication, courage, confidence, and continuous selfless effort of the little parrot, not through the prayers and worship of god. All the credit for life-saving goes to the parrot and its sense of humanity. The animals worship the parrot as a god for its sacrifice and selflessness. The parrot remains immortal for its great humanitarian deeds.

Martin's "The Brave Little Parrot," subverts the universally accepted god-worshipping practice prevalent in the world, as it can't solve the problems and save the lives of people. Rather, it divides the people and the world into fragments, otherizing and dehumanizing humans by so-called religiously civilized people. As Bucar (2024) asserts: "Religion can be rooted in outdated, conservative values that no longer align with our more progressive vision of the future. Institution is hostile" (para. 2). In this way, Martin establishes humanity as the best religion, as it ties and harmonizes people for the betterment of humankind. This story evidences him as a revolutionary humanist in a world largely dominated by religious orthodoxy.

Findings

Devkota, Peretz, and Martin dismantle conventional religious dogma—such as going to temples, offering sacrifices to God, and engaging in ritual worship—and instead establish humanity as the highest form of religion through their respective texts "Yatri," "If Not Higher," and "The Brave Little Parrot."

As existing religious systems and practices—Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and others—tend to divide the world and its people, create hierarchies, dehumanize individuals, suppress compassion, foster selfishness, and contribute to the degeneration of society, humanity emerges as the only practical religion capable of regenerating a fractured world. It promotes life affirmation, equality, unity, and harmony among people, ultimately advancing human civilization. Devkota urges people to tend to the burning wounds of the injured rather than searching for God in temples. He calls for the worship of the human being, asserting that the human body is itself a temple, that humanity is divine, and that the earth is heaven.

Similarly, Peretz encourages us to offer selfless help to the helpless rather than reciting prayers in a synagogue. This is exemplified by the Rabbi who aids a poor, sick, and elderly Jewish woman in a dilapidated house instead of remaining in the synagogue.

Likewise, Martin promotes courage, confidence, devotion, and selfless sacrifice through the story of the little parrot, who saves the lives of animals by extinguishing a blazing forest fire—choosing action over words. Together, these authors proclaim with one voice that humanity is the truest and most effective religion for the advancement of human civilization. They compel us to revisit and rethink traditional notions and practices of religion—specifically, idol worship in temples—and instead advocate for a religion rooted in compassion and service. For them, religion is not about ritualistic worship but about selflessly helping those in need.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Devkota, Peretz, and Martin strive to redefine the concept of religion through their respective works, establishing humanity as a more meaningful and practical alternative to conventional religious practices. In a world increasingly fractured by religious dogma, sectarianism, and capitalist exploitation,

these authors present a compelling vision: that compassion, selfless service, and human dignity should be at the heart of our spiritual lives. The divisions and discrimination perpetuated by rigid religious systems often undermine the very essence of what it means to be human. In this context, embracing humanity as the ultimate religion becomes not only a moral choice but a necessary one. The age-old proverbs—"work is worship," "*karma is dharma*," and "*manav dharma is mahadharma*"—resonate now more than ever, offering a moral compass to irrigate the spiritually barren landscape of today's world. This study urges a fundamental rethinking of religion—not as ritual, but as action rooted in empathy and solidarity. By doing so, it encourages individuals to nurture the humans within and create a world where harmony, respect, and kindness prevail. Treating every person with humanity is the truest form of worship, and perhaps, the path to a more peaceful and united world.

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