

Some suffixes defy easy comprehension and yet define the subtle nuances of our lives

The question was raised by a professor at the gym. He and his co-sweat crunchers discussed it, laughed about it and moved on, and I who was on an elliptical in the middle, caught it and am still there spinning my feet to and fro, along with my mind. And yes, I was quite a willing volunteer in that discussion about *-ishes* and *-ists*, adding my own *-wallahs* to it.

The big, or the small, original question being about the *ishness* of things- for instance Fattish, Frenchish, even Hinduish perhaps- and then moving on to British, Swedish, and ultimately, Jewish. What does that *ish* signify? What does it reflect from the core word? What does it take? What does it sell? Purvey?

Now, coming from India, I am used to the *-wallahs*: Peanut-wallah, Carpet-wallah, Shop-wallah, Rickshaw-wallah, Book-wallah, Delhi-wallah... Maybe, to extend the analogy, I would say Knowledge-wallah or Preaching-wallah, but I wouldn't say, Teacher-wallah, for instance.

So thinking about it long and hard, as far as the suffix *wallah* is concerned, I came to the conclusion that it is added to imply- purveyance, which in many instances would be simple selling of goods, but in some cases, would imply a more subtle transference of culture, norms, etiquettes, as in Delhi-wallah, or knowledge as in Knowledge-wallah.

But, can the same thought process be applied to the *ishness* of things: Do fattish, Hinduish, British and Jewish answer to a similar concept of *ishness*? Is British, Brit-Like and Jewish, Jew-Like. And is there such a thing as Hinduish?

In fact, can one born outside the four castes of Hinduism, be even considered a Hindu? According to the rules of orthodoxy- Not. Those three lines chiseled in stone, that bestow the four types of birthrights: Brahmin- the supreme, anointed through the forehead of the gods, to the Kshatriya warrior king that bows only to the Brahmin to the merchant Vaishyas to the lowest- the Sudras, the untouchables that time and the exploitation of one man by another, created. Those lines send high flames of orthodoxy to burn any outsider before he or she may put his foot on that sacred stone of division and unjustness and yes, profound knowledge.

And yet, if one looks at the philosophy of Hinduism, or rather the many philosophies of Hinduism, you may believe in any god you can visualize, chisel or sculpt. You may worship or attempt to reach God in any manner that suits you- as a friend, a parent, a child, a lover, an idol of stone. Any form of worship, any pathway that may lead you to that one ultimate truth or consciousness- you are practicing Hinduism.

So, maybe you could be practicing any religion in the world, and in that sense, you could be Hinduish? I am sure the orthodoxies of this world would probably disagree with me, but then I did step off that stone into the fluid air that flows and weaves through all lives and around the world many years ago.

So then, in the light of the above and coming back to the original question, if I convert to Judaism- am I Jewish or a Jew? If I adopt Islam, am I a Muslim or Muslimish? Christianish or a Christian? And, why would I do any such thing anyway? What does it mean to convert? To relinquish and adopt? To change from what to what?

In the south of India, it is believed that Thomas, the 13th apostle landed on the coast many-many centuries ago and numerous Hindus converted to Christianity. They may of course, have also converted when the missionaries started arriving in the 1600s

and the 1700s. And the puritanical evangelicals held sway in the mid 19th century at the time of the British rule in India, busy doing their zealous work, but those lines of historical time are all blurred by now. Anyhow, there in the South of India, exist, both upper caste and lower caste churches! Would you then call those people- Christianish?

So, let's see- Fattish, Hinduish, British, Swedish, Jewish, Frenchish, Muslimish. American-ish, anyone?