

**MASTER OF ARTS  
SOCIOLOGY  
CENTRE FOR OPEN AND  
DISTANCE LEARNING  
(CODL)**



**MSO 204: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION  
BLOCK I**

**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING  
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)  
TEZPUR, ASSAM - 784028  
INDIA**

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- **To contribute to conserve and promote cultural heritage, literature, traditional knowledge and environment conducting short programmes, workshops, seminars and research in interdisciplinary field.**

# **MSO 204: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION**



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**TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)**

**TEZPUR, ASSAM-784028**

**INDIA**

## **MSO-204: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION**

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# BLOCK I

## MODULE I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

### UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

### UNIT 2: MARX, WEBER AND DURKHEIM

### UNIT 3: MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

### UNIT 4: CRITIQUE OF RELIGION: FREUD AND MARX

## MODULE II: RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

### UNIT 5: RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS: NATURE, TYPES, FUNCTIONS

### UNIT 6: RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: TYPES, NATURE

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>MODULE I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION</b>	
<b>UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION</b>	<b>4-19</b>
1.1 Introduction 1.2 Objectives 1.3 Understanding Sociology of Religion 1.3.1 Definitions of Religion 1.4 Elements of Religion 1.5 Types of Religion 1.6 Theories of Religion 1.6.1 Marx 1.6.2 Durkheim 1.6.3 Weber 1.7 Summing Up 1.8 Questions 1.9 Recommended Readings and References	
<b>UNIT 2: MARX, WEBER AND DURKHEIM</b>	<b>20-34</b>
2.1 Introduction 2.2 Objectives 2.3 Durkheim on Religion 2.3.1 Totemism: Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life 2.3.2 Sacred and Profane 2.3.3 Religion and Construction of Knowledge 2.3.4 Critical Remarks on Durkheim's Sociology of Religion 2.4 Weber's Sociology of Religion 2.4.1 The Origins of Spirit of Capitalism 2.4.2 Ascetic Protestantism and Capitalism 2.4.3 John Calvin and His Doctrines	

2.4.4 The World Religions 2.4.5 Critical Remarks on Weber's Understanding of Religion 2.5 Marxian Notion of Religion 2.5.1 Religion as an Instrument of Oppression 2.5.2 The Dominant Ideology 2.5.3 Religion as Super Structure 2.5.4 Criticisms to Marxian Approach to the Study of Religion 2.6 Summing Up 2.7 Questions 2.8 Recommended Readings and References	
<b>UNIT 3: MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION</b>	<b>35-52</b>
3.1 Introduction 3.2 Objectives 3.3 A Synoptic View on Magic, Science and Religion 3.3.1 Tylor's Views on Religion 3.3.2 Frazer on Magic, Science and Religion 3.3.3 The Concept of Totemism 3.4 The Domain of the Science (Profane) 3.4.1 Gardening Among the Natives of Trobriand Island 3.4.2 Canoe-Building Among the Natives of Trobriand Island 3.5 The Domain of the Religion (Sacred) 3.5.1 Initiation Ceremonies 3.5.2 Rites Related to Death 3.5.3 The Public Character of Primitive Cults 3.6 The Domain of the Magic (Sacred) 3.6.1 Rite and the Spell 3.7 Similarities Between Magic, Science and Religion 3.8 Cultural Functions of Magic, Science and Religion 3.9 Summing Up 3.10 Questions	

3.11 Recommended Readings and References	
<b>UNIT 4: CRITIQUE OF RELIGION: FREUD AND MARX</b>	<b>53-67</b>
4.1 Introduction 4.2 Objectives 4.3 Freud on Religion 4.3.1 Background of Freud 4.3.2 Religion as an Illusion 4.3.3 Primitive Men and Their Idea of Religion 4.3.4 Sufferings in Human Life and Oceanic Feeling 4.3.5 Dealing with Unhappiness 4.4 Marx on Religion 4.4.1 Marx: A Brief History 4.4.2 Marx's Critique on Religion and His Influences 4.4.3 Sociological Conditions During Marx's Time and the Theory of Religion 4.4.4 Synoptic View on Marx's Concept of Religion 4.5 Summing Up 4.6 Questions 4.7 Recommended Readings and References	
<b>MODULE II: RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS</b>	
<b>UNIT 5: RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS: NATURE, TYPES, FUNCTIONS</b>	<b>69-82</b>
5.1 Introduction 5.2 Objectives 5.3 Religiosity and Individual Religiosity 5.4 What is Religious Organisation? 5.5 Nature, Types and Functions of Religious Organisation 5.6 Summing Up 5.7 Questions 5.8 Recommended Readings and References	



UNIT 6: RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: TYPES, NATURE	83-99
6.1 Introduction	
6.2 Objectives	
6.3 Religious Movements	
6.4 The Nature of Socio-Religious Movements in India	
6.5 New Religious Movements	
6.5.1 The World-Rejecting Groups of New Religions	
6.5.2 The World-Affirming New Religions	
6.5.3 The World Accommodating New Religions	
6.6 Summing Up	
6.7 Questions	
6.8 Recommended Readings and References	

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## **COURSE INTRODUCTION**

This course will introduce the learners to the conceptual and theoretical understanding of the relationship between religion and society. It presents the basic social philosophies of different institutional and non-institutional religions and discusses their changing nature in contemporary times with special reference to India. This course critically looks at various religious practices and issues in the context of their relationship with different social forces.

The course is divided into four Modules, each consisting of multiple units. This has been done to discuss the major concepts more elaborately and, in a learner, friendly way.

**Module I** gives an introduction to the study of religion. **Unit 1** introduces Sociology of Religion to the learners, focusing on the definitions, types, elements and theories of religion. In this unit, the learners will also get introduced to the contributions of Marx, Weber and Durkheim in the understanding of religion. **Unit 2** will further elaborate on the contributions of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, focusing on their major works. **Unit 3** deals with magic, science and religion and looks at the similarities and differences between them. The last unit of the module, **Unit 4**, presents a critique of religion, exploring the works of Freud and Marx.

**Module II** is about religious organisations and movements. **Unit 5** gives an overview of the meaning, nature, types and functions of religious organisations and how these influence in generating individual religiosity. **Unit 6** deals with religious movements.

**Module III** deals with religions in India and it consists of five units. **Unit 7** explores Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Tribal Religion. On the other hand, **Unit 8** covers Christianity, Judaism and Islam. **Unit 9** is about religious cults and sects. **Unit 10** deals with the concept of God man and God woman. Certain aspects of religion in India like sacred knowledge, sacred space and sacred persona are discussed in **Unit 11**.

**Module IV** deals with the concept of religion in India in contemporary times. This module is divided into three units. **Unit 12** discusses secularism. **Unit 13** deals with proselytisation while **Unit 14** discusses communalism.

The complete course is divided into two Blocks. **Block I** contains Module I and II. **Block II** will have Module III and IV.

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# **MODULE I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION**

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# **UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION**

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## **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Understanding Sociology of Religion
  - 1.3.1 Definitions of Religion
- 1.4 Elements of Religion
- 1.5 Types of Religion
- 1.6 Theories of Religion
  - 1.6.1 Marx
  - 1.6.2 Durkheim
  - 1.6.3 Weber
- 1.7 Summing Up
- 1.8 Questions
- 1.9 Recommended Readings and References

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## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The concept of religion has engaged the attention of scholars for a long period of time. There have been a large number of changes in the perception of religion starting from the issues of belief in the supernatural to the whole question of the politics of religion. Religion in simple words can be understood as a cultural system with an interrelated set of belief, rituals, symbols, values and norms (Keith, 1984). Further, religion is also considered to be a part of the larger society as it binds people together through a common sharing of belief. In Durkheim's (1912) words, religion is an essential feature of collective life. Thus, it can be said that religion permeates almost all aspects of society.

This unit will introduce you to issues relating to religion and how different scholars have tried to understand them. Efforts will also be made to make you understand the vital link between religion and society as religion is a phenomenon which has a profound interconnection between the economic, political and social aspects of society.

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## **1.2 OBJECTIVES**

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By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Analyse the existing definitions of religion;
- Discuss its significance and impact upon human history;
- Explain the major elements of religion;
- Analyse the contributions of sociologists in the understanding of religion;
- Explain the relation between religion and society.

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## **1.3 UNDERSTANDING SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION**

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Religion is a complex phenomenon. It is a cultural system with an interrelated set of beliefs, rituals, symbols, values and norms. Each of them interacts in complex ways with one another, sometimes being mutually supportive and sometimes conflicting. (Keith, 1984). Religion can also be understood as a structural system with established roles, group boundaries etc. Further, it can be also understood as a part of the larger social system, and as such it affects and gets affected by the social system. In this unit, we are going to analyse this complexity of religion as well as its relationship to the larger society. In common parlance, religion refers to the belief in supernatural power or God. Sociologically, it has a much deeper meaning as we can see below.

### 1.3.1 Definitions of Religion

Roberts A. Keith (1984) in his book, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* states that definition of religion can be grouped into-

- Substantive definition – Many sociologists in their studies employ the substantive definition. It focuses on the substance or the essence of religion. Substantive definitions emphasise on a specific belief in spiritual beings/ supernatural realm or it concentrates on the distinction between sacred and the profane. Sociologists who employ this definition include Tylor, Durkheim, Greely and so on.
- Functionalist definition – This definition focuses on what religion *does*. It identifies religion as something which provides a sense of meaning, a system of religious symbols and a set of core values for life. Sociologists like Yinger, Geertz employ this definition.

In order to get a grasp on how the study of religion developed in the discipline of Sociology, we need to trace back to its history in the 19th century. This period has been considered very important in history, as the society was going through various structural changes as a result of the industrial revolution, reformation and enlightenment. So the main task of the sociologists was to look into religion as an institution that could help to understand the social transformations taking place in the society. Some of the notable works in this period are of Durkheim, Marx and Weber who were trying to understand these changes by taking into account the role religion was playing in the society. Durkheim was trying to see religion as a binding force in the society whereas Marx was viewing it as an ideology which was used by the capitalist class to subordinate the working class. Furthermore, there is the work of Weber, who was trying to understand the emergence of capitalism because of the Protestant belief system. All of these thinkers were in a way trying to understand the evolution of the society and how religion had a role to play in it. In the coming sections, the works of these scholars will be explained in details. However, before going on to the intricacies of religion and its impact on society, let us try to understand the main elements of religion.

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## 1.4 ELEMENTS OF RELIGION

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Durkheim in his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* states that religious phenomena fall into two basic categories- beliefs and rites.

**i) Beliefs** are states of opinion, values or ideas for doing certain actions. According to Durkheim, beliefs classify the real and ideal things into two opposed groups which are termed as the *sacred* and the *profane* (Durkheim, 1912). The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other containing all that is profane – is a distinctive trait for the foundation of religion.

- *Sacred* things are not simply those personal beings that are called Gods or Spirits. A rock, a tree, a pebble, a piece of wood, in a word anything can be sacred. It is not the object in itself that makes it sacred, but it is due to the meaning through belief and ritual attached to it. And the sacred meaning of such objects comes from the collective belief of the society. Thereby religion or religious belief becomes the source of solidarity in society and building a moral community among those who adhere to that.
- *Profane* things, on the other hand, refer to the everyday objects and day to day activities that are necessary for existence but are not regarded as separate or sacred. Basically, it includes the personal and the private which is of not much importance to the collective community. The sacred and the profane exist together but have nothing in common. The only way to move from the profane to the sacred through purifying rituals or ceremony that separate sacred from the profane.

**ii) Rites** are rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things. For instance, during a ritual/*puja* there are certain objects which are considered to be sacred. These are not supposed to be touched. Such kinds of actions or taboos attached to the belief system are a



part of the rites. Durkheim differentiated rites into three categories: positive rites, negative rites and piacular rites.

- Positive rites are the activities which promote production and act as the binding force of society. Positive rites include- imitative rites and representative rites. Positive practices prescribe the 'dos' in consonance with religious beliefs.
- Negative rites are in the form of taboos which prevents people from doing certain actions. They mainly function to separate the sacred from the profane. Negative practices prescribe the 'don'ts' in consonance with religious beliefs.
- Piacular rites are punitive or expiatory rites which are performed in order to repair the damage caused to the collective religious belief. This is the practice towards intensification of attachment to the sacred.

**Stop and Read:**

Types of positive rites:

**Imitative-** This rite constitutes of individuals depicting the movements and cries of a particular totem species be it plant/animal whose reproduction is desired. Durkheim argues that through this act the clan feel they really are the animal/plant of their totemic species and thus it should be demonstrated when the clan gathers.

**Representative-** This rite constitutes of dramatic representations of the mythical history of the clan. It evokes the feeling of collective consciousness.

Arnold Van Gennep (1960) in his work *Rites of Passage* tried to understand ritual and religion naturalistically and socially. Through his study, he portrayed how an individual passes the most important occasions

in his life, starting from birth through death by giving in to the rites and ceremonies. Individuals in most societies have to go through various rituals at birth, during puberty, marriage and finally the funeral rites at the time of death.

Durkheim while trying to understand religion through beliefs and rites, sacred and profane also recognised that not all experiences of sacredness are religious in character. He observed tribal people engaging in rites of magic which is similar to religious life. However, he maintained that both are different. Religion is a communal activity. To attain a sacred character, it must involve a group experience. Only then it can be identified as a religion. Thus, he defined religion as:

"A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." (Durkheim, 1912).

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is the substantive definition of religion based on?.

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2. What is the functional definition of religion based on?

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3. Name two scholars who employ substantive definition of religion.

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4. Define beliefs and rites.

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### 1.5 TYPES OF RELIGION

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Scholars from various disciplines have attempted to classify religions. One of the most important classifications to understand the religious beliefs of individuals is based on what or who they worship. Using this classification religion would fall into the following criteria:

- **Animism:** Animism refers to the belief in spiritual beings. Spiritual beings here means conscious subjects that have capacities which are superior to ordinary men and thus it includes the souls of the dead, genies, demons as well as deities. It was Tylor who proposed this theory of Animism and considered it as the oldest form of religion that existed.
- **Naturism:** Another theory proposed by Max Muller was Naturism, which signifies worship of nature. Various forces of nature were worshipped because they were supposed to have power over ordinary men. In India also we can find instances of Naturism in which people worship the Sun, Moon or the rivers. These are considered as sacred and powerful by individuals.
- **Totemism:** Emile Durkheim rejected both these theories of Animism and Naturism as the most primitive forms of religion. He feels there is another more fundamental and primitive cult from which Animism and Naturism have emerged. According to him that cult exists and is called Totemism. Totemism is the belief in totems. It is practised by the aborigines of Central Australia and is the most primitive and simplest form of religion. In most cases, the totem is represented by an animal, less frequently a plant and in rare cases

an inanimate object with which the members of a clan assume the relation of kinship. The members of the clan believe themselves to have descended from some common ancestor- i.e. an animal, a plant or an object. The common ancestor thus becomes the totemic object. From this totem, the clan gains its name and identity. Totem is not just a name, it is also an emblem. It is carved on the belongings of a clan and also on the bodies of clan members. Each clan has their own totem which is considered as sacred. There are also a large number of restrictions and taboos associated with Totemism.

Durkheim's understanding of totemism also becomes relevant in understanding the meaning we attach to our national flag which becomes a totem of our country. Each country has their own flag which gives an identity of belonging to that nation. We can also take the example of a soldier who dies for his national flag, in fact, dies for his country. Likewise, the clan member who worships his totem, in fact, worships his clan.

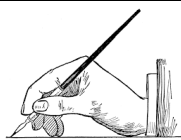
- **Theism:** Theism is a system of religious beliefs that establish divine beings that shape human affairs. It can be classified into two categories:
  - Polytheism: Belief in a number of Gods.
  - Monotheism: Belief in one supreme God. For example, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

### **Stop and Read**

The credit of having laid the foundations of an anthropological study of religion belongs to Edward B. Tylor. In his study of Animism, (the belief in spirit worship that plants, animals, rocks, and thunder, have spirits which can influence human events) he shows how this belief has

originated from a mistaken yet consistent interpretation of dreams, visions and hallucinations. There was a belief that the soul was separate from the human body and leads a continuous existence even after death. Thus, it appears in dreams and haunts the survivors in memories. This led to the belief in ghosts and spirits of the dead, in immortality and a nether world

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Who proposed the theory of Animism?.

2. What is Naturism?

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3. What is a Totem?

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### 1.6 THEORIES OF RELIGION

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After getting an understanding of the elements and types of religion let us focus on some of the major theories of religion. The classics have long played an important role in sociological theory and research, perhaps particularly on religion. This section will introduce you to the works of the classical sociologists Marx, Weber and Durkheim on their theories of religion.

### 1.6.1 Marx

Marx's work on religion, a conflict perspective, has a more problematic status when compared to the works of Weber and Durkheim (Turner, 2010). Turner suggests two reasons for this

- i. Marx never devoted much of his ideas to the study of religion.
- ii. He had an antagonistic view of religion. He basically focussed on the divisive role of religion.

Marx considered religion as a false picture of the reality or an illusion which tends to promote false consciousness. His understanding of religion fits in the analysis of class relations in society. Marx, in his analysis of the capitalist society talks about two main classes:

- i. The Bourgeoisie- which comprises the owning class
- ii. The Proletariat- which comprises a major part of the society, i.e. the working class.

In his famous work *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx argued that the capitalist bourgeoisie mercilessly exploited the proletariat. On one hand, the work carried out by the proletariat or the working class created great wealth for the capitalists. But on the other hand, the same product created by the workers' labour gets sold for more than the value of the labour itself (i.e. the workers' wages). Thus, the capitalist makes a profit but the workers fail to benefit from the fruits of their own labour. In this process, the worker gets alienated from his/her own products as well as his/her own self. It is specifically at this point when the alienated person takes the recourse to religion to find a solution. So religion becomes a route to escape from the exploitation, appropriation and so on. It represents a false picture of the reality which hinders societal change by making social arrangement seem right and inevitable. For Marx, this illusion promotes a false consciousness which has evil consequences. He quotes, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people" (Marx, 1848). By

this, he tries to say that the crucial need for the society is not the abolition of religion, but the abolition of the heartless world that is the origin of the religious impulse.

From the above understanding, we can try to understand his views on religion in two ways:

- Religion as an ideology: In class societies, the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class. The legitimacy to these ideas as well as interests of the ruling class is provided by religion, which acts as tools of manipulation of the working class.
- Religion as superstructure: In Marxist theory, human society consists of two parts: the base (or substructure) and the superstructure. The base comprises of the economy or in other words forces and relations of production. On the basic structure rests the superstructure which comprises of religion, family, state, law and so on. The relation between the base and the superstructure is asymmetrical because it is the basic structure (base) which is the site of primary social change that leads to super-structural changes. Marx argues that because of a change in the forces and relations of production from a pre-capitalist society to a capitalist society, the perception of religion changes. Religion from being a communal feeling changes into a recourse or escape from the exploitation faced by the working class.

### **1.6.2 Durkheim**

Durkheim applied the functionalist perspective to understand religion and thus focuses on the role of integration. In his work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim tried to understand the most primitive and elementary form in which religion existed, and tried to find the common elements in religion. He also sought to establish the fact that religion was not supernaturally inspired and in fact was a product of the society. He considers religion as something which is eminently social. Religious rites

and rituals are a manner of acting which rises in the minds of groups and which maintains or recreates certain mental states in these groups.

Durkheim after recognising the social origin of religion states that it acted as a source of solidarity. In his work, *The Division of Labour in the Society* (1933), he states that when the society changes from pre-industrial society to the industrial society, there is a shift from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. The pre-industrial society which was based on mechanical solidarity implies a solidarity of resemblance. The members of the same community resemble each other because they feel the same emotions, values and hold the same things sacred. So any kind of shift in this society did not bring about a large amount of change in the overall structure. In this type of society, the division of labour was very less as it was based on age and sex.

The opposite form of solidarity which was found in the industrial society was known as organic solidarity. This solidarity resulted from or is expressed by differentiation. In this society which is based on specialisation of skills and education, when there is a change in one structure it will bring about a change in the other. According to Durkheim, the reason for using the term organic solidarity is because it resembles the functioning of a living organism. Though the part/organs of an organism do not resemble each other and it has different functions, yet each of the organs is equally important for the survival of the living creature. In other words, the parts are related to the whole which is the same in the case of organic solidarity. While talking about religion he states that when a society shifts from one with mechanical to organic solidarity, the religion as a binding force becomes less significant in terms of the meaning attached to the sacredness.

Another contribution of Durkheim in the field of religion, which has already been discussed in the previous sections of this unit, was in identifying certain elements of religious beliefs that are common across different cultures. A belief in a supernatural realm is not necessary or common among religions, but the separation of different aspects of life,



physical things, and certain behaviours into two categories -- the sacred and the profane -- is common. This according to him was the most important trait in the foundation of religion.

From the above explanations, it is evident that Durkheim was primarily concerned with religion as a functional source of social cohesion. As said before, religion acts to pull people together. By doing so, religion is able to reaffirm collective morals and beliefs in the minds of the individuals in society. This can be applied to his understanding of society which has changed from mechanical to organic. It can be seen that unlike in mechanical solidarity in which the meaning which is attached to the community or society is more important than the meaning attached to an individual starts to fade in an organic society. There is a growth of individualization in which one's own interests become more significant. As a result, the society moves to a state of anomy or alienation where there is no sense of togetherness.

There are four important functions of religion according to Durkheim: (i) Disciplinary (ii) Cohesive (iii) Vitalizing and (iv) Euphoric function.

In disciplinary function religion imposes self-discipline and a certain measure of asceticism. In cohesive role religion serves to reaffirm common bonds and to reinforce social solidarity. With regard to vitalizing function, religion maintains and revitalizes the social heritage by transmitting the same from generation to generations. Religion has a euphoric function also, as it serves to counteract feelings of frustration and loss of faith and certitude by re-establishing the believer's sense of well-being. It acts as an insurance against odds and creates a sense of the rightful tightness of their own moral world.

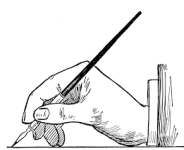
### **1.6.3 Weber**

Weber was trying to understand the relation between religion and the economy. Unlike Marx he says, the change in social structures brings about a change in the economy. Using this understanding he was trying to

understand if the emergence of capitalism could be attributed to religious ethics and related practices. He observed that in western countries, the majority of capitalists were the ones who were protestants or followed the Protestant ethic. The Protestant ethic which gives more significance to 'calling', investments and savings leads to a question of giving up one's leisure life and stressing on hard work and self-discipline. This ethic is based on the ideas of John Calvin. Calvinists believed that individuals' material rewards actually belong to God and the purpose of their life was to multiply the profits through reinvestment rather than spending it on personal pleasures. By focusing more on hard work an individual can become the chosen one for God while all others will be damned. This idea goes very well with the spirit of capitalism. Thus, Protestant ethic provided individuals with religious sanctions that fostered a spirit of religious discipline which in turn encouraged individuals to acquire wealth.

Form the above understandings on religion we can observe how religion has been understood in society. It is basically the meaning attached to the institution of religion, which shows whether it plays a functional or a dysfunctional role or becomes an ideology of a particular class. Thus, in conclusion, it can be said that religion is an important institution to understand the major social changes in society.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Fill the gap:

1. According to \_\_\_\_\_ religion is an opium for the masses.

2. What are the two most important traits in the foundation of religion according to Durkheim?

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## 1.7 SUMMING UP

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- Religion is an important institution to understand the major structural changes taking place in society.
- Beliefs and rites constitute the basic categories to understand religious phenomena.
- Totemism is considered the most elementary form of religion.
- It is basically the meanings attached to religion as an institution which shows if it plays a functional or a dysfunctional role in society.

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## 1.8 QUESTIONS

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Short questions:

1. How did Durkheim define religion?
2. Explain the basic elements of religion.
3. Differentiate between the idea of sacred and profane.
4. How does Weber explain the emergence of capitalism?
5. Analyse Karl Marx's view on religion.

Essay type questions:

1. How does religion help in maintaining solidarity?
2. Explain the conflict theory of religion.
3. Illustrate the relation between religion and society.

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## 1.9 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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## **UNIT 2: MARX, WEBER AND DURKHEIM**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

#### 2.1 Introduction

#### 2.2 Objectives

#### 2.3 Durkheim on Religion

##### 2.3.1 Totemism: Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life

##### 2.3.2 Sacred and Profane

##### 2.3.3 Religion and Construction of Knowledge

##### 2.3.4 Critical Remarks on Durkheim's Sociology of Religion

#### 2.4 Weber's Sociology of Religion

##### 2.4.1 The Origins of Spirit of Capitalism

##### 2.4.2 Ascetic Protestantism and Capitalism

##### 2.4.3 John Calvin and His Doctrines

##### 2.4.4 The World Religions

##### 2.4.5 Critical Remarks on Weber's Understanding of Religion

#### 2.5 Marxian Notion of Religion

##### 2.5.1 Religion as an Instrument of Oppression

##### 2.5.2 The Dominant Ideology

##### 2.5.3 Religion as Super Structure

##### 2.5.4 Criticisms to Marxian Approach to the Study of Religion

#### 2.6 Summing Up

#### 2.7 Questions

#### 2.8 Recommended Readings and References

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit, we are going to learn about the views on religion held by classical sociological thinkers such as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx. We will learn each thinker's views on religion separately.

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## **2.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this unit you will be able to:

- Describe Durkheim's concept of religion;
- Explain Durkheim's sacred and profane;
- Explain Weber's Sociology of Religion;
- Explain the relationship between Protestantism and Capitalism;
- Describe the Marx's notion of religion.

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## **2.3 DURKHEIM ON RELIGION**

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Durkheim as a positivist thought of his study of society as a scientific study. His search for a definition of religion has two ways. One is the positive direction and the other is the investigative mode. By the positive way, Durkheim meant to study religion subject to observation as opposed to speculation. The investigative aspect of religion reduces it to elementary parts. It looks for what is common for all religions.

He discusses religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices which are relative to sacred things and set apart from those things which are profane as discussed in the previous unit. Those who adhere to such beliefs and practices, it unites everyone into a moral community called 'Church'. Here, in this work, the concept of the church used by Durkheim refers to the presence of regularized ceremonies pertaining to a group of worshippers. The definition of religion put forth by Durkheim has two parts.

Firstly, all religions are defined in terms of a system of beliefs and rites. Beliefs are a set of ideas in relation to sacred things or objects. Besides beliefs, rites are an action which developed toward the religious things or objects. Secondly, all religions divide the world into sacred and the profane.

### **2.3.1 Totemism: Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life**

Durkheim developed his theory of religion by studying the aborigines of Australia as he considered studying the most primitive and simple religion as a way to understand all religions. All religions have their origin in the elementary form.. He chose primitive religion as it expresses the essential features, which do not vary at all. In his work, he discusses the clan organization and the association of each clan with the sacred totem, which could be either animal or plant or a polished stone.

The totem is images drawn on wooden objects or stone. This is called *churingas* which are considered sacred and bears the image of their sacred animal or plant. The churingas are treated with respect and there are taboos surrounding it. The totem represented as images on churingas is more sacred than the plant species or animal. In fact, Durkheim says, that these totemic symbols become the emblem of clan just like the flag of a country. Durkheim believed that totemism is the essence of religion. The totem stands for two things. Firstly, it is an impersonal force or totemic principle. Secondly, the totem is the clan itself.

### **2.3.2 Sacred and Profane**

Durkheim stated that division between sacred and profane is common in all the religions. The sphere of the profane is the sphere of everyday utilitarian mundane activities whereas the sphere of the sacred is set apart and not ordinary. An object is neither sacred nor profane but it becomes either sacred or profane depending on what men choose it to be.

Emile Durkheim differentiates between sacred and profane. There are rites and practices which set out rules on how the members are to conduct themselves in the presence of the sacred objects. The sacred objects have restrictions and taboos surrounding it to protect it. The sacred is regarded as superior to the profane and that is why it is segregated from the profane. Both sacred and profane represent a unifying principle and the separation between the two forms the model of opposites such as good and evil, holy and defile.

### **2.3.3 Religion and Construction of Knowledge**

Religion according to Durkheim, is also sociology of knowledge. He says that the conceptual categories of thought, basic concepts such as time, space, number, cause are due to religion. It is born of religion and it is for religion. He claims that since religion is social, these basic concepts are derived from society. We conceptualize things the way we do because we live in society.

Durkheim, from here on, shows how the totem system is a cosmological system and even how categories of thought are actually tied up with the totem and clan structure which characterized the early society. To explain this, Durkheim begins by explaining how the people of a particular clan partake in the sacred. As members of a particular totem and descendants of the totem, the human being of early society, have the same essence of their totem and so recognize themselves too as sacred. To illustrate, a person from a black cockatoo clan will not introduce oneself as part of black cockatoo clan but as black cockatoo itself.

Similarly, just as in totemic ideas, everyone is associated with one or the other clan, they all partake in sacred. For instance, rain and lightning, winter is associated with the Crow clan of Arunta. In the same way, there are ranges of a natural phenomenon across different clans classified systematically. Such a systematic classification of totemic ideas, according to Durkheim, is the first in human thinking. Such notions of categories of thought, class, category, was not given. It came from somewhere. It came from collective life which generated such ideas and concepts. This thought is based on social organization. The aborigines have taken upon the form of society as a framework. That is, the social clan organization gave way to form categories of thought, and, thereby, made thought itself a possibility.

Durkheim claims that if totem and clan symbolize as sacred, then god and society are one. From this, one can see that Durkheim's conception of society as *sui generis* which subjects to its own laws. He gives primacy to society over the individual on the basis of moral authority which is



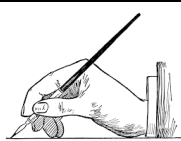
exercised as an external pressure on the individual. The dictates of society are obeyed because one feels pressure by it as well as a deep respect for it. Because of this, human beings conceive society as an external power which takes on spiritual and sacred nature. This makes the religion for Durkheim, as the collective force of society over an individual. To Durkheim, religion is society transfigured. It is not an illusion or false as humans are dependent and subject to the moral power and this power exists in society.

#### **2.3.4 Critical Remark on Durkheim's Sociology of Religion**

Durkheim's study of religion has been criticized on many grounds. Firstly, in terms of methodology, the study was based on very limited data. On the basis of a study of Australian aborigines, his basis on the sociology of religion has been questioned. His concern was to find the essential nature of religion. This idea has been criticized because one cannot generalize religion based on one study.

In his work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he says that the divine is not illusory. Religion refers to something real which is society. However, Durkheim has also been questioned for his conclusion that morality is the voice of the society. Despite many faults, Durkheim's analysis of religion remains one of the most important works in the sociology of religion till today. It has inspired many followers and subsequent analytical studies in the sociology of religion. Durkheim was a great influence on functionalists. To this school of thought, his emphasis on the social dimension of religion, the role of society on the individual, focus on morality has appealed greatly.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**



1. What is a Totem?

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2. What is the difference between beliefs and rites?

3. What does Durkheim mean by Sacred and Profane?

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## 2.4 WEBER'S SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

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Weber deals with understanding the subjective meaning of religious action. Weber did not want to establish the laws of religion or society. He was not interested in evaluating the social function of religion as Emile Durkheim. Rather than giving an explanation of religion, Weber was more concerned with connections between different types of religion and impact of the religious outlook on social life as well as on economic behaviour of specific social groups. That is, for Weber, sociology of religion is the study of the relationships between religious ideas and the particular social groups which carry those ideas and its impact on their attitude and behaviour. It is also about consequences for history and society of such religious orientations. Max Weber's central thesis on religion is reflected in his major work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* published as essays in 1904 and 1905. It shows the theme of religion as well as his ideas on capitalism by showing a connection between religion and commercial activities.

### 2.4.1 The Origins of Spirit of Capitalism

Max Weber tried to find out how religious beliefs led to the promotion of capitalism in the West. For this, he explained what is meant by 'spirit of capitalism'. He observes that behind the development of capitalism, there is a spirit which is different from other systems of money making. He

observed firstly, people amassed wealth and profit beyond their personal needs; they worked really hard along with self-denial and to avoid from splurging the wealth for personal enjoyment. For Weber, this spirit is a different nature of Western capitalism.

#### **2.4.2 Ascetic Protestantism and Capitalism**

Weber focused upon asceticism and Capitalism in context of the rise of capitalism in Western Europe. Asceticism, for Weber, is a way of living where the individual engages in self-denial with the aim of reaching a higher moral state. Capitalism for Weber is rational and is characteristic of western civilization. The spirit of capitalism cannot simply be comprehended from the rationalistic character of the Western civilization. In his major work, Weber tried to find out how religious beliefs promoted such a spirit of capitalism. He found a correlation between the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism in the West. He also examined other religious groups to find out whether there was a similar correlation or not. Although capitalism was present in other religious groups, the spirit of capitalism was confined only to industrial societies.

He differentiated four main types of ascetic Protestantism: Calvinism, Methodism, Pietism, and the Baptist sects. Weber was concerned about only those elements in their religious doctrines, which affected the conduct of the individual in their economic activity and Weber found Calvinism doctrine most closely related to the spirit of capitalism.

#### **2.4.3 John Calvin and his Doctrines**

John Calvin, a Protestant Reformer in the early half of the sixteenth century had developed an interest in an ecclesiastical career. In 1534, he took a critical stance against Catholic teaching. He viewed that it was too tolerant and he put forth a salvation theology that was very restrictive. Calvin then joined the Protestant reform movement in France and he began to devise Protestant theology. He studied the Bible carefully and he discovered a series of regulative measures related to the worldly activity. From thereon,

he began to stress on a strict interpretation of the Bible. John Calvin settled in Geneva but his ideas spread throughout Europe and influenced Protestant teachings.

Weber identified that one of the important teachings of Protestantism is the doctrine of Predestination. Some of the pronouncements were:

Before the world began, God had divided humanity into two classes of persons, the saved and the other is damned. Those who were elected to heaven as saved by god were granted eternal grace and salvation. Those who were damned to hell were given everlasting death and dishonour. As god decides to elect to heaven or select for hell, no believer could know beforehand where one is placed. Nothing could be done to reverse the decrees. No prayers, confessions for neither forgiveness nor priest could help them to be elected to be saved. Their decided fate is revealed to them only at the time of death.

Since one's fate is already decided, Weber views that the consequence of doctrine forces the followers of Protestant teaching to follow their path alone to meet destiny. There is no possibility of salvation as God cannot be called or approached. Due to this, there is a feeling of abandonment and feeling of anxiety. To combat the loneliness and anxiety, the only way is to be engaged in worldly work. Calvinists believed that attainment of wealth became a sign in case of worldly activity. Along with attainment of wealth, the attitude of self-denial helped in increasing the wealth. The ethics pushed for rational work for making profits but at the same time, restraint on spending or consuming it for oneself. Rather than spending the wealth, the ethics demand to reinvest the wealth.

Although self-denial and asceticism are found in another religious ethos the Protestants teachings were different. There was regulation of everyday life of the worldly work. This commercial asceticism of self-denial and reinvesting wealth makes it different from monastic asceticism. The

monastic asceticism demands its believers in renouncing the world as it presents temptation by withdrawing themselves from this world.

Weber identifies two historical types of asceticism, the Other-worldly and inner-worldly asceticism. Both kinds of asceticism reject the world, however, they have different reasons. In otherworldly asceticism, salvation is sought by religious devotion and self-denial. The inner-worldly asceticism teaches the believers to focus on their activities as a response in the world.

Max Weber relates the concept of 'calling' to capitalism. The Protestants interpreted the concept of calling to signify service to worldly activity. It gives a moral focus to transform the world through work and self-discipline. This made a connection between worldly activity, asceticism and religious justified action by the followers. Weber says that Protestantism made 'calling' as worldly economic pursuits. Therefore, Protestantism successfully unites spirit with everyday commercial life. This trait makes it unique to Protestantism and absent in other religions. By fulfilling the worldly duty became the only way for the Protestants could understand whether their actions are acceptable to God.

#### **2.4.4 The World Religions**

After understanding the role of Protestant ethic in the development of capitalism, Weber tried to explore whether worldly asceticism existed outside the Western civilization. He found that it did not develop in any other part of the world. What was missing in other religions in non-West is a religious ethic. He studied and compared six major world religions such as Confucianism, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity (Protestants vs. Catholics), Islam and Ancient Judaism.

#### **Confucianism**

Weber was concerned why rational capitalism emerged as an indigenous development only in the West and not anywhere else. He compares Protestantism to religion in China and found that a lot of developments

such as the emergence of cities, development of monetary systems and law occurred at certain periods of time which became conducive for rational capitalism in West. However, in China, the private property never became private the way it is in the West and there was no emphasis on asceticism. Confucianism emphasized self-control and focused on a cultivated man who behaves in unison with himself and the outer world. It centred upon the harmonious adaptation of the individual to a given order. Thus, Weber argues that in spite of the various factors which could have promoted rational capitalism; it did not lead to capitalism in China. It could not rise because of the absence of ethical code which was present in Protestant teachings

### **Hinduism**

Hinduism is marked by caste system which stabilized the social order and this hampered the rational capitalism. In Hinduism, there exist a number of beliefs shared by most of the believers. One of the most important beliefs is the transmigration of souls and karma. Both these dogmas are directly bound up with the social ordering of caste system existed in Indian society. Karma is all about the cycle of rebirth. It is the belief that whatever one does in terms of actions of this world in this birth has a consequence in the next birth. On the basis of one's performance of duty, it decides the social mobility. So, the impact of the karma is to confine a person to his ascribed caste and to prevent an individual from searching for better occupations. According to Weber, due to such dogmas, Hinduism lacked an ethic which could have been conducive for the development of capitalism. Weber said, 'India is the proverbial home of otherworldliness'.

### **Ancient Judaism**

Judaism is historically important as it is the source of Christianity and Islam. Judaism as religious norms has rational-ethical character. According to Judaism, the world in its present form is a result of God's reaction to the actions of men, the Jews in particular. The present condition of suffering,

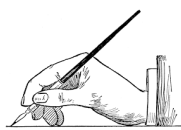
toil is temporary and would soon give way to God-ordained order. The ancient Judaism is determined by the concept of future God-guided social and political revolution.

Weber studied Judaism and concludes that though the Jews had a rational religious ethics, yet it did not lead to rational economic conduct. The ethical dualism of the Jews with focus on in-group and out-group morality for outsiders prevented them from economic engagements. The in-group was strict with respect to brothers in belief.

#### **2.4.5 Critical Remarks on Weber's Understanding of Religion**

Weber's theory of the development of capitalism makes a correlation between the ascetic Protestantism and rational capitalism. One of the major criticisms is that that this correlation is small to be significant. While Weber's theory may be true to some extent but so many factors need to qualify to make Weber's hypothesis. Weber's view on religion and economy has been criticized because of many views that capitalism grew because of Reformation. Capitalism would have thrived without the Catholics and the Protestants. Along with this, the driving force behind Capitalism is not asceticism but rationality as the reason behind it.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**



1. How does Weber deal with the concept of Religion?

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2. How does Weber relate religion with capitalism?

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## **2.5 MARXIAN NOTION OF RELIGION**

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According to Karl Marx, religion is dependent upon the economic realities in a given society. For Marx, religion is an illusion that provides excuses to keep society functioning and regulating just as it is. For him, religion is irrational and alienating as it is a delusion. It alienates people from their aspirations and they project their wishes to God. By doing so, it makes human being accept the status quo and continue with the state of being oppressed. Marx finds religion hypocritical as it professes valuable principles and sides it with the oppressors.

Marx believed that religion should be abolished as according to him, religion is the illusory happiness of the poor which needs to be done away with. The economic system keeps them suppressed and distressed in the existing social system as religion provides solace. Thus Marx says that religion masks the reality by provide the distressed temporary relief. It is similar to when people who get injured are given drugs to relieve pain for some time. The pain can be healed only if the root cause is solved. But, religion instead helps them to forget their sufferings and makes them to look toward an imaginary future and to accept the existing social system. Thus, Marx compares religion to opium and says that religion is the opium of the people as religion is administered by the oppressors who are responsible for the suffering of the actual oppression. Marx says that people are not aware that religion has been made to serve the interests of the dominant class. He hopes that economic conditions which cause suffering would be eradicated and so will be the need of religion. He expects that ultimately there will be no oppression and hence there is no need for religious dogmas to provide an illusionary happiness.

### **2.5.1 Religion as an Instrument of Oppression**

According to Marx, religion not only relieves the pain of suffering but also act as a tool of oppression. Religion promises of granting salvation after death. It preaches that whosoever can bear the miseries of life with humbleness and dignity will be rewarded after death. Religion also



appeases oppression by offering supernatural solutions to problems. Thus, religion not only justifies and perpetuates the social order by saying that poverty and misfortunes are given by God as punishment for sin. So, it legitimizes oppression by distorting the reality as it offers a false illusion of hope in a helpless situation.

### **2.5.2 The Dominant Ideology**

In German Ideology, Marx regarded ideologies as an illusionary and negative idea. He thought that religion misrepresented ideas about reality. Marx was influenced by Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach who defined religion as a dream and viewed that deities are the projections of human attributes. For Feuerbach, a false view arises due to social arrangements and once these are recognized then people would free themselves from ideas. But for Marx, the state and society produce religion as it expresses the contradictions and miseries of the reality.

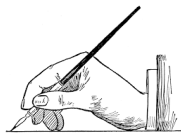
### **2.5.3 Religion as Super Structure**

For Marx economy constitute the basic structure of society. Upon this economic system, other institutions such as legal, state and foundation of religious ideas too are developed. So, Marx viewed religion as a part which he terms it as superstructure and is affected by infrastructure. Marx viewed religion as one facet of that whole which he calls the superstructure and that is based on and affected by the infrastructure. Each of the historical periods finds a change in superstructure when there is a change in the economic infrastructure. He also said that religion, political, legal react to each other and also on the economic base.

### **2.5.4 Criticisms to Marxian Approach to the Study of Religion**

Karl Marx based his criticism of religion on his understanding of Christianity. He does not take other religions into account to base his argument. Another criticism against Marx is his idea of religion being influenced by the infrastructure as religion cannot be influenced and it cannot influence the infrastructure as well.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Why does Marx compare religion to opium?

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2. What according to Marx constitute the basic structure of society?

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### 2.6 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, we have seen that to Durkheim, religion is about worshipping society. According to him, religion made people willing to put their interests of society ahead of their own individual wishes. Weber, on the other hand, tries to establish the relationship between modern rational capitalism and the religious ethics of Protestantism. In spite of criticisms' on Marx's theory of religion, it has forced people to think at the conditions in which religion manifests itself. His theory has provided great insight into the running of society. It has made us study religion and its ties to various social and economic forces.

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### 2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the role of religion in society according to Marx.
2. Discuss Weber's Sociology of Religion.
3. How does Weber relate Protestantism with the rise of capitalism in the West? Explain.
4. Discuss Durkheim's views on Religion.
5. Write a note on Durkheim's concept of Sacred and Profane.

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## **UNIT 3: MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

#### 3.1 Introduction

#### 3.2 Objectives

#### 3.3 A Synoptic View on Magic, Science and Religion

##### 3.3.1 Tylor's Views on Religion

##### 3.3.2 Frazer on Magic, Science and Religion

##### 3.3.3 The Concept of Totemism

#### 3.4 The Domain of the Science (Profane)

##### 3.4.1 Gardening Among the Natives of Trobriand Island

##### 3.4.2 Canoe-Building Among the Natives of Trobriand Island

#### 3.5 The Domain of the Religion (Sacred)

##### 3.5.1 Initiation Ceremonies

##### 3.5.2 Rites Related to Death

##### 3.5.3 The Public Character of Primitive Cults

#### 3.6 The Domain of the Magic (Sacred)

##### 3.6.1 Rite and the Spell

#### 3.7 Similarities Between Magic, Science and Religion

#### 3.8 Cultural Functions of Magic, Science and Religion

#### 3.9 Summing Up

#### 3.10 Questions

#### 3.11 Recommended Readings and References

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### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In every primitive community, studied by competent ethnographers, there has been found two clearly distinguishable domains- the Sacred and the

Profane (Durkheim, 1912; Malinowski, 1948: 1). Malinowski feels that the domain of sacred comprises of Magic and Religion while the domain of profane comprises of Science. On the other hand, scholars like Durkheim for instance, feel that magic cannot be considered as sacred since it does not involve community activity and is performed for individual gains.

This unit will help you understand these three spheres of Magic, Science and Religion as well as the similarities and dissimilarities between them. It will mainly focus on the debates on these three concepts during Malinowski's time. The unit begins with the views on magic, science and religion which will be followed by a discussion on their similarities and dissimilarities. In this way, you will be able to learn about Malinowski's theory which basically deals with the understanding the nature of these three concepts as well as the way in which it satisfies human needs and thereby contributes to the functioning of the society.

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### **3.2 OBJECTIVES**

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By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Explain the concepts of magic, science and religion;
- Analyse the similarities and differences between these concepts;
- Discuss the contributions of sociologists in these fields.

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### **3.3 A SYNOPTIC VIEW ON MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION**

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Sociological research has been focussed on the concepts of magic, science and religion since its inception. Here we will be focussing on Malinowski's understanding in which he also talks about the inception of these three concepts as well as the studies done by various scholars in the mentioned fields.

#### **3.3.1 Tylor's Views on Religion**

The credit of having laid the foundations of an anthropological study of religion belongs to Edward B. Tylor (Malinowski, 1948: 1). In his study on

Animism, which refers to the belief in spiritual beings, he shows how this belief originated from a mistaken but consistent interpretation of dreams, vision and hallucination relating to the belief in ghosts, ancestral spirits and the world after death. Tylor maintains that through the dreams and hallucinations, the primitive men see a separation between the body and the soul. According to them the soul never dies because it survives even after the death of an individual. Through this understanding, they demarcated two worlds- the world which they live in and the world after death. Similarly, plants, animals and other objects, which tend to obstruct primitive man's activities, are also regarded by them to possess souls or spirits. Thus, the belief in the spirit of the ancestors and ghosts came up, which got manifested in the worship of the spirits. Tylor thus proclaims Animism as the most primitive religion.

However, his theory has been criticised on having based on a very narrow range of facts. Various other studies have proved that primitive societies were also engaged in fishing, gardening as well as festivals and were not brooding over dreams and visions. Criticizing Tylor's concern over reflective thought, Malinowski is more ready to treat early man as practical and early forms of religion and magic as serving practical ends both at individual and at the group level. Malinowski then takes up Frazer's writings.

### **3.3.2 Frazer on Magic, Science and Religion**

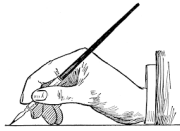
Frazer's works are primarily concerned with the evolution of the society from the belief in magic followed by the belief in religion and science. His works also introduce the analysis of Totemism which was further carried out in his studies by Durkheim.

Frazer in his well-known book *Golden Bough* clearly shows that animism is not even a dominant belief in the primitive culture. Early men tried to control nature for achieving practical ends by using magic, which in a way

makes it relatable to Science. It was only after finding some limitation in magic, the primitives found their resort in religion, owing to fear and hope. Frazer propounded his ideas in an evolutionary or stage-by-stage perspective. To him the earliest stage of human existence is marked by Magic, then comes Religion and then comes Science. In his studies, Frazer maintains a clear distinction between magic and religion. For him, magic was used to control the day to day survival practices. In his studies, he states that science also exists side by side with religious beliefs. Malinowski disagrees with Frazer in designating magic as primitive man's science. Magic for them serves the useful function of bridging the gap between 'uncertainty' and 'success'. Magic has the function of accounting for the unforeseen conditions of life (e.g. Sea voyage or Crop Yield) while the rational thinking and actions help the people to actually control their surroundings (e.g. well-built Canoe or weed control).

Frazer's studies were taken as taking off points for many other scholars who study on these concepts. But his study was also criticised based on his understanding of science and magic. Critics pointed out that though science and magic might appear similar, they are very different from one another. Science is born out of reason and experience while magic is born of tradition. At the same time, science can be practised by one and all while magic only belongs to a selected few. Lastly, science is based on natural forces and principles while magic springs from a divine and superior force called the 'mana'. Some other scholars also pointed out that the most important events in the domain of the sacred are caused by 'mana'. They consider mana as the essence of religion as well as magic.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Who termed the concept of Animism?

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2. Explain Frazer's views on magic and religion.

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### 3.3.3 The Concept of Totemism

Frazer defined totemism as the intimate relationship between a group of people on one side and a species of natural beings or artificial objects on the other side, which are called totems of the human group of believers (Malinowski, 1984: 4). Totemism thus has two sides: it is an instrument of group formation and a unified religious system of beliefs and practices. As a religion, it becomes associated with primitive man's interest in his surroundings, used in religious rites with the ideas of related taboo associated with it. Totems are important symbolic sacred objects such as animals, vegetable species, trees, plants and stones with which primitive people forge their intimate link. More diverse are the totemic objects, more are the subdivision of the group into smaller units. The social aspect lies in the subdivision of the tribe into smaller units of clans or phratries.

Durkheim in his study proves that totemism is the earliest form of religion. Each clan has its own totem which can be represented by a particular animal or plant, and are considered as sacred. Members of the clan either wear the totemic emblem on their bodies or keep it in their house to identify as a member of the clan. Totem/totemic emblem thus symbolises two different kind of things- from one point it is the outward or visible form of God and from the other, it is the symbol of a particular society. To

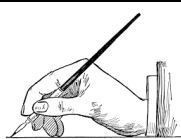


him, religion is society transfigured. Durkheim concludes by saying that the totemic principle is identical with 'mana' (which is the invisible force) and with the God of the clan... and thus can be nothing than the clan itself. Thus, in sum, it can be said that he understands religion as a phenomenon which permeates each and every aspect of society and thinks of collective participation as the fundamental aspect of religious practices.

Malinowski criticised Durkheim's view on religion and said that religion cannot be entirely devoid of the inspiration of solitude. He also pointed out that not all collective enterprises can be equated with religious practices. And thus, we cannot equate society with religion. He further proves his point by quoting the instances of a battle and sailing regatta- which are both collective activities but has nothing to do with religion.

After going through the various works on these fields, Malinowski tries to give his views on magic, science and religion. The following sections will try to explain in detail the new ways of looking at these three aspects of social life. It will help you in understanding how Malinowski introduced the logic of rationality in these aspects.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Define Totemism.

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2. How has Malinowski criticized Durkheim's view on religion?

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### **3.4 THE DOMAIN OF THE SCIENCE (PROFANE)**

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Malinowski in his study tried to answer a few questions. First one was to understand if the primitive men had any rational outlook and rational control of their surroundings. Rejecting Levy-Bruhl's idea that primitive society depicted everything as 'mystical' he stated that every primitive community is in possession of a considerable store of knowledge, based on experience and fashioned by reason (Malinowski, 1984: 9). He further added that this question has to be examined by analysing the profane side of life- the arts, crafts and economic pursuits which will clearly demarcate it from the sacred sphere of religion and magic. The natives of the Trobriand islands on whom he conducted the study, themselves also tried to keep the profane apart from the sacred. He gives a few examples which prove the existence of scientific knowledge among the primitives.

#### **3.4.1 Gardening Among the Natives of Trobriand Island**

The Trobriand Islanders are expert fishermen, manufactures and traders but they rely mainly on gardening for their subsistence. For gardening, they use simple instruments like a pointed digging stick and a small axe. With these, they are able to raise crops sufficient to sustain a dense population and even yielding a surplus. The success in their agriculture depends upon their extensive knowledge of soil, various plants and their knowledge of the importance of accurate and hard work. In selecting the seeds and the soil they make use of their knowledge acquired through observation and experience. For clearing the plot, weeding, burning the bushes, etc they need to possess the ability to work hard and apply their knowledge at the appropriate time and place. Based on these arguments, Malinowski shows that the natives possess a rational outlook of their surroundings.

Malinowski further goes on to explain how these practical operations of gardening are also linked to a series of annual rites. Magic is regarded by the natives as necessary for the welfare of the gardens. To control uncertain happenings, obtaining the right amount of yield, getting rid of ill luck, the

primitives take resort to magic. However, they maintain a clear distinction between the two spheres of work and ritual. Every magical ceremony has its appropriate time which makes it stand out of the ordinary course of work. Work is prohibited at the time of magical performance and is performed in public and in full knowledge of the people.

### **3.4.2 Canoe-building Among the Natives of Trobriand Islands**

The canoe building process is also a mix of empirical knowledge of material and technology, certain principles of hydrodynamics along with a close association with magic. A canoe is basically a narrow boat which has sharp ends on both sides. While building a canoe they are fully aware of the mechanics of the boat and ways to control it when there is a storm. This points out their extensive knowledge required for sailing. But like gardening the process of canoe building also makes use of magical rites. These rites are performed at the time of building a canoe and again at the beginning of sea-expeditions. Both these activities of gardening and canoe building show the primitive people's knowledge of science as well as the way in which they keep the realm of profane which is the day to day work separate from the sacred.

After going through the knowledge system of the Trobriand Islanders, the second question which opened up was- Can this primitive knowledge be regarded as a rudimentary form of science or is it a crude empire having no theoretical value? To this, he answers that if we consider science to be a system of knowledge based on experience and reasoning then the primitive people do possess the rudimentary knowledge of science. On getting a clear understanding of the primitive people's knowledge on the realm of work, Malinowski moves forward to understand how the primitive people conceived the domain of the sacred.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Explain in brief one particular activity which can prove primitive people's knowledge of Science.

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2. How do the Trobriand Islanders separate work from ritual?

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### 3.5 THE DOMAIN OF THE RELIGION (SACRED)

Malinowski tries to determine more precisely the domain of the sacred and mark it off from that of the profane. He also tries to state the differences between magic and religion. He starts off with this point stating that the underlying aim of magic is always clear while in religion there is no purpose directed towards a subsequent event. According to him, this is the most vivid distinction between magic and religion which he explains in the subsequent pages. To give a clear understanding of the religious beliefs and practices, Malinowski tries to explain it through the example of initiation rites and ceremonies.

#### 3.5.1 Initiation Ceremonies

Malinowski talks about initiation ceremonies by talking about its general features- Firstly the person to be initiated goes through a period of seclusion and prepare themselves for the ceremony. During the ceremony,

the person passes through many ordeals which include acts of bodily mutilation. Sometimes they are imitative and not real. These ordeals signify the idea of ritual death and then rebirth of the initiated person. Also, these ordeals are considered to be brought about by ancestors or culture-heroes. It is through these ceremonies the initiated person is able to form a relationship with these superior powers (Malinowski, 1948).

It can be said that in initiation ceremonies, religious rites are performed as an expression of the supreme power, to instil this power into each generation as well as for transmitting tribal lore and maintaining tribal cohesion. Thus, these rites have both religious as well as social impacts. Malinowski gives another example to explain his view on religion which is explained in the following subsection.

### **3.5.2 Rites Related to Death**

According to Malinowski, of all sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of life, that is death is of greatest importance. (Malinowski, 1948: 29). Rites relating to death are similar across the world. Even among the most primitive people, the attitude of death is infinitely more complex and more akin to our own. Soon after death, the body is washed, anointed and adorned. Then it is exposed to the view of all, and the mourning begins. Then comes the time to dispose of the corpse. It is either buried, left in the ground of a deserted place or burnt.

Malinowski shows that there is a contradictory custom among the primitive societies. One is to preserve the body through mummification and other is to dispose of it completely by burning. He states that these processes reflect the twofold attitude of mind. The desire to keep a link with the dead and the parallel wish to break it. Both are achieved through mortuary rites. The second aspect of death ceremonies is to overcome the disgust and fears which is achieved through the belief in life after death. According to Malinowski, the rites held soon after death and belief in immortality signifies both the loss suffered by the group and at the same time the feeling of the survival of the spirit.

### **3.5.3 The Public Character of Primitive Cults**

Religion demands the existence of seasonal, periodic feasts, a big gathering of people, celebrations with an abundance of food and relaxation of rules and taboos. In all these events, the act of eating involves an emotional tension for the primitive people. Ceremonies such as first fruit offerings, harvest and seasonal festivals play a significant role in the lives of these people. Food is considered sacred and according to Malinowski, it plays an important role in the ceremonies of sacrifice as well as in the act of communion (sharing of food). He gives an example of the totemic beliefs among the Central Australian tribes and states that for survival, the primitive people want to get an abundant supply of the species of plants and animals they consider as their totem. So various rites are performed to achieve the purpose in the ceremonies. Malinowski thus explains how these rites constitute as a moral value as well as biological significance in a system of beliefs relating to the totems.

After giving a detailed understanding of religion in the primitive society, Malinowski (1948) tries to sum up the nature of primitive religion, the necessity of public and collective enunciation of moral truth in the following points-

- i) The ceremonies related to initiation provides a sacred character to the traditional knowledge
- ii) The event of death in primitive society gives rise to a series of rites which obstruct the forces of fear and destruction
- iii) The rites associated with totemic beliefs, food and sacrifice bring people in contact with powers, which provide sustenance.

Malinowski while giving his views on religion stated that the idea of collective is necessary for religious ceremonies but is not sufficient. Along with the social side of religion, emphasis also has to be given on the individual mind.

**Stop and Read:**

Propagation and nutrition are the vital concerns of primitive man. Savagery sexual cults thus play a very important role in expressing a reverent attitude towards the fertility in human beings and nature. Likewise when it comes to nutrition, primitives are surrounded with special prescriptions and prohibitions. Food is thus considered sacred.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What are the two-fold aspects of death ritual?

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2. Give a brief description of Malinowski's understanding of religious ceremonies.

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### **3.6 THE DOMAIN OF THE SACRED- MAGIC**

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Malinowski explains magic as an art which is performed to achieve certain desired ends. In his study he talks about i) black magic and love magic ii) imitating magic iii) simple magic.

- In black magic, a pointy bone or a stick or a spine of an animal is ritually, in mimic fashion thrown or pointed in the direction of the person to be killed or destroyed. The performance of the ritual is marked by dramatic expression of emotions. It expresses fury against the person.
- Love magic is the opposite of black magic. In this type of magic, the sorcerer strokes the object representing the beloved. Here the behaviour of a love-stricken person is imitated.
- In imitative magic, the ceremonies imitate the desired result.
- The third type which Malinowski describes comprises of the simple acts of magic meant for immediate results. For instance, a sorcerer conveys the magic spell to an object which can be later used on the person who needs to be controlled.

#### **3.6.1 Rite and the Spell**

After describing the various types of magic he goes on to discuss the force present in magic. That is the power present in the spell. In all types of magic, there are two vital elements- the rite and the spell.

**Rite-** Rite refers to the process in which a magic is performed. It includes the objects like darts, sticks through which the magic is performed and also the dramatic expression of emotion by the sorcerer.

**Spell-** Spell is that part of the magic which is handed over in magical filiation, known only to the practitioner. (Malinowski, 1948: 52-53). The

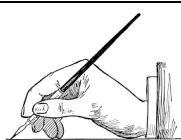


magic spell may be contained in the ritual utterance of formula which is handed down from generation to generation. Malinowski in his study describes three elements of magical formula-

- i)Phonetic effects- imitations of natural sounds, such as whistling of winds, growling of trees etc.
- ii) Use of words- which invoke, state or command the desired aim.
- iii) The references to ancestors and culture heroes- from whom the magic has been received.

According to Malinowski, along with all the strength magic draws from spontaneous belief as well as ritual, magic is also surrounded by strict conditions which result in its success. It includes exact remembrance of a spell, flawless performance of the rite, and also an account of the taboos associated with it. If any of this is neglected failure of magic follows. Thus, magic cannot be performed by one and all. It requires special skills which are only possessed by practitioners of magic.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What are the two vital elements of magic?

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2. Explain the three elements of spell.

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### 3.7 SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

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After going through the three domains of magic, science and religion, Malinowski sums up his study by discussing the relations between magic and science and between magic and religion.

#### **Magic and Science Similarities:**

- i. Both magic and science have a definite aim intimately associated with human instincts, needs and pursuits.
- ii. Both of them are governed by a theory and a system of principles which dictate the manner in which the act needs to be successfully performed.
- iii. Development of strategic techniques of carrying out certain activities are common to both magic and science. Malinowski calls magic a pseudo-science.

#### **Magic and Science Differences:**

- i. Science is born out of an experience, magic out of tradition.
- ii. Science is guided by reason and corrected by observation while magic lives in an atmosphere of mysticism.
- iii. Science is open to all whereas magic is an occult taught through mysterious initiation and handed on in a hereditary or a very exclusive filiation.
- iv. While Science is based on the conception of natural forces, magic springs down from a certain mystic force called the *mana*.

#### **Magic and Religion Similarities:**

- i. Both magic and religion arise and function in situations of emotional stress.
- ii. Both magic and religion open up escapes from situations of a crisis through belief and ritual.

- iii. Both magic and religion are based strictly on mythological tradition.
- iv. They are both surrounded with taboos and observances which mark off their acts from those of the profane world.

**Magic and Religion Differences:**

- i. Magical acts are based on a means-end relationship. Religion, on the other hand, is based on self-contained acts which are performed in self-fulfilment.
- ii. Magic has limited techniques in which spell, rite and the magician are the basic elements. Religion has no simple technique. It has many aspects and its rationale lies in the function of its belief and practice.
- iii. In magic, mythology is based on boastful accounts of man's primeval achievements. Religious mythologies are complex and creative which centres around various tenets of belief
- iv. Magic can be only practised by certain people and can only be handed over in direct filiation, while in religion everyone can take an active part.

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### **3.8 CULTURAL FUNCTIONS OF MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION**

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The function of Science enables human beings to use the forces of nature. Science and primitive knowledge thus set them far above all other species. The function of religion as already mentioned in the earlier sections establishes, enhances and fixes all valuable mental attitudes to face and struggle with the uncertainties of life. And finally, magic allows the natives to carry out the important tasks with confidence, maintain mental integrity in cases of hate, unrequited love and so on.

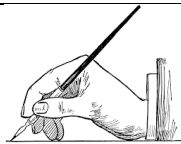
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### 3.9 SUMMING UP

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This unit started by explaining the interrelationships among magic, science and religion up to the time of Malinowski. It was followed by discussing his work among the Trobriand Islanders and the concept of the sacred which comprises of religion and magic and the profane which comprises of scientific knowledge. Malinowski further tried to explain the similarities and differences between magic and religion as well as magic and science. Finally, the unit comes to a conclusion by giving a brief on the social functions of magic, science and religion.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Which sphere does magic belongs to according to Malinowski?

a) Sacred      b) Profane

2. What is the purpose of initiation ceremony?

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### 3.10 QUESTIONS

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1. Explain Malinowski's view on Science by citing few instances from the Trobriand Islanders.
2. Mention three similarities and dissimilarities between magic and religion.
3. Write a note on the death rituals explained by Malinowski.

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### 3.11 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Malinowski, B. (1974). *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*.  
Souvenir Press, London.

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## **UNIT 4: CRITIQUE OF RELIGION- FREUD AND MARX**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

#### 4.1 Introduction

#### 4.2 Objectives

#### 4.3 Freud on Religion

##### 4.3.1 Background of Freud

##### 4.3.2 Religion as an Illusion

##### 4.3.3 Primitive Men and Their Idea of Religion

##### 4.3.4 Sufferings in Human Life and Oceanic Feeling

##### 4.3.5 Dealing with Unhappiness

#### 4.4 Marx on Religion

##### 4.4.1 Marx: A Brief History

##### 4.4.2 Marx's Critique on Religion and His Influences

##### 4.4.3 Sociological Conditions During Marx's Time and the Theory of Religion

##### 4.4.4 Synoptic View on Marx's Concept of Religion

#### 4.5 Summing Up

#### 4.6 Questions

#### 4.7 Recommended Readings and References

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### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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This unit will introduce you to the views of Freud and Marx regarding religion through their works. Both Marx and Freud were raised by Jewish parents and grew up in an anti-Semitic environment (Kung, 1976: 162). Marx considered religion as the opium of the masses whereas Freud considered religion as a source of illusion and grounded in a need for dependency. In this unit, you will be able to understand these two scholars' view of religion in detail.

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## 4.2 OBJECTIVES

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By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Discuss Freud and Marx's view on religion
- Explain the synoptic view on the upheavals/changes taking place in the society during their time which influenced these two scholars in getting a critical understanding of religion.

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## 4.3 FREUD ON RELIGION

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This section will help you get a brief history of Freud's life and his works relating to religion. Further, it will try to explain his conception of religion by going through some of his important works.

### 4.3.1 Background of Freud

Sigmund Freud is one of the most influential and controversial thinkers of the 20th century. Also known as the father of Psychoanalysis, Freud was born in Galicia, Ukraine to Jewish parents. Since his childhood, he was sceptical about the religious beliefs and practices. At the age of 17 when he moved to a medical school in Vienna, he found himself surrounded with principles of mechanistic physiology, which explained all life and development in terms of biological and chemical factors (Kung, 1976: 165). For Freud, belief in God was thus replaced by the belief in Science (ibid).

Freud viewed religion as psychological in nature. His views on religion are expressed in many of his books and essays he had written throughout his life. Some of his well-known books which represented his views on religion include- *Totem and Taboo*, *The Future of an Illusion*, *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Moses and Monotheism*.

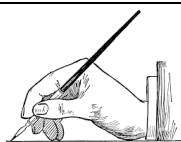
### 4.3.2 Religion as an Illusion

*The Future of an Illusion* (1927), one of the most important books of Freud, says religion as an illusion which is "perhaps the most important item in the

psychical inventory of a civilization". It revolves around religious ideas which had kept him preoccupied throughout his life. According to him, religious ideas are illusions, fulfilment of the oldest, strongest and the most urgent wishes of mankind (Kung, 1976: 168). He ascertained that the role of religion is to supply the fundamentally inadequate and helpless mankind with emotional support. Instead of constructive control of the environment, the religious believer appeals to the mercy of the gods and tries to appease, bribe and influence them (Sharvit, 2015). In Freud's version of enlightenment, science and reason called for adult behaviour while religion consoled the believer and offered effective solutions to the basic human condition. Thus, Freud thinks this situation makes an individual's condition like that of an infant who is in a similar state of helplessness (ibid: 7).

In case of uncertainties and the helplessness of human beings, they resorted to the Gods who according to them fulfilled the threefold task: i) they must exorcize the terrors of nature, ii) they must reconcile men to the cruelty of fate and iii) finally compensate them for the sufferings which the civilised life has imposed upon them (Freud, 1927: 18). However, later it dawned upon them that fate stood above the Gods and in most cases, Gods themselves couldn't control it. So the task of the Gods now became to attend to the sufferings of human life. Thus, a store of ideas is created which protects humans from- dangers of nature and Fate as well as from the injuries that threaten them from human society itself. People felt that attaching such ideas and values would make life tolerable.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Name one of the most important books by Sigmund Freud on religion.

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2. What are the threefold tasks of God that people expected from Him in the case of uncertainty and helplessness? How did this belief change?

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#### 4.3.3 Primitive Men and Their Idea of Religion

Freud studied totemism as the most primitive religion in the world through his analysis of the concept of taboo and considered 'primitive' man as little more than infants who cannot control their desires. His psychological explanation for Taboo is that they are "very ancient prohibitions which one time were forced upon a generation of primitive people from without". They involve all those acts that are the focus of great desire yet forbidden. Freud maintains that the idea of God and religion has moved through various phases of development in different epochs and civilisations while catering to the needs of the people. In his book *Totem and Taboo*, he argues that primitive man also had practical motives for their belief in natural forces.

To Freud, totemism means a set of beliefs and practices that are characterized by the following:

- a) The division of the tribe into clans that regard themselves as descended from a non-human ancestor in most cases an animal but at times a force of nature like wind or thunder.
- b) Rules prohibiting marriage between men and women of the same totemic clan, the transgression of which may be punishable by death.
- c) Strict Prohibition of killing, eating and harming the totemic animal or bird or natural object.

d) Ritual killing of the totemic animal in an annual ritual in which the ceremonial killing of the animal is often accompanied by grief like at the death of a kin.

According to him, totemism has close connections with the later-God religions (Freud, 1927: 23). In totemism also he used Psychoanalysis to explain the relation between a child and its father who is considered strong and considered a danger for the child because of the father's relation of affection and attention with the mother of the child. Thus, the child both fears and longs for him. To protect itself from the strong forces of nature, the child lends those powers the features belonging to its father. In this process, the adult (with childhood fears) creates his own God whom he fears and seeks to please. The totemic taboos and rituals relating to the totemic species which is performed during rituals are based on this. This reaction against childish helplessness which is manifested in the adult's reaction is the foundation of religion which in a way or the other is seen in the later-God religions as well.

However, Freud claims that his intention is not to find the origin of religious belief but the manner in which religious beliefs are transmitted by civilisation to its individuals. He then moves on to the teachings of religion and states that they justify the religious belief by stating these points-

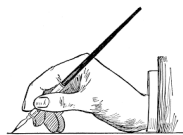
- i. These teachings are to be believed because they were already believed by their ancestors.
- ii. They possess proof which has been handed down from the primeval times
- iii. It is forbidden to question their authentication (Freud, 1927: 26)

According to Freud, the last point causes strong suspicion. According to him, the ancestors were far more ignorant than us; they believed in things which are not acceptable today. Religious doctrines also might belong to the same. They are full of contradictions and the ancestors are themselves

doubtful of their authenticity (ibid: 26-27). Freud provides two attempts to evade this problem. One is ancient in nature and the other is subtle and modern.

- i. The first maintains that religious doctrines cannot be explained by reason. They are above reason and the truth must be felt inwardly.
- ii. The second is that of the philosophy of “As if”. Like fairy tales people are led to behave “as if” they believe in these fictions.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Fill in the blanks:

In his book ..... Freud argues that primitive man also had practical motives for their belief in natural forces.

2. How are the religious teachings justified? Give two points.

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#### 4.3.4 Source of These Ideas

After explaining the reasons behind the faith in religious dogmas and doctrines he moves further to find the source from which these beliefs have emerged or in other words the source for the origin of these ideas. He asserts that these dogmas are not the result of experience or reflections, but they are illusions and fulfilment of the strongest wishes of mankind. The secret of their strength is the strength of these wishes (Freud, 1927: 30). Religious doctrines thus are also illusions. Since they cannot be proved

these ideas, doctrines, etc cannot be judged and thus cannot be refuted by reason.

#### **4.3.5 Sufferings in Human Life and Oceanic Feeling**

In another work, *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud starts off with his claim of religion being an illusion. However, one of his close friends claims that the source of true source of religion can exist. He describes that source as an ‘Oceanic feeling’; (Freud, 1930: 11) which is a feeling of indissoluble bond with the external world that –at the same time- accompanies us everywhere we go.

Freud acknowledges this feeling and claims that it can be present in a lot of religious people. He compares this oceanic feeling to the feeling of our self or the ego. This sense of self would not easily compromise its boundaries to include anything from the outside. However, he notices this can occur in some circumstances; i.e. in the case of love (ibid: 13). In love the boundaries between ego and the object melts away. According to him, as new born infants, our ego includes everything; later as soon as an infant starts having desires, it separates off an external world from itself (ibid: 15).

He also imagines that the oceanic feeling became connected with religion later on. He feels that the ‘oneness with the universe’ is another way of disclaiming the danger which the ego recognises as threatening from the external world (ibid)

#### **4.3.6 Dealing with Unhappiness**

After explaining the oceanic feeling, Freud tries to go back to the purpose of religion. He argues that religion alleviates the harshness of life. He argues that human being strives to be happy. What we call happiness in the strictest sense comes from the satisfaction of needs. But human beings are not wired to be in a happy state always. In his book, Freud states, unhappiness comes from three directions: from our own body, from the


external world and finally from the relation with other people (Freud, 1930: 24). The suffering from the third source is the most painful when compared to the other two.

Under the pressure of these sufferings, man is accustomed to moderating it through different methods. Apart from religion, there are three other measures to escape this harshness of life (ibid: 22):

- i) Intoxication- this is the most effective way to deal with sufferings, as it makes one indifferent to it.
- ii) Powerful deflections- by involving oneself in intellectual work
- iii) Substitutive satisfactions- these are offered by art, yoga, voluntary isolation, etc. through which one can attain happiness of quietness.

By going through these explanations by Freud in his two books we can get a grasp on his perception of religion. The succeeding sections will try to explain religion from Marx's perspective which like Freud applies a critical understanding of it.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. Define Oceanic Feeling.
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2. Mention three ways in which people deal with sufferings apart from religion.	
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## 4.4 MARX ON RELIGION

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This section will familiarise you on Marx's background, his understanding of religion, sources which influenced his thought on religion and how religion acts as a class ideology. Marx has written many books throughout his life but he has dealt with religion only in a few which is seen in his writings between the periods of 1841-1846. It is during this period he was concerned mostly with the dysfunctional role of religion.

### 4.4.1 Marx: A Brief History

Karl Marx was born on May 5th 1818 to a Jewish middle-class family. He was a German Philosopher, economist, sociologist, political theorist and socialist revolutionary. His works offered powerful critique to modernity. He is best known for his attacks on capitalism and the capitalist society. Some of his major works include- *The Communist Manifesto*, *The Capital*, *The German Ideology*, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, *A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* among many others.

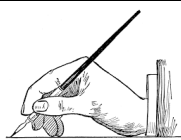
In his view, religion was the 'soul of soulless conditions' and the 'opium of the people' since it gave false hope to the people, basically the working class. The following sections will provide you with a more detailed analysis of his view of religion.

### 4.4.2 Marx's Critic on Religion and His Influences

Marx's views of history and class struggle which greatly account for his understanding of religion are based on Hegelian concepts of dialectics (Uchegbue, 2011: 53). In Hegel's dialectic view of society, the conflict between ideas produces new concepts which provide the basis for social change (cited in Uchegbue, 2011: 52). According to Hegel alienation in a society is a consequence of religious ideas since ideas create a society (ibid). While Marx was influenced by the Hegel's understandings, but he rejected his view that ideas are the creator of the society. For Marx, it is economic factors which exert primary influence in the changes taking place in the society (ibid: 53). Thus, for him, religion is the product of alienation.

Another scholar who influenced Marx's studies is Feuerbach. He viewed religion as separation of the man from himself as he empties the superlative qualities into the divine which becomes the idea of God. In his conception of religion as misrepresented ideas of social reality, Marx was highly influenced by the religious conceptions of Feuerbach. He started to abandon religious belief on the basis of criticisms developed from Feuerbach's work. Towards the end of his life, Marx's critique of religion focused primarily on the political functions of religion, i.e. as an ideology of the State (Turner, 63-64). According to him, religion was used by the ruling class for its ideas and domination over the working class. Thus, he was particularly a critic of institutionalised Christianity, because of its oppression.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1 Mention two important books written by Marx.

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2. Name the scholars who influenced Marx in his studies?

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#### **4.4.3 Sociological Conditions During Marx's Time and the Theory of Religion**

Marx's theory on religion was shaped by the sociological conditions and changes during his time. For Marx religion is a superstructure in the sense that like all other factors in the human experience, the foundation of religion is also dependent upon the economic factor. The production of immediate material means of subsistence and the consequent degree of economic development form the foundation upon which other institutions such as state, legal conceptions, aesthetic and religious ideas of the people concerned are developed.

His understanding of alienation springs from the exploitative relations of the capitalist society. In his famous work, *The Communist Manifesto* Marx stated that the capitalist society comprises of two major classes. i) The bourgeoisie or the capitalist who form the powerful section of the society and ii) the proletariat who comprises the majority of the population belonging to the working class. According to him, the bourgeoisie mercilessly exploit the proletariat. On one hand, the work carried out by the proletariat or the working class creates great wealth for the capitalists. But on the other hand, the same product created by the workers' labour gets sold for more than the value of the labour itself (i.e. the workers' wages). Thus, the capitalists make a profit but the workers fail to benefit from the fruits of their own labour. In this process, the worker gets alienated from his/her own products as well as his/her own self. It is specifically at this point when the alienated person takes the recourse to religion to find a solution. So religion becomes a route to escape from the exploitation, appropriation and so on.

##### **Stop And Read:**

Marx's theory has made significant contributions to the understanding of religious life in general. It touches on important socio-historical



facts, which helps to show the significant roles that the society can play in the expression of religion.

#### **4.4.4 Synoptic View on Marx's Concept of Religion:**

Marx's view on religion can be summarised in three aspects:

- i. A reflection of alienation
- ii. Ideological tool to perpetuate the oppressive social order
- iii. A false consciousness.

Marx sees religion as a product of alienation in society. Due to the oppressive social order and work conditions, individuals face frustration and begin to feel alienated from their work, their co-workers as well as themselves. This leads them to put their faith in religion which helps them to cope with these difficulties by providing an illusionary environment. In other words, religion protects the false consciousness and self-alienation created by the oppressive social order (Uchegbue, 2011: 57). Religion according to him helps deal people with the miseries on earth by giving them hope of heaven. Thus, according to Marx and Engels (1975), "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature.."

The second view in Marx's analysis of religion views it as an ideological tool used by the ones in power for moralising the exploitation inflicted on the working class. Marx insists that it was used by the oppressors in persuading the oppressed to accept their condition calmly (Uchegbue, 2011: 59) and think of it as the perfect work of God's infinite wisdom who has created the social structure (ibid: 60). Religion according to Marx is, therefore "a body of myths...which provides many of the deceptions which form the basis of the ruling class ideology" (cited in Uchegbue, 2011: 59).

Finally, Marx argues that besides being an ideological tool for the legitimization of oppression, religion also has a positive and functional role in consoling the oppressed class. He quotes, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless

conditions. It is the *opium* of the people” (Marx, 1848). By this Marx means to say that religion works as an opiate to dull the pain and sufferings of the proletariat/working class produced by oppression. That is religion cannot be used as a means to solve their problems and sufferings but can act like a psychotherapy to make their life bearable. Marx maintains that religion can relieve the pains of oppression by giving a functional explanation of the sufferings, promising a paradise of eternal bliss in the future and offering hope of supernatural intervention to solve the problems in the earth (Uchegbue, 2011: 61).

For Marx man makes religion, religion does not make a man. He argues that religion does not really reflect a man's true consciousness. Religion, hence, is a false consciousness; religion is the creation of men in power especially those few who control the productive process. Religion comes to divert people's attention from their miseries, which are the consequences of exploitation. He states that religion is only the illusory sun, which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself. He argues in a truly socialist-communist society all illusions and distortions of reality disappear and need for any religion ceases.

On the basis of these explanations, Marx tries to put forward his views on religion and the role it plays in the society. In sum, he views it as a tool to oppress the working class. The capitalists also adopt the religious belief, but it is only to justify their position to themselves as well as the others. Though it makes working people's life on earth bearable, at the same time it tends to discourage people from making efforts to change their conditions. It helps the ruling class to stay in power by preventing the idea of overthrowing the existing social structure through revolution. Thus, for Marx, religion plays a divisive role in the society.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Name the two main classes of the capitalist society.

2. What is Alienation?

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### 4.5 SUMMING UP

- Both Freud and Marx had a very critical view on religion
- Freud considered religion as an illusion while Marx considered it as a tool for oppression used by the oppressors
- Religion can be considered as an ‘oceanic feeling’
- According to Marx religion acts as an opiate to make the working class accept the conditions of their suffering

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### 4.6 QUESTIONS

1. Explain Marx’s theory of religion.
2. Why did Freud consider religion as an illusion? Discuss.

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### 4.7 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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## **MODULE II: RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS**

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## **UNIT 5: RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS: NATURE, TYPES, FUNCTIONS**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives
- 5.3 Religiosity and Individual Religiosity
- 5.4 What is Religious Organisation?
- 5.5 Nature, Types and Functions of Religious Organisation
- 5.6 Summing Up
- 5.7 Questions
- 5.8 Recommended Readings and References

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### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

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This entire unit deals with the study of religious organisations, its nature, types, functions. Religious organisations play a significant role in expressing religious values and ideals of the respective religious organisations. These organisations play an important role in shaping people's religious lives and their religious belief systems (Levy and Razin, 2009). Every religion preaches peace and negates violence and religious organisations being the institutions which upheld and spread these beliefs must certainly have similar goals as the religions. If that is so, then why do we see some religious organisations resorting to violence? Why do we see innocent people suffering because of religious violence? The society in which we live has undergone changes and incorporated developments but these developments are not smooth because on one hand where we can celebrate the glorified advancements, we at the same time suffer from extreme retrogression and religion plays a very substantial role in bringing this unevenness in our lives with religious fundamentalism rising at its peak. (Krishna Kumar, 2002).

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## **5.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this unit you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning of religious organisation;
- Describe the nature, types and functions of religious organisations;
- Discuss the influence of religious organisations in generating individual religiosity.

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## **5.3 RELIGIOSITY AND INDIVIDUAL RELIGIOSITY**

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What do we mean by religiosity? Religiosity implies the quality in the individual, group or community of being religious or piety or devoutness. It is used to understand the level of importance religion holds in a person's life. (Macionis and Plummer, 2014) Sociology indeed studies groups, social structure and how social changes take place but at the same time, it also focuses on individual actions and the factors underlying beneath those actions. Human beings live in a society and sociologists believe that an individual acquires an image of itself when it views oneself in relation to its fellow members; a person acknowledges one's identity while interacting with other members of the society. It has been mentioned earlier what sociology of religion as a discipline studies. We will discuss in the following paragraph why people become religious? What makes an individual a religious human being, is it social or completely personal? (Furseth and Repstad, 2006).

At the very outset, let us accept that people in present societies are highly individualised. We often come across people who call themselves religious to some extent and some who negate the existence of the divine entirely. At the same time, we might also come across people who worship just for the sake of worshipping, without actually believing in it and stand in sharp contrast to people who are highly religious and who devote their lives to their Gods. Thus, what becomes clear is that to be a believer or not, is completely an individual condition. It is a fact that even if individuals have their personal opinions related to religion, their opinions get affected by

their social conditions which mould and at times re-shape their perceptions on religious matters.

Furseth and Repstad in their book *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion* discuss the theories which study individual religiosity. This section explains, in brief, the theories which deal with the questions mentioned above.

To start with, let us discuss what deprivation theory argues about individuals and their inclination towards religion. According to this theory, people seek religion when they are overburdened with the hurdles of life when they suffer from anxiety and loneliness. It is when the people go through bad times they look for religious guidance. Religion here plays the role of a comforting shelter which gives a hope of good times that possibly brings peace in many minds. Charles Glock (1972), an American sociologist puts forward five different forms of deprivation which probably makes way towards religion. The five forms he describes are-

- Economic deprivation
- Social deprivation
- Organismic deprivation
- Ethical deprivation
- Psychic deprivation

Firstly, with economic deprivation, Glock meant the circumstance in life when one goes through tough economic times, suffers poverty. It might be one situation which may lead the person to search for religious comfort or any economic benefits or rewards from the religion they follow. Here, we can cite an example to have a better understanding of the condition. It is often heard that certain religions during the proselytizing process, give economic benefits and other material necessities in order to attract people to convert to their religion. We would not argue or attempt to contest the spirituality of those religions or judge the means used in conversion but this



might also be a probable factor for which one would feel the need of religious assistance in one's life.

Secondly, Glock defines another form of deprivation which he names as social deprivation. Not everyone is treated the same way in a society, some enjoy a privileged position and some do not. Some might have a high social status and some might be socially boycotted. We can compare the social position of males in a society as compared to the females and the third gender; we will see stark differences in all their positions in the same society.

The third form of deprivation is Organismic deprivation. In our societies, we often come across people who are alienated from the other members of society owing to their health conditions or physical deformities. Those people are often neglected and stigmatized by the 'normals' of society. These anxieties and isolation leave no other option to those people and they seek religious help and acceptance. We will often notice physically and mentally deformed people taking shelter in religious institutions as that remains the only shelter for them where nobody neglects their deformity. The spiritual power or the Almighty seems to be the only ray of hope to them.

The fourth form of deprivation Glock talks about is Ethical deprivation. It might happen to some that their personal values do not conform to the values of the society. In that situation, one might enter into conflicting conditions with others or with oneself and suffer from distress and depression.

Lastly, he makes mention of Psychic deprivation which occurs when some individuals do not find the appropriate interpretation to orient themselves into their society, one might suffer from the problem of expression of one's interpretation of self.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is religiosity?

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2. Who wrote *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion*?

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3. What are the five different forms of deprivation which probably makes way towards religion according to Charles Glock?

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### 5.4 WHAT IS RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION?

Religiosity or religiousness within an individual depicts the importance of religion in the person's life. Whether a person chooses to orient oneself religiously is primarily a personal choice but the social background or environment at a particular context is also important which contributes to decisions as such. Religious organisations do play a role in moulding its believers' minds; either they build growth in the beliefs or at times, may also contribute in the diminishing of religious interests.

Religious organisations are formal structures, groups with some common goals and values. Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Richard Niebuhr are some of the theologians who have worked on religious organisations. Furseth and Repstad in their book, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion* have written a chapter named, "Religious Organisations and Movements" in which they have

incorporated the views of the above-mentioned thinkers to explain the essence of religious organisations.

Beginning with Ernst Troeltsch, he stood as a renowned German theologian. Apart from his contribution in the field of religion, he has also written on church history where he studied the relationship between churches and the state. Church and sects are important religious organisations. Both of these have different sociological meanings. We will discuss churches, sects, cults and such organisations in a detailed manner as we follow. According to Troeltsch (1931), Church is a religious organisation well integrated within the larger society. They control the means of redemption that everyone needs. Redemption means the action of saving, rescuing or saved from anything evil. Churches are more formally organised which have formal, strict rules for the members to follow. They claim absolute truth. When it comes to membership of the churches, they have large ones, mostly by birth. Another important feature of the church is that they tend to be bureaucratic in nature. (Furseth and Repstad, 2006; Macionis and Plummer, 2014).

### **Sects, Cults and Denominations:**

Sect is a term which refers to various forms of religious organisations which stand outside the church. The sects stand as a counterpart of the church. Unlike the church, sect stands apart from the larger society. The term mostly carries along with it negative meanings because they speak in sharp contrast to the beliefs of others around them; they have their own beliefs which they consider as the ultimate truth negating all the beliefs against theirs. This might be the reason why they are assumed to be less religiously tolerant as they consider themselves to be following the true religion. As mentioned earlier, they maintain a distance from the society outside theirs, they do not involve with others nor do they expect any interference from outsiders. One significant bond that the people of the sects share is that they have experienced 'rebirth' and this probably ties them together. Talking of membership, sects are less organised in a formal way than the

churches are, these are voluntary associations. (Furseth and Repstad, 2006; Macionis and Plummer, 2014).

Cults are another form of religious organisation. The concept of cults was first introduced by Howard Becker in the year 1932. Becker defined Cults as a fairly loose association of individuals who practice a private and eclectic religiosity. (Furseth and Repstad, 2006) Cults differ from sects' altogether. We can say so because the sects emerge from within a traditional religious organisation whereas the cults stand completely outside society's culture and traditions. They choose their charismatic leader who guides them towards a new way of life, who enlightens them of a new world altogether. Many accuse cults to have a negative identity, to have a deviant character but it is also important for us to know that many flourishing religions of today began their journey as cults, Christianity for instance. (Macionis and Plummer, 2014)

Either the church or the sect, both form a society or group of their own, large or small and get divided into competing for watertight compartments. However, Niebuhr, an American theologian introduced a new category—denomination, which he argued lied in the intermediate position between sects and church at each end. Let us see how denominations differed from the church and the sect. Firstly, they, unlike church do not involve the larger society nor do they include a small group like the sects. Secondly, in terms of membership commitment, it takes an intermediate stand. They are not so much engrossed with the sacraments like the churches are and the other way; they comparatively focus more on the activities of its members than the sects do. (Furseth and Repstad, 2006).

As has been mentioned already, many theologians have designed their own typologies of religious organisations. We have discussed Troeltsch, Becker and Niebuhr already. Let us now look at Roland Robertson's typology of religious organisations. He organised his typology along two dimensions, namely organisational legitimacy and membership principles to explain the nature and functions of religious organisations.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is a religious organisation?

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2. What do you mean by a sect?

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3. What are cults?

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### 5.5 NATURE, TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION

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Under organisation legitimacy, Robertson tried to study the way the organisations form or on what grounds they form their structure. He used two ways in which religious organisations might shape their structure.

- Unique legitimacy- Under this category, he fits those organisations which claim that they are true, unique and they even go to the extent of negating other organisations' concept of truth.
- Pluralistic legitimacy- Under this category, those organisations which have their own concept of truth but they are open towards others' notions of truth and do not reject them are included. Unlike the previous category, they are affirming towards other organisations.

The second dimension of the organisations according to Robertson's typology is membership principles, on what grounds are members accommodated and what is expected of the members.

He mentions two forms of membership, inclusive and exclusive, where he considers the church to have a more inclusive form of membership and sects having a more exclusive form of it.

Let us draw a brief overview of the sociological meanings which these religious organisations carry.

- **Church-** These are religious organisations which claim to represent exclusive and unconditional truth. It includes almost the entire society. One becomes a member of the church by birth and therefore an acquired status by the members. They include nearly everyone, all generations of people; therefore, they witness cultures of every period and are all-embracing and compromising. Its formal structure, however, does not make it overburden its members and these are the reasons which make churches more adorable since it maintains equilibrium among the belief-systems as well as the believers.
- **Sects-** These organisations are considered to stand in sharp contrast to the church. They are not large in number and are formed by a small number of believers, even if they are small as a group, they hold strong views about themselves and do not appreciate being questioned, they desire the least interference from those whom they consider as 'non-believers'. Unlike in the case of a church, the members of the sect choose to become a part of it, thus a voluntary association. Churches are respectable institutions of every society and they exist in harmony with other members of the society but what is observed in case of the sects is that, they stand against the society and its members, see the society as morally degraded which

is why they maintain distance from the society in order to keep themselves safe and their beliefs untouched by the degraded, materialist societies. The same can be told of the rest of the society because it too associates some sort of negativity and suspicion towards the sects and the members who join them.

- **Institutionalized sects** are a new category of organisations which was introduced by Robertson. He characterised these organisations as one with a more welcoming and open attitude towards other organisations which follow the principles of cooperation. However, they differ from organisations that have a completely different worldview from theirs. One very important characteristic of these sects is that they demand a sincere commitment from their members.
- **Denominations** are the category introduced by Richard Niebuhr when he talks about religious organisations in the context of the United States. These organisations, Niebuhr argues are voluntary associations but important recruitment takes place through childbirth. Unlike sects, they do not isolate themselves from the society; instead, they share a more or less harmonious relationship.
- **Cults** have a loose membership as compared to other organisations and they have a pluralistic legitimacy. Generally, they are guided by a charismatic leader whom the members follow. (Furseth and Repstad, 2006).

It is often assumed that conversion or membership in religious matters is backed by manipulations or brain-washings. This is, however, a very traditionalist way of viewing it. When we say that people join movements or sects just because they are manipulated to do so, we ultimately argue that the individuals who join them are irrational and who do not use their reason to make decisions. Negating this traditional approach, the contemporary approach argues that the people who participate in religious

movements are conscious beings that are well aware of their needs and desires, which realise their quest of life and thus join movements to establish their arguments against others. However, the Resource Mobilisation theory has appeared as a new way of approaching the organisational membership debate; if members are irrational followers or are not. Rather than debating the outlook of the participants, they give importance to the organisation's efforts in attracting participants their way. The resources or benefits they provide for the members which seem welcoming to the participants. They make use of adequate resources like money, social networks and so on to win their participants and at the same time find relevant ways of socialising them so that they retain their existing membership numbers to the same level without suffering any decline. Thus, if we try to see where the difference lies between the traditional approach and resource mobilisation theory, we find that the former deals with the question of why people go for religious movements and the latter focus on the efforts the movements make in order to mobilize their goals.

In order to understand what kind of relationship ties the members and the organisation together, we require examining the nature of the organisations. Some organisations might be dictatorial or imposing, some might be democratic in nature. Talcott Parsons and Max Weber's typology formulated for the study of social organisations, in general, can be used to understand religious organisations too.

Talcott Parsons has classified organisations into four types on the basis of their functions or goal served by the organisation. To him, religion comes under the fourth category. The four types of organisations are:

- i) Economic Organisation: This type of organisations produces goods or make things which are consumed by society.
- ii) Political Organisation: This type of organisations is concerned with the attainment of political goals. They generate and allocate power within the



society and also maintain peace and stability in society. Legislature and government departments are examples of such organisations.

iii) Integrative Organisations: These organisations try to settle conflicts, integrate and coordinate various segments of society to work together and provide stability in society. Judicial courts, police, and social agencies are examples of this type of organisation.

iv) Pattern Maintenance Organisation: These organisations are concerned with the societal continuity with a focus on long-term issues such as of society's values, patterns, knowledge, culture, etc. through the educational, cultural and religious institutions.

Max Weber's concept of Authority is well versed. Authority, Weber argues, is the power and its use which is justified and considered legitimate by those subjected to it. He states three types of authority. Traditional authority is the form of authority which is based on traditions entirely. There is only one source of knowledge which people rely upon without looking for any other alternative path to choose from. The second form of authority given by Weber is the charismatic authority. In this case, a leader has special, influential qualities to guide a large group of followers. The personal qualities and aura pull the followers towards devotion. The third form of authority is the one Weber considers as the perfect fit in modern societies. The legal-rational authority seems fruitful for modern societies because it fulfils both the legitimate and rational demands of the people. However, Weber argues that charismatic leaders play a significant role in the mobilisation of the religious movements or any other social movements for that matter. (Furseth and Repstad, 2006).

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## **5.6 SUMMING UP**

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In this Unit, we have discussed how religious organisations function. Religious organisations are important because they perform in keeping the importance of religion in an institutional manner. Individual commitment is

certainly necessary but these organisations help people to organise their religious moorings in a more formal and established manner. Religion has been a source of integration in our societies but in what ways have people integrated and with what goals, becomes important for us to address, the reason being that religious tensions have also been the factors leading to social conflicts, hatred and disintegration among people.

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## 5.7 QUESTIONS

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1. How do the families contribute to generating religiosity within an individual? Critically analyse.
2. What is a religious organisation? Explain its types and nature.
3. Do religious organizations contribute to building religiousness within an individual? Explain.
4. Distinguish between the organizational patterns of the church and the sect. Why are sects attacked by society?
5. Is religion rational? Critically analyse.

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## **UNIT 6: RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: TYPES, NATURE**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Objectives

6.3 Religious Movements

6.4 The Nature of Socio-Religious Movements in India

6.5 New Religious Movements

6.5.1 The World-Rejecting Groups of New Religions

6.5.2 The World-Affirming New Religions

6.5.3 The World Accommodating New Religions

6.6 Summing Up

6.7 Questions

6.8 Recommended Readings and References

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### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Religion today asserts itself in different ways, affects social life in varied manners. At a certain point of time, it might unify people and in some other, it might be the cause of a conflict or debate. It might seem and be desired by many that secular ideas have washed off the essence and importance of religion but this cannot be held true as the scenario today shows the clear picture of religion standing so strong and making such influential presence in all aspects of our life; personal, political or economic. These are the reasons which make the study of religion in our social lives so important (Macionis and Plummer, 2014). In this unit, we will study religious movements because it explains the importance of religious identities in people's lives, how people strive to establish or maintain their religious identity from being withered. Religious movements

are an important area of study because then we realize how religion can bring peace and spiritual satisfaction on the one hand and violence on the other.

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## **6.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this unit you will be able to:

- Discuss the role played by religion in people's lives;
- Explain the terms like secularism, communalism and religious fundamentalism;
- Analyse the nature of socio-religious movements in modern India;
- Define new religious movement and its various types.

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## **6.3 RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

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Let us begin with movements or social movements before we discuss religious movements. Social movements are collective efforts made by a group of people, necessarily having a similar ideology. Now, what do these people do? Or why do they form a group? They form a collectivity to bring about a certain form of change in the social structure, full or partial. They aim to bring about changes in the structure of society. Social Movements emerged as a concept in social science theory in the early twentieth century in the Chicago School. The Chicago School theorists first used the concept to explain collective behaviour which reacted against their fear or insecurities within the social system. (Kirmani, 2008) Movements are ways of expressing discontent towards something structured which is further attempted to change or uprooted.

How do we characterize a movement? In the very first stance, a social movement is never an individual action; it has to be collective, where a mass is involved and the efforts made must necessarily sustain itself for a considerable period of time and mobilize its actions. Secondly, Social movements aim at bringing large or considerable alterations in the existing

social structure or the system of relationships. The third and the most significant feature of Social movements as argued by M.S.A Rao in his paper “Conceptual Problems in the study of Social Movements” says for an event to be called a movement, it has to have an ideological base. A movement would not be one if rests only on a collective of people who desire a change without actually forming an ideology of their own. However, it might also happen that a movement fulfilling all the above conditions might cease to come under the roof of ‘movements’. It might so happen when the movement tries to take an institutionalized form. To be more precise, when a movement with an ideology eventually takes the form of a political party, it no longer remains a movement. (Rao, 1978)

The collective behaviour approach which came as an early theory studying social movements saw group behaviour as an irrational form of expressing their grievances but the conception concerning social movements changed with theories like Resource Mobilization Theory. This approach appeared in the 1960s and 1970s within the study of social movements. Resource Mobilization was coined by McCarthy and Zald. They used this term to mean the resources; material or non-material which the movements used to capitalize on their participants in order to bring success or emergence of the movements. These movements are organized ones with definite rational purpose or goal. (Furseth and Repstad, 2006; Kirmani, 2008) However, the approach is criticized on the grounds that it overemphasizes on rationality and political aims and ignores the importance of emotional and cultural factors. (Kirmani, 2008)

It has been argued by many that with the advent of modernity, religion would start losing its relevance and be pushed to the private realm of people’s lives. It has also been argued that with the rise of secular ideas, religious influence would eventually decline but the real scenario seems to be a completely different one because even the present ways in which societies organize itself continue to have religion holding them at the deepest roots. A number of protests based on religious grounds have taken

place and recently as have been observed, the emergence of a new set of movements, the new religious movements have shown up. For a country like India which is so religiously diverse, it becomes very important for the state to keep the unity among its people intact and this goal can be achieved only when people do not merely follow the ideology of tolerance, rather believe in celebrating the diversity in the form of diverse religious beliefs present all over the country. We are all aware of the undergoing battles spreading itself with religion as its base element, to tackle which the authority resorts to something we know as secularism, which is assumed to push religion into a private domain. Debates surrounding secularism and religion are very complex ones with complicated views from either side. But it is important for us to know that secularism does not preach that there is no god, neither do they suspect the validity of religious doctrines. (Sweetman, 2010) Unlike the Western concept of secularism which denies religion any public space, secularism as embedded in Indian constitution follows the principles of equality and democracy; religious freedom and tolerance (Heredia, 2015) Shefali Jha in the paper, “Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950” has argued how and why secularist principles imprinted in the Indian Constitution contributes in the spread of communalism today, why religious minorities feel threatened because of the deprivation of their basic rights, the debates concerning religious personal laws and the uniform civil code. These clearly depict how religion and rights concerning it have turned out to be so contemptuous, so much that becomes enough to lead to religious violence and religious fundamentalism today.

In the above paragraph, there has been made mention about words such as communalism and religious fundamentalism. Now, these terms are intrinsically related to the study of religion in the Indian context in particular. This, however, does not mean that communalism and religious fundamentalism have been the only defining features of religious movements in India. As will be discussed in the following paragraphs, the rise of socio-religious movements in India has had been accelerated by the

need of a change in the social structure of India, the major parts of which have been influenced by religious factors.

India is a home to many religions, of which Hindus are a majority and Muslims cover a large population as a minority. There have been clashes among several religions at various points in time but the tussle between the Hindus and Muslims have been prominent since a very long time. Now, communalism in Indian context would mean identifying oneself strictly as a member of one's religious community or over-attachment to one's religious group blindly. India has witnessed many riots on communal lines, Nellie Massacre and Babri Masjid demolition to name two. Communalism breeds from religious fundamentalism which itself is an ideology. Religious fundamentalism as an ideology believes in the fact that one's religion is the ultimate truth and this stars as a hindrance on the path of secularism which is liable to keep the integrity of Indian nation intact.

Let us trace the nature of socio-religious movements in India. By the nature of these movements, we mean to understand the major factors which made the socio-religious movements a necessity and what were the various causes and mechanisms which led to those movements.

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#### **6.4 THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN INDIA**

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India was not only ruled by the British for a long time but also by a number of discriminatory traditions; subjugation under foreign rule did threaten the Indian minds from adopting anything of Western origin but there were revolutionaries who believed that certain elements of modern Western thoughts were indeed necessary for the upliftment of Indian societies. Some of the important movements that swayed a huge influence on the Indian minds were The Brahmo Samaj, The Arya Samaj, The Prarthana Samaj and the Ahmadiyya movement. The Bhakti movement was another important movement which struggled against social evils like caste division and untouchability. As has been mentioned while discussing the features of social movements, social movements desire transformation in the existing



order and the above-mentioned movements too aimed to serve the same cause and were successful to a great extent in reforming the Indian society.

### **The Brahmo Samaj:**

Raja Rammohun Roy, considered the father of Modern India, was the man behind the formation of Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj was in a true sense, the first modern religious movement in India. He was born in the year 1772 and his birth brought such illuminating awakening in Modern India. He learnt the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bible, the Quran and all other religious scriptures which could make him a more knowledgeable person. He learnt them so that he could grasp the essence of all the religions and spread it among the people who were not aware of them. At the age of sixteen, Roy composed a tract against idolatry which brought his way a line of criticism and animosity, his family was so annoyed with him that he had to leave his home and his parents at that age but a strong personality as he was, did not fear to leave his family and go after his quest for wisdom. Roy was against idol worship and he tried to persuade people to accept their religion in the purest form that could develop their spirituality. In the year 1815, Roy and his friends decided to form a society amongst them for spiritual enhancement. They named it '*Atmiya Sabha*'. But unfortunately, this society had to be dissolved because of some arguments which were posed against the society by the Brahmins who also were a part of the society. Roy respected all religions in their pure form. He attempted to study Christianity to get a better understanding of the religion and he penned down views on Christianity in his work *The Precepts of Jesus*. He was a person who believed that the inclusion of Western education would help in the development of the people of India.

The fundamental aim behind the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj was to revive the Hindu religion and get it rid of idol worship and meaningless superstitious beliefs which could only mystify the believers. He spread the message that ancient Hindu scriptures preached monotheism and that should be the real form of worship. The Samaj preached unity of all

religions. The Samaj not only worked towards religious reforms but it also aimed to address the social problems of the then Indian society. The status of women during that time was even more deplorable with practices like Sati being present. Roy struggled for women's rights too and contributed to the abolition of the Sati Pratha.

### **The Arya Samaj:**

The Arya Samaj owes its origin to its founder Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He was born in the small town of Tankara in Kathiawar, 1824. He was a great educationist and a social reformer. His important contributions include *Satyartha Prakash*, *Veda Bhashya Bhumika* and *Veda Bhashya*. He was an ardent believer of the Vedas but it would be wrong to think that he was a blind follower of rituals. He was a rationalist in thought. Saraswati was against idol worship, casteism and other such social evils. Like Rammohun Roy, he too stood for the liberation of women from social bondage. He gave the Vedas and Hindu religion a supreme status and considered them to be the only truth which is why he rejected Islam, Christianity or any religious faith as they seemed false faith to him. He wanted the native people to respect Indian culture rather than following Western education or Western way of life. This could never mean that he rejected developments brought by science and technology; instead, he tried to couple traditional values with the advancement brought by science and technology for he believed that it is education that can wash off all social evils of the society. As mentioned already, he was a strict believer of his religion and he rejected all other religious faith, he advocated the Shuddhi Movement in order to reconvert the other sects back to the Hindu religion because he was driven by the belief that Hinduism was the true religion which everyone followed and should follow and people of other sects were just converted from their native Hindu religion which he aimed to bring back. To sum up, the Samaj worked to spread education, promoted moral values of equality and respect for all, made significant efforts to revive Hindu traditions and still stands as a spiritual force for many (Singh, 2015).

### **The Bhakti Movement:**

The Bhakti Movement is another important movement which began in the South of India in the 6th century. The term Bhakti implies 'devotion' or passionate love for the Divine. Here, we will try to explain Bhakti as a revolutionary movement in the context of Assam. It was in the late 15th century when Srimanta Sankardeva sowed the seeds of Bhakti in Assam. Bhakti means devotion and every religion in this world tries to connect the chords between the divine and its believers. People chant prayers; sing to their lords in order to strengthen their bond with the spiritual world. But why is Bhakti called a movement, can devotion be a form of protest? Indeed and Bhakti movement was one of them, a revolutionary social protest which contributed towards discrimination perpetuated towards the people of low caste. The Bhakti saints spread messages of a harmonious relationship among humans and these practices influenced the whole of India as well as Assam. It is nearly impossible to find societies where everyone shares a harmonious relationship but through Bhakti movement, the saints dreamt of such a dream. Dr Rabin Deka in his article, "Bhakti Movement of Sankardeva: Road to Enlightened Assam" discusses the ideals of the movement led by Sankardeva. He addresses the Bhakti movement of Sankardeva as a cultural revolution which strove to spread the message of love among all the sections of the society. The religion which Sankardeva preached which is known as *Eka Xaran Nam Dharma* strived to unite people from all the sections of the society. During that period, feudalism reigned and worked as a mechanism of dividing humans from humans. Sankardeva followed the principle of freedom and he thought that one can unleash one's potential only when is free thus through his movement, Sankardeva revolted against the exploitative feudal structure. He created the Namghar which performed as an important public sphere where people gathered together, leaving aside all differences and remembered their God and offered prayers. (Deka, 2016).

### Stop and Read

- A social movement is an organized attempt made by a collectivity in a society to bring desired changes in the structure of the society.
- Reform movements basically aim partial changes in the system and demand changes in the quality of relationships. Reform movements in India, however, brought both doctrinal changes as well as a change in social relationships.
- Raja Rammohun Roy was the founder of the Brahmo Samaj.
- Rammohun Roy protested against evils like polygamy and child marriage
- Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj in 1875 at Bombay and another Samaj at Lahore in 1877.
- Maheswar Neog defines Bhakti as a religion of love.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What were the ideals of the Brahmo Samaj?

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3. What does the word Bhakti mean?

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From the above-explained paragraphs, we have drawn an idea about the nature and kinds of religious movements which took place in India but

we must keep in mind that the ones discussed were not the only movements which took place.

Let us now discuss the various types of religious movements as has been put forward by scholars beyond Indian context.

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## **6.5 NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

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Prior to studying new religious movements, let us first understand what new religions are and why are they called new religions. Eileen Barker in the first chapter of her book *New Religious Movements*, “New Religions and New Religiosity” discusses new religions and at the very outset states that there is nothing new about new religions and that they have made their presence felt since years. These religions basically form when people shape new ideas and hope as a result of the changed social structure, be it due to economic disruption or cultural deterioration. Another significant mention about them is that they generally break all relations from society and vice-versa. Barker while illustrating their characteristics also mentions that those new religions which struggle a survival as an old religion are quite likely to compromise their pure form while struggling through the hurdles in a society.

Below we will discuss the three types of New Religious Movements (NRMs) as given by Roy Wallis.

There are three recognized types of New Religions: the world-rejecting new religion, the world-affirming new religion and the world-accommodating ones.

### **6.5.1 The World-Rejecting Groups of New Religion**

The world-rejecting groups claim to be more religious. They are very strict and clear in their conception of God and they also claim to be the purest form of religion. They have high moral demands too. They are critical of the outside world; they view the outside world as highly materialistic and

completely different from the world prescribed by God and this is why they reject the outside world, the world whose values are different from theirs. The Unification Church is one example of a world rejecting religions, they are also known as the Moonies. It was founded by Reverend Sun Myung Moon in the year 1954 in Korea. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness or ISKCON is another example. They are devotees of Swami Bhakti Vedanta, who travelled to America to spread devotion to Krishna among other people. As has been mentioned, these groups reject the materialist world. The ISKCON desire a new world which they call New Vrindavana referring to re-establish Vrindavana, where Lord Krishna lived. They desire to have a simple living away from industrial life, a village life probably which would be self-sufficient. These religions isolate themselves from society because they feel it is inhuman where people always engage in conflicts. The fact that they remain in isolation from the rest of society, it might, therefore, result in separation from family and friends. These religions expect selfless service from its members and devotion to the service of the prophet. It demands subordination of self-interest for the fulfilment of collective interest.

Another common bond that connects the NRMs is that of re-birth. They believe that they are all reborn and should break all ties with the past life and desires. One might wonder how they get financial assistance to maintain a living. Even if they reject the materialistic life of the society, the members seek and collect state welfare payments. Another way they prefer is street solicitation; this brings them a certain amount of economic stability. They seek donation in return for some low-cost items like leaflets, flowers and such things. Moreover, the members of The People's Temple, another New Religion were seen begging in streets for funds. These were the features of the world rejecting groups. Let us now discuss in brief the world-affirming groups of the new religion and in what are their movement goals (Dawson, 2003).

### **6.5.2 World-Affirming New Religions**

Unlike the world rejecting groups, they do not attack the society on the grounds that they are evil rather they believe that society has positive qualities which are desirable. These groups are different from what we address as traditional religions; they might not have a church or definite rituals. They argue that humans have immense potentialities within themselves which need to be realised. One does not need to depart from society to find peace; one has to realize ones' mental, spiritual and physical potential to free oneself from all strains of life. For instance, Silva Mind Control is a training technique innovated by Jose Silva, a Mexican American in the 1950s. It was basically started in order to celebrate the power of the human mind which is never-ending. It trains people to forget pains, to abandon unwanted habits and so on. Likewise, Transcendental Meditation is another such innovative technique which heals through meditation. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is the innovator and he spread it in the West in the 1950s. The participants are given a personal mantra which they are to meditate for 20 minutes every morning and evening which claims to free them from all worldly pressures. The Transcendental meditators engage in Siddhi Programmes which they claim to bring magical abilities within the meditators. Erhard Seminars Training or est is another organization which provides a 60-hour training which helps people to transform the undesired changes in their life.

Soka Gakkai is another movement of Japanese origin. They proposed an all-new faith and they spread their faith through proselytizing people to their faith. They considered the Lotus Sutra as the highest and most powerful scripture. They believed that one who would chant the sutra would achieve personal happiness, get rid of their pains, attain economic improvements and also attain spiritual potentialities. As said previously, they do not see the society as contemptuous or evil. To them, it is the individual who is the source of its suffering and it is through individual

effort that one gets relief from all the pain. The Inner Peace Movement, for example, provides methods for spiritual and psychological growth of the individuals. There are movements which campaign for the welfare of others, for example, est promoted a hunger project where they spoke on behalf of the people who suffer from poverty and starvation. Likewise, movements like Scientology campaigned for another such noble cause. They protested for the security of civil rights of the mental patients.

There are three particular aims which these new movements try to address. Firstly, they concern the issue surrounding individual achievement. They train the participants to obtain success in their lives in any sphere, help in building their confidence and self-esteem, unleash their potential so that they are able to face the world and its hurdles. The Inner Peace Movement serves such a cause. The second theme of their work is quite similar to the first theme, of realizing one's potential. They basically work to train the participants in such a way that they are able to liberate themselves from all the constraints and find the real individual which lies within an individual, free from all bondages. For example, The Human Potential Movement works for this cause as they assume people to possess great abilities which they eventually lose as a result of the constraints posed by outer structures. The third theme in which they work is to train the people to cope with the loneliness of life. Thus, we have seen how this group of new movement functions; it is not completely religious but psychological too. (Dawson, 2003)

### **6.5.3 World Accommodating New Religions**

This is the third way of grouping the new religious movements. They are the World accommodating ones. These are different from the other two movements in the sense that they maintain a relationship with a religion but give priority to the inner religious life. They at times protest against prevailing religions as they think those have lost their real essence and vitality. They do not stand against society but attempt to make better individuals as they believe that better individuals can form a better society.



One example of the world accommodating religious movement is the movement founded by Michael Harper named Charismatic Renewal Movement. It is not a protest entirely but a deep faith and affirmation in the belief that God will turn all evil into good and change people and institutions (Wallis, Dawson, 2003).

### **Stop and Read**

- New religions might rise as a reaction to social changes which occur due to economic disruption, colonial invasions or cultural and political changes
- 10, 000 new religions have appeared in South Africa over the past 100 years
- The 1997 Religion Act in Russia provides a situation by virtue of which NRMs as well as 'traditional' religions might be discriminated by law. This clearly shows the antagonistic relationship between the state and the NRMs or for that matter any religion which the State finds infringes in its jurisdiction.
- The word Fundamentalism came into light in the 1920s in relation to a Christian group who published booklets which opposed the modern critical approach to the Bible ( Thomas, 1994)

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. How is religion both a source of social cohesion and social conflict?

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2. What are New Religious movements?

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### 6.6 SUMMING UP

To make a concluding remark when discussing religion has always been difficult because religion has developed its meanings differently with time. The world today witnesses an extreme development in the field of religion through the rise of religious fundamentalism. The question is why has fundamentalism grown? Some might argue that the gradual decline of religious values and sentiments among the people have resulted in the rise of fundamentalist groups, which basically aim to restore the importance of their religion. This can be considered true to a large extent because fundamentalism functions as a thought which manifests itself as a struggle to preserve their traditional identity which they feel are at stake due to liberal and modern values of the modern society. There are several examples of religious violence perpetrated by the religious fundamentalist groups. They are against other religions as well as people of the same religion who do not agree to them, they are undoubtedly against humanity because they are blindfolded with their conservative values which fear

extinction (Kumar, 2002). Thus from all that we have read so far, we come to conclude that religion manifests itself in various forms and certainly influences every human being irrespective of their involvement.

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## 6.7 QUESTIONS

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1. What is a Religious Movement? Discuss the nature of Religious Movements in India?
2. What do you mean by New Religious Movement? Discuss the different types of New Religious Movement.
3. Fundamentalism is against humanitarian principles. Explain with examples.

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