
UNIT 1 SOCIOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Religion is a Field of Sociological Analysis
 - 1.2.1 Religion is a Social Phenomenon
 - 1.2.2 Sociology of Religion Differs from Philosophy of Religion and Theology
- 1.3 Sociological Definition of Religion
 - 1.3.1 Religion is a Group Phenomenon
 - 1.3.2 'Supernatural' and the 'Sacred'
 - 1.3.3 Beliefs and Practices
 - 1.3.4 Moral Prescriptions
- 1.4 The Development of Sociology of Religion
 - 1.4.1 Pre-modern Societies
 - 1.4.2 Industrial Societies
 - 1.4.3 Religious Revivalism
- 1.5 Religion and Other Related Social Phenomena
 - 1.5.1 Religion and Magic
 - 1.5.2 Religion and Science
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Key Words
- 1.8 Further Reading
- 1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- appreciate the need to understand religion sociologically
- differentiate between Sociology of Religion, Philosophy of Religion and Theology
- trace the development of Sociology of Religion
- understand the difference between magic, science and religion
- sociologically analyse any religion, on your own.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of this course and we extend to you a warm welcome. Political parties use the appeal of religion to gain public support. Secularism debated on public platforms. In this context it is important for you to understand how religion influences social and political thinking and action today.

Broadly speaking, this Block introduces you to various approaches used in the study of religion. Evolutionism and functionalism are two well-known approaches which are discussed in Unit 2 and 3. Religion is also understood through the study of beliefs and symbols. This is explained in Unit 4 and 5. To appreciate any discussion of sociological thought in various theories of religion, we should first form an idea of religion as a field of sociological study. This is the main focus of Unit 1 which introduces the Course in general and the Block in particular.

Unit 1 begins with a discussion on how religion becomes a relevant field of sociological analyses. It also differentiates sociology of religion from philosophy of religion and

theory. Efforts are then made provide a sociological definition of religion by listing out and elaborating the characteristics of religion. This is followed by an outline of the development of Sociology of Religion. And before summing up, religion is differentiated from and related to magic and science.

1.2 RELIGION IS A FIELD OF SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

- How do sociologists study religion using the scientific method?
- Is it at all possible to study religion?
- How are 'gods' and 'heaven' connected with sociology?
- When there are philosophers and theologians to study religion, why should sociologists also study religion.
- Religion is something 'sacred'. How can we take it an object of study?
- Religion is a personal affair. Why should a sociologist intrude on an individual's privacy?

These are some of the queries, which come to mind. Your questions are absolutely genuine and if you try to find answers to them, you might very well end up a sociologist of religion, yourself.

Sociologists find religion a relevant field of inquiry because religion is a social phenomenon. Moreover, a sociologist concentrates on issues and questions which are not generally considered by theologians and philosophers. The sociologist of religion focuses on the links between religion and other social phenomena such as politics, economics, science and technology. The sociologist of religion is not bound in his/her professional writing to accept prescriptions of a particular religion. A recent book on religion by Lawson and MacCauley (1990:v) is dedicated to those who taught that "...religion need not be a force to be feared nor a dogma to be embraced, but simply a way of life". To the extent religion is a way of life, it is perfect field of sociological analysis. Now we will see what this means.

1.2.1 Religion is a Social Phenomenon

What do we mean when we say something is 'social'. It broadly refers to

- a) experience of **human beings as a collectivity in all parts of the world,**
- b) **relationships** between human beings, probably in all walks of their life, and
- c) to **all facets of everyday human life,** for example, education, politics, economy etc.

Every society has religious beliefs, rites and organisations. Religion very often affects our understanding of the everyday life. The way in which we relate to each other is very often influenced by our religious beliefs. Religions is also related to politics, and to economic activities like production, distribution and consumption. Religion can unite human being together, but also sow hatred among them. Religion may produce differing impacts in different places. At one end of the globe, it serves to justify oppression and unequal distribution of resources. The same religion, you may find, serves as a reason to resist and struggle against oppression, at the other end of the globe. If religious beliefs are the same, then how do we explain why people react differently in different parts of the world? All religions teach love and universal brotherhood. Even then, why do people 'fight' amongst themselves and 'die' in the name of religion? It is precisely these sets of question, and the like which sociologists study. In a book on *Religion, Society and the Individual,*

Yinger (1957:xi) wrote that religion is a social phenomenon, because it is “woven into the fabric of social life”.

Whether a believer or non-believer, a sociologist is supposed to observe without bias the way in which people experience religion. May be a sociologists curious to understand the different ways in which the rich the poor experience religion. Reality is not what meets our eyes alone. A sociologist most often tries to unearth the explicit, outwardly visible reality. But behind this lies the invisible trend—the increasing criminal trends of party politics. Further in times of acute crisis, there tends to emerge a strong fervor of religious revivalism. By research, a sociologist might possibly prove that the rich use religion during crises to exploit the masses. or, it may be that the masses recall and revive religion during crises, as a measure of hope.

By now, you would have understood that religion is a social phenomenon and hence it is legitimately a field of sociological study. Sociology of religion attempt to understand the relationship between religion and society. Religion and society have positive as well as negative effects on each other. Apart from this, sociologists also study the relationship between religion and various other social institutions like education, government and economy. They try to study the separate meaning of religion for various groups and levels in a society. This is certainly different from what is of concern to a philosopher of religion and theologians.

Let us now discuss the difference between sociology of religion, philosophy or religion and theology.

1.2.2 Sociology of Religion Differs from Philosophy of Religion and Theology

Clear-cut distinctions cannot be made between sociology of religion, philosophy of religion and theology. This is because they concentrate on the study of a singly social reality, that is religion, and no social reality can be separated like atoms. When we try do differentiate between disciplines, we do so in terms of their focus and specific issues. To be specific, though sociology of religion, philosophy of religion and theology differ in their focus and the issues of analytical interest, they have much to contribute to the development of each other. Let us see how they differ in their focus and the issues of analytical interest.

Box 1.01

A sociologist may be a believer, and need not necessarily study religion. But if one is interested in the mutual interaction between religion and society, there are a number of issues one can investigate, for example, rituals, sects, or different aspects of a religion or a whole of religion as it operates in different setting. In other words, a sociologist has a vast domain from which to choose the particular area of study. Whether good exists or not is not a question a sociologist is interested in. Sociology of religion cannot prove or disprove the existence of god, or judge whether a set of values are right or wrong. **Sociology of religion is not an agenda of socio-religious reform.**

The focus of the three disciplines is broadly as follows

- i) **Sociology of religion** does not ask, whcther god exists. Rather, sociology of religion asks, if **people believe** that god exists, ‘why do they believe’, ‘how do they come to believe?’, ‘how do they describe their god?’, and ‘is there any relationship between their description of god and their social conditions?’ Similarly, sacrificing goats or buffaloes for deities cannot be certified as right or wrong by the sociologist. To be precise, the question of ‘what ought to be?’ does not belong

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iii) Mention any two differences between sociology of religion and theology. Use five lines for your answer.

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1.3 SOCIOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF RELIGION

A definition helps us to identify clearly the subject of our study. The primary task of sociologists, before undertaking any research, is that they should define the object of their study. Very often definitions tend to describe the content or substance of the object of study. But adequate care must be taken so that a definition provides the essential ideas of the object of study. Broadly, the following four characteristics of religion(s) have been identified in order to construct a sociological definition.

1.3.1 Religion is a Group Phenomenon

Religion involves a group of people. Religion is a shared system of beliefs and practices. Every religion emphasises the need for collective worship. Festivals and rituals are occasions which bring people together. **M.N. Srinivas (1978:202) in his study of a Coorg village observes that the festivals of village deities include a village-dance, collective hunt and a dinner for the entire village. The collective dinner, in which the entire village participates, is called 'urome' (village-harmony). Durkheim (1912), equates god with society, so much so that, when you worship God you are worshipping your own society. According to Durkheim God is a human creation and a social creation at that. God is, in fact, born in the collective experience ("effervescence") of coming together, leading to rituals.**

Some people may hold that one's religious affiliation should not be disclosed in public either through rituals or any religious marker. According to them religion belongs to the realm of the private life. Some parents are not bothered about the religious affiliation of their sons or daughters, because it is their personal affair. Some people may even declare that, 'Mera haath Jagannath' while some may say that 'my work is my religion'. Now, you might ask, whether these individual beliefs make a religions or not. The answer is that even these individual beliefs operate in the context of shared social values and norms and to that extent they can be treated like any other religion.

Many people may be critical about religion and some of us may reject it altogether. Yet the fact remains that since religion is an aspect of culture, we learn religious values, beliefs and practices as we grow up in a society.

1.3.2 The 'Supernatural' and the 'Sacred'

At the centre of almost every religion lies the idea of the supernatural. The supernatural is something beyond physical understanding. It is 'omnipotent', 'infinite',

or 'extraordinary'. 'Belief in supernatural beings' was the definition for religion, offered by Tylor (1871), a famous anthropologist. Belief in the supernatural beings might also include belief in other kind of beings like magic forces, angels or souls of dead ancestors. Believers might arrange the supernatural beings in a hierarchy according to their power or they may differentiate the supernatural beings in terms of their functions. It should be interesting to note that Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, three Hindu Gods, are said to perform the functions of creation of the cosmic order, its maintenance and destruction, respectively.

Though the supernatural is all powerful, 'infinite' and 'beyond senses', some people try to personify it as a human being. This can be considered as one's attempt to comprehend the supernatural. People also believe that favours can be extracted from the supernatural forces or being by pacifying them. Certain natural misfortunes may be explained with references to the anger or outrage of the supernatural. Moreover, it is not necessary that supernatural must be personified as human beings. Supernatural beings can be natural forces as well, such as wind, fire, mountain etc.

Yet the fact remains that the notion and experience of the supernatural is present in all religions across the globe. Indeed it is among the basic areas in which both religious specialists and laypersons happen to worship, respect, and propitiate the sacred.

Box 1.02

All supernatural beings are not 'sacred'. There are categories of supernatural beings, like devils, evil spirit, etc. which are considered as 'evil', are also powerful. For example, it can be pointed out from the Bible that Satan (devil) was powerful enough to tempt even Jesus, when he was doing penance in the desert. Certain other categories of supernatural beings are considered to be neutral—neither good nor evil. All categories of supernatural being create, in the minds of human being, a sense of 'fear' and 'respect'.

Some scholars have argued that there is a definite distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane'. The 'sacred versus profane' is an opposition which correspond to other oppositions like 'other worldly versus worldly', 'extraordinary versus ordinary'. The sacred, says Durkheim (1912), is set apart and forbidden from the profane. The world 'profane' refers to unholy, secular, mundane. Rituals are occasions during which communication becomes possible between the profane and the sacred. If one wants to approach the sacred, one must purify the set by undergoing penance or by any other prescribed means. Many scholars have criticised this strict separation made by Durkheim between the profane and the sacred. Such a strict separation emerges out of a church or temple-entered understanding of religion. It has been widely pointed out by scholars that sacred impinges on many profane activities of everyday life. In turn, profane communicates with the sacred even during this-worldly activities.

1.3.3 Beliefs and Practices

Religious belief is a system of knowledge about the divine and its relationship with the human. It is simply not enough to believe in the existence of a supernatural force. The knowledge of its existence must be explained to people and to generations to come. Beliefs serves this purpose of revealing the existence of the supernatural or divine or the sacred. Belief explains the nature of the divine, the deeds, actions or words of the divine and prescribes ways in which human beings can communicate with the divine.

Belief necessarily involves a sense of the past and speaks about a tradition, in the sense of a custom followed for a long time. It narrates the history of communication

between the divine and human, and in doing so gives meaning to ritual.

Ritual is an act performed repeatedly and according to custom. It is ceremonial and formal. Most often rituals are invested with specific purposes. Rituals are series of symbolic actions which have a specific meaning in relation to religious beliefs. Rituals tend to be standardised, repeated and condensed. In pre-modern societies, rituals tend to be very elaborate and even minute details are observed carefully, in order to get full benefit. Rituals may be performed collectively, or individually. Where rituals are performed collectively, either every one performs or only the specialists perform while the believers participate. Shaman, *pujari*, priest are examples of ritual specialists. They recite extensive prayers or chants (mantra) and simultaneously perform the ritual acts (see Unit 4 in this Block and Units 5, 7, 8 in Block 2).

There is a debate in sociology or religion on the nature of the belief and ritual. Some scholars have argued that ritual emerged before an elaborate system of belief. Durkheim is one among them. Another group of scholars argue that people tried to explain the mysterious through belief first and then the ritual followed. Let us now talk about religious behaviour as a source of moral values.

1.3.4 Moral Prescriptions

In the previous section we stated that religious beliefs and rituals help human beings to communicate with each other. When human beings define their relationship with the 'sacred', they also define their relationship with fellow human being. Some behavioral patterns are prescribed as compulsory before one can relate to god. This is how morals are born out of religion. As an example, it must be pointed out that the 'Ten Commandments' form an essential component of Jewish-Christian religion. Commandments are moral prescriptions for human beings to relate to god. Religion is the source of moral values, and religion without moral prescriptions is virtually not possible. Religion can distinguish between the right and the wrong, more powerfully than other social institutions.

There are many sources of moral prescriptions in a society, such a family, education and law. People who believe in a particular religion are also expected to adhere to its moral prescriptions. Thus more prescriptions come to be shared by all the members of the group. Religion and certain of its moral prescriptions are more relevant today than ever before, because some people hold that science is increasingly becoming inhuman. Billions of dollars are poured into arms and weapon manufacture, military science and technology, when millions of human beings die of starvation in Africa, Latin America and many other parts of the globe. In this context, military-defence expenditure becomes a moral issue. For example, in order to follow the religious principle of non-violence, prevention of the increasing militarisation of science can become a moral commitment.

Now, before going on to the next section on Development of Sociology of Religion, complete Activity 1 and Check Your Progress 2.

Activity 1

Four characteristics of religion have been identified and developed in order to give a sociological definition of religion. Now you frame a sociological definition, yourself, after carefully reading the sections 1.2 and 1.3. Meanwhile, a specimen of the definition of religion is given to guide you.

Religion is a system of moral prescriptions, beliefs and practices, which aids a community of believers to communicate with the supernatural or the extraordinary.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Define, in five lines, the idea of the supernatural

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ii) What is a religious belief? Use five lines for your answer.

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iii) What is a ritual? Use five lines for your answer.

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iv) Why and how does, religion serve as a source of moral prescription?

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v) List out, the sociological characteristics of religion. Use four lines for your answer.

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1.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Scholarly interest in religion is not a recent one. The Veda, Upanishad and the treatises of Greek, philosophers, like a Aristotle and Plato, are texts which show scholarly interest in religion. It has to be admitted that Theology (Have you heard about St. Augustine's 'Summa Theological'?) and Philosophy have gone far ahead in the study of religion than the relatively new and recent discipline of Sociology of Religion. Here, we are concerned with sociological interest in religion. Such classical sociologists as Durkheim and Weber studied in different ways the significance of religion. This interest is again revived in the present times. There are three observable

- i) Sociological interest in religion began to emerge after the merchant-voyagers, missionaries and the colonialists 'discovered' the pre-modern societies. Here anthropologists and sociologists seemed to share an interest in religion (refer to Units 2 and 3 of this Block).
- ii) Sociological interest in religion received an impetus following the industrial revolution in Europe. Industrial revolution followed the break-down of feudalism in the fifteenth century. Scholars of this stream were more interested in analysing the 'fate' of religion in the industrial world (see Block 2 of this course).
- iii) Sociological interest in religion is evident in those studies which trace the growth of religious revivalism in societies of late-industrial phase, and early post-industrial phase. Scholars of this stream are engaged in analysing the reasons for the survival of religion. In this third stream, we witness the presence of a large number of third world scholars, who are concerned with questions of Islamic fundamentalism, and Sinhala-Buddhist and Hindu communalism (see Block 3 and 5 of this course).

1.4.1 Pre-modern Societies

During the first phase of the development of sociology of religion, the interest was focused mainly to tracing the origin and evolution of religion. Explanations of two



Religions, art, drama, and architecture influence society deeply world-wide.

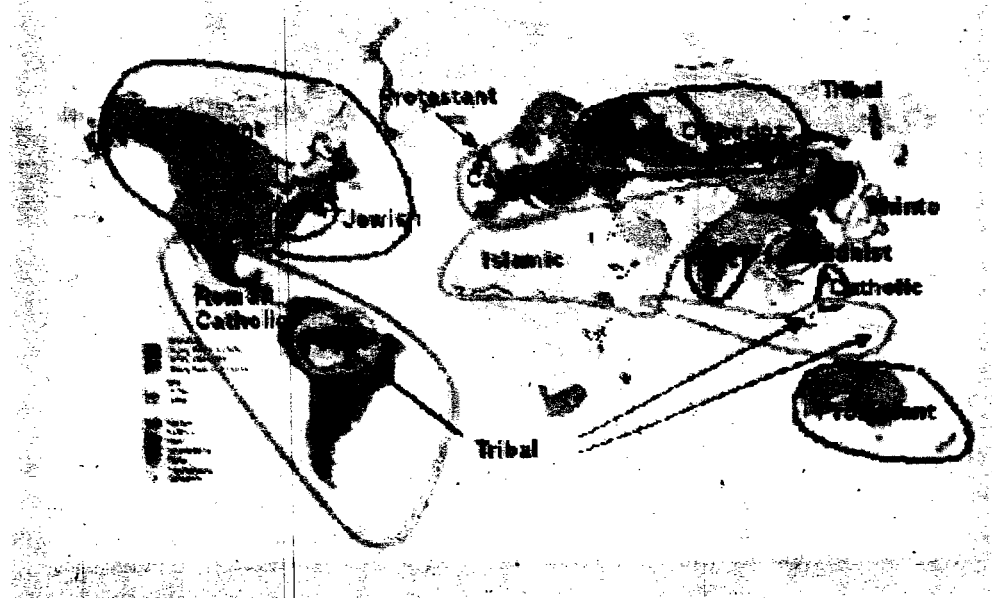
types can be identified: individualistic explanations and social explanations. Individualists explanations either emphasised the cognitive (intellectual) or the emotional aspects of religion. Both varieties of explanation of religion by anthropologists and sociologists were based on material related to primitive people around the world. Edward B. Tylor (1881) and Herbert Spencer (1882) can be called the intellectualists, because they opined that pre-modern man had to evolve religion in order to explain the phenomena of dreams, echoes and deaths (see Unit 2 of this Block). In their view, religion might vanish when its explanatory function is taken over by science.

Some scholars, notably Paul Radin (1938), emphasised the emotional aspects of religion. According to this school of thought (see details in Section 2.4 of Unit 2), religion is nothing but pre-modern person's emotional response to overcome a frightening situation. Religion, in this case, helps one to overcome one's feelings of powerlessness. Even Durkheim's (1912) understanding of religion emphasises the emotional component of religion. He holds that rituals and beliefs about the sacred emerge from the emotional outburst of the hunting tribes, when they come together after separation.

In addition, Durkheim's explanation of religion includes its social dimension and functional necessities (see Unit 3 of this Block). Durkheim (1961:52-6) says, "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 one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them". Durkheim identified totemism as the elementary form of religion. The 'totem' is a sacred object which is also the marker of a social group. This totem is exalted during the 'collective effervescence' generated when individuals come together as a group. Rituals and beliefs not only emerge from the group, they also strengthen the solidarity of the group. Durkheim argues that religion has survived from the immemorial, although in various forms; because it has performed specific functions for the society—the main function being 'integration' of society. Some of these functionalist arguments have been affirmed, elaborated and reconstructed by many scholars including Radcliffe-Brown (1952), Talcott Parsons (1954) and Milton Yinger (1957). Units 2 and 3 of this Block deal in detail with the issues discussed in this sub-section.

1.4.2 Industrial Societies

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and **Weber** (1864-1920) are two important scholars who have explained religion in industrial societies in details (in relation to issues discussed in this sub-section see Units 10 and 11 Block 2 of this course). **Both Karl Marx (1976) and Max Weber (1963) argue that religion is increasingly losing its reason or justification for existence and there will come a specific historical point after**



Generalized map of world religions

which religion will be no more. For Max Weber, rationalisation is the main theme and for Karl Marx, class conflict. According to Karl Marx (1979), religion in this world of exploitation is an expression of distress and at the same time it is also a protest against the real distress. In other words, religion continues to survive because of oppressive social conditions. When this oppressive and exploitative condition is destroyed, religion will become unnecessary. Marx denied a place for religion in his utopian world of communism.

According to Karl Marx, religion is a component of superstructure (broadly, the world of ideas), which is a mere reflection of the base (broadly put, the mode of production comprising relations of production and forces of production). There have been wide ranging debates among scholars both Marxist and non-Marxist, whether base or material condition can determine the superstructure or realm of ideas. Some neo-Marxist scholars argue that, in some cases, the realm of ideas may become relatively independent and try to subvert the material conditions or the base.

Increasingly, religion has come to be accepted as a possible instrument of social change as well. Though Max Weber agreed that religion will vanish ultimately, he demonstrated the power of religious ideas to act as forces of development. By systematically analysing the doctrines of certain Protestant sects like Lutheranism, Calvinism and Pietism, Weber came to believe that ethics generated by these sects have aided capitalist development in many European countries. The doctrine of predestination, preached by Calvin (1509-1564), said that God had chosen his people already, and one could live by faith alone. Calvin criticised all kinds of magical practices followed by Catholics. The doctrine of predestination aroused the question, "Am I one of the God's chosen?" in the minds of the believers. This question resulted in the hard work and asceticism. Work became an end in itself, for it was for the greater glory of God. Work was no more a means to obtain worldly pleasures and prosperities. Asceticism combined with hardwork resulted in accumulation of wealth (capital) which was reinvested to accelerate the pace of industrialisation. Thus religious ideas generated by the Protestant sects aided capitalist development, according to Weber. You will learn more about this in Unit 10 of Block 2.

1.4.3 Religious Revivalism

Though many of scholars predicted that religion would ultimately vanish, it has managed to survive. In fact, there has been a religious revivalism in many parts of the world.

In recent times there has been a fresh growth of fundamentalist Protestant sects in the United States. There has been religious revivalism in many Asian countries and religion tends to increasingly become a tool of political mobilisation. Meanwhile, in some of the Latin American countries, Christianity has become the tool of resistance against exploitation. Even where religion seems to lose its hold in the sense of decreasing attendance in church ceremonies, a private religion is seemingly emerging. In other words, a personal interpretation of religious doctrines is tolerated. Some scholars raise doubts whether religion will vanish from the history of mankind. They have analysed the evidence of religion found in the forms of rituals and beliefs in the so-called secular system like the State, Communism and Nationalism (see Unit 19 on Civil Religion, of Block 2). To be specific, if communism is analysed as a form of religion, no one should be surprised.

Before concluding the section, let me quote the words of Turner (1986:48), for they summarise the secret of the survival of religion, "Religion is not a cognitive system, a set of dogmas alone, it is a meaningful experience and experienced meaning".

Activity 2

Is religious revivalism on the increase in almost all parts of the world? Give some examples of this phenomenon in India and abroad. In addition, write, in 250 words, your views on why religion is again popularly accepted and vigorously defended.

1.5 RELIGION AND OTHER RELATED SOCIAL PHENOMENA

We shall now discuss the similarities and differences between religion, magic and science. Very often science is opposed to religion and magic is classified within religion. These arbitrary assumptions have to be clarified, for a better understanding of religion, science and magic. For a detailed review of this topic see Unit 23 of Block 6 of ESO-03. Our reason for including this section in this unit is related to the fact that many anthropological and sociological studies have conventionally discussed this topic to analyse religious phenomena.

1.5.1 Religion and Magic

Religion and magic reveal many similarities. Both of them deal with unobservable powers. They operate only on the basis of faith of the adherent or believer. Both religion and magic can be explained as human attempts to cope with fears, frustrations and uncertainties of day-to-day life. Both in religion and magic attempts are made to direct the supernatural power to achieve specific ends, using certain techniques. Malinowski and Frazer are well-known scholars who have contributed richly to the understanding of magic and religion.

Religion refers to ultimate problems and meaning of human existence (e.g. death, failures etc.), whereas magic is concerned more with immediate problem like control of weather, drought, victory in battle, prevention of disease. Within religion, one prays to gods and pleads with them, whereas in magic, the magical manipulates the supernatural power. Religion makes a person believe in the power of the supernatural. On the contrary, in magical practices, the adherent believe in the **own** power to manipulate the power of the supernatural. It needs to be pointed out that religion and magic are not completely distinct.



Magic attempts to direct the supernatural power to achieve specific ends

Vernon (1962:63) explains that magic is dispensed in a buyer-seller situation, whereas religion follows the pattern of flock and the shepherd. In religion, a person feels powerless before the sacred, and accepts the supreme power and omnipotence of the sacred. A devotee prays and begs to the supreme. Moreover, religion demands a strong emotional involvement its adherents and is very personal. In magic, the magician is business like and undertake to manipulate the power of the supernatural, only for a 'price'. A magical act is more impersonal and follows a fixed formula. Religion has more of collective-orientation. Religion pursue common goals; it has a set of beliefs and common practice; it units its adherents as a community. In direct contrast, magic does not produce or even attempt to produce 'community' among the believers. Magic is more individualistic. Magic moreover does not provide a philosophy, a way of life or moral prescriptions, as religion does. A practitioner of magic, the magician represents only himself or herself. Whereas religious functionaries represent the religion or the community of believers. In view of its businesslike character, and reliance on magic formula magic was considered by Frazer, a renewed anthropologist, as a primitive form of science.

1.5.2 Religion and Science

Science is a search for knowledge as well as method for solving problems. Both religion and science are forms of human understanding. Thus science and religion and human ways of relating themselves to reality. Science and religion try to make exploit the world of the unknown. Religion is more collectively oriented than science, but science too emphasises team-spirit and co-operation of the scientific community. Both science and religion claim access to truth. On many occasions in the past as well as present, in many a war, science and religion have acted against humankind. Both religion and science prescribe qualifications for their personnel.

Science insists that all phenomena that is observed should not be accepted at face value. Its value and meaning can be discovered through experimentation. All factors (time, place, persons, equipment, etc.) that can affect the results of such experiments are controlled in laboratory condition. Science differs from religion because it believes in neutrality and objectivity. Scientific method is claimed to have annulled the subjective biases. Science believes in precision and measurement, which is not possible for religion. Science brings the unknown to the level of observable reality. Religion cannot bring god to the level of observable phenomenon. Scientific knowledge has more concrete application in the form of technology, which might help in manipulating nature. Religion cannot establish such concrete and immediate results. Scientific knowledge and method are valid universally, whereas principles of religious life differ from society to society.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) State briefly, in five lines, the individualistic view of religion held by the intellectualists.

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- ii) Describe, in five lines, the origin and functions of religion, as explained by Durkheim.

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iii) What is the role of religious ideas, according to Weberian thought? How did Weber arrive at his thesis? Use five lines for your answer.

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iv) Mention, in five lines, any two differences magic and religion.

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v) Match the following

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| 1) Webber | a) Religion is an emotional response to overcome a frightening situation. |
| 2) Marx | b) Religious ideas can become forces of development. |
| 3) Durkheim | c) Religion explains the mysterious. |
| 4) Spencer | d) Religion is a mode of protest. |
| 5) Paul Radin | e) Religion integrates society. |

1.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit introduced the course (ESO-05) by explaining the meaning of sociology of religion. First, it was established that religion is a social phenomenon because it is a system of shared beliefs and collective practices. Religious experiences are social experiences, not only because they are experienced in a group, but religious beliefs and practices themselves are a part of culture.

Secondly, it was demonstrated that sociology of religion differs from philosophy and theology. Sociology brings to the fore certain issues not considered by philosophy and theology. Sociology, philosophy and theology. Though they differ among themselves, are interlinked disciplines. Sociology of religion explains religious beliefs and practices in their social context, philosophy of religion tries to explain the truth or untruth about god, and theology tries to know about god by studying human experiences.

Thirdly, Sociological characteristics of religion were listed and elaborated. Religion is a social phenomenon, that is it is a system of shared beliefs and collective practices. Religion provides moral prescriptions and it at its centre lies the idea of the sacred and supernatural.

Fourthly, the unit provided a brief sketch of the development of sociology of religion. Three phases were identified and elaborated. Intellectualism and emotionalism were the early sub-phase of the first phase. The second phase examined the question of religion against the background of rapid industrialisation. Marx and Weber belonged to this phase. Marx considered religion to be a mode of protest. Religion will lose

its relevance, when the present exploitative conditions justifying it are destroyed. Weber, developing his theory from the position of ethics of protestant sects, argued that religious ideas can be effective forces in development.

Finally, we stated the differences and similarities between religion, magic and science. Religion is more collectively oriented and other-worldly, whereas magic is more individualistic and this-worldly. It was also pointed out that both religion and science are ways of relating with reality, though they use different methods.

1.7 KEY WORDS

Beliefs: it is a tenet or body of tenets, held by a group. It refers to state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing.

Faith: allegiance to duty or a person. Belief and trust in and loyalty to God. Belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion.

Magic: standardised series of acts performed as a means of manipulating the supernatural to reach the desired end.

Morality: prescriptions of conduct for human beings.

Protestant: one who makes a protest. Here, the term refers to non-Catholic Christians who deny the universal authority of the Pope and affirm the Reformation principles of justification by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers and the primacy of the Bible as the only source or revealed truth.

Revivalism: the spirit of methods characteristics of religious revivals. A tendency to revive or restore.

Rite of Passage: a ceremony which marks the passage of time and is associated with a crisis or change of status for an individual, such as marriage, illness or death.

Ritual: the established form for a ceremony, particularly a religious ceremony.

Theology: the study of God and God's relation to the world.

1.8 FURTHER READING

O'Dea, Thomas F., 1966. *The Sociology of Religion*. Prentice Hall : New Delhi

Robertson, Roland, 1970. *The Sociological Interpretation of Religion*. Basil Blackwell : Oxford

Yinger, J. Milton, 1957. *Religion, Society and the Individual*. Macmillan : New York

1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i) a) Yes

b) Yes

c) Yes

d) No

- ii) Religion is woven into the social life in the form of beliefs, rituals and organisation. Religion influences our understanding of the world and the pattern of our interaction with fellow human beings.
- ii) Sociology of religion explains beliefs and rituals in their social context, whereas theology tries to understand the divine by probing the experiences of the believers. A sociologist need not necessarily be a believer in order to study religion, whereas a theologian is necessarily a believer.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Supernatural is considered to be beyond human senses. It is taken to be extraordinary, all powerful or infinite.
- ii) Religious beliefs refers to a system of knowledge about the divine and its relationship with the human. It gives meaning to a ritual.
- iii) A ritual refers to the performance of acts, usually ceremonial in nature. Ritual acts are the outward expression of religious beliefs.
- iv) When human beings attempt to relate with god, some behaviors are prescribed as a condition to relate with god. This is how do's and don'ts come to be prescribed as moral acts which govern the relations between fellow persons.
- v)
 - a) it is a social phenomenon
 - b) it is a system of shared beliefs and collective practices
 - c) supernatural or sacred is at the centre
 - d) religion provides moral prescriptions.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) According to the intellectualists, members of pre-modern societies evolved religion in order to explain the phenomena of dreams, echoes and deaths. Consequent upon this view is the assumption that religion might vanish when the function of explanation is taken over by science.
- ii) Durkheim felt that totemism is an elementary form of religion. The totem is a sacred object which is also the marker of a social group. The totem is exalted and rituals arise during the 'collective effervescence' generated when the group assembles together.
- iii) Weber argued that religious ideas can be forces of development. He found that the 'doctrine of predestination' propounded by the Protestant sects had generated a life style of hard work and asceticism; self-denial in which people earned but did not spend money on luxury. This resulted in the generation of capital necessary for industrialisation.
- iv) Religion refers to ultimate problems (for example death, failures) and meaning of human life, whereas magic is concerned with immediate problems like good weather, good crops or cure of disease. Religion is collectively oriented, unlike magic, which is more individualistic.
- v)
 - 1) b
 - 2) d
 - 3) e
 - 4) c
 - 5) a