UNIT 12 RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS : SECTS, CULTS AND DENOMINATIONS

Structure

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you should be able to

- familiarise yourself with various religious organisations both in the Indian context and the western context

- understand the origins of the religious organsations, their development and their social functions

- compare the religious organisations in India with that of the Western religious organisations

- analyse whether the typologies offered by western sociologists are adequate to understand the Indian religious organisations.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss religious organisations as an important element of religion. The religious organisations discussed in this unit are the ecclesia, the sect, denomination and the cult along with the three Indian groups, viz., the Sangh, the Mat and the Panth. This we hope will enable you to evolve a comparative perspective. This unit also seeks to explain the genesis of religious formations, their development, functions and the dynamics. We hope this discussion will help you understand the dynamic-interactia between ideal and real.

12.2 UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Religion is not only a body of belief but it is practised. Almost all major religions

of the world are found in organised forms.

A religious organisation grows out of and after the religious experience of a charismatic personality (as for example, Christ, Mohammad, Buddha). This religious experience of a charismatic personality gets organised and institutionalised. Its developmental process operates at three levels : (i) formation of the pattern of worship, i.e., the cult; (ii) formation of the pattern of ideas and definitions, i.e., development of myths and theology; and (iii) formation of association and organisation. The problem of interpreting the original religious experience can also be added to this.

Sociologists generally speak of four types of religious groups—the ecclesia (The Church), the sect, the denomination and the cult. Known as the Church-Sect Typology, this differentiation of religious groups is based mainly on the pioneering work of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch and on the basis of development of Christianity in the West.

Does it help to explain religio-social groupings of all types and of all religions other than Christianity? The prevalent sociological stand on this question is somewhat ethnocentric, ambiguous and even contradictory. To some, with certain changes, this typology is universally applicable (Mobergh, 1961), while to others, it is not (Bhatt, : 1969). To Johnson it can be conveniently adopted for 'the purpose of exposition' though he also finds it somewhat 'awkward to discuss oriental religions'. In India, we identify religious groups as **Mat, Marg, Sampradaya, Sangh, Panth, Samaj, Ashram** and **Akhara**. Here, we face a problem, that is, can we explain religious groups in India by the Church-Sect Typology?

To find an answer to the question, we have to look at religious groups from the social-historical perspective. Also, we have to analyse the genesis of religious groupings.

Without emphasizing too much on the uniqueness of India, we have to keep in mind the distinction between two traditions of religious experience—the Semitic, out of which grew Christianity and Islam and the tradition of **netiwad-anekantwad** (the tradition of religious pluralism) out of which grew religious groups in India. Let us elaborate them a little more. As you can already discern the cross over of religious concepts from the Christian tradition as discussed above, are really distinct from each other so far as organisations are concerned.

In the Semitic tradition, religious experience is viewed as revealed and a commandment from God sent through a divinely chosen mediatory between man and God therefore the Semitic tradition tends to be monolithic. This helps in the organisation and spread of this type of religion. But, it sometimes comes in conflict with the political authority and other religions.

In the other tradition, no religious experience is final. There are and can be many paths to reach God. In India, we have both these traditions, growing parallel and cutting across each other. Islam tends to be monolithic though sufism is pluralistic. While there are socio-historical differences between monolithic and pluralistic religions, according to sociologists there are certain characteristic features of religious organisations. These can be made the basis of comparison.

Johnson (1868: 419-20) suggests a seven-point criteria of variables to compare religious groups. They are summarily given below for your reference as they have been made use of in describing religious groups for you:

i) Group Membership: Compulsory or voluntary

ii) If voluntary: exclusive or relatively open to new members

iii) Group's attitude towards other religious groups

iv) Whether the group proselytises or not

v) Internal Organisation: autocratic or democratic

vi) Clergy: Whether clergy regarded as necessary for the salvation of lay members

vii) Attitude of the group towards the secular affairs of the society as a whole. Such criteria can be used for comparative study of religious groups.

12.3 THE GENESIS OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS

In very general terms we can define religion as a system of belief and practices. It is shared among people and also it sustains over time. As a shared and stable practice of faith religion organises itself into a consistent systematic form. In the sub-sections to follow, we will try and understand the way in which religious groups originate and sustain, over a period of time.

12.3.1 Social Factors

The genesis of religious organisation lies in social groupings which are a part of the society. It also lies in the routinisation and institutionalisation of charisma and in the structural differentiation of society. The solid foundations of a religious organisation are often laid down by the disciples and not by the founder. His religious experience provides a breakthrough.

Death of the originator of the religion or preceptor creates the crisis of continuity and succession. The way they are met has a significant bearing on the subsequent religious organisation. The cultural background of the group in which the preceptor functioned, its kinship and political structure and the material and ideal interests of the followers, particularly the leaders among them, along with the teachings of the preceptor, affect the formation of the religious group.

The crisis of continuity is generally met by collecting, recording and communicating the sayings, precepts, sermons and deeds of the founder. But, socially, of more crucial importance is the emergence of a system of worship, a cultic philosophy which binds and inspires the ensuing religious brotherhood. The cult is the nucleus of every religious organisation.

The crisis of succession can be met in many ways — by the prevalent rule of inheritance (usually primogeniture) or by nominating the successor disciple; or by consensus among the disciples; or by appointment; or through a struggle for power among the disciples/colleagues or among the members of the group itself. Much depends on the gravity of the situation. It may be pointed out that succession in a religions group is not usually smooth and easy. It may involve much infighting within the group before anything about succession is finalised or decided upon by the factions attempting to garner leadership and power.

Since the founder of Islam did not have a successor, **Khilafat** had came to occupy a cardinal place in the organisation of Islam. Christ, too, did not have a successor, nor did he name one but Christianity grew into an ecclesiastical-apostolic order. Buddha decreed that the Sangh which he founded, would be guided by Dhamma (Dharma) and Vinaya after he was no more. It is said that the oligarchic-democratic tradition of the Sangh grew out of the republican traditions of the Sangh grew out of the republican traditions of the tribes among which Buddha was popular.

12.3.2 Development Process

Formation of cult is one level of this process, the other being the formation of myths and theology. The formation of the group is the third level. These three levels operate simultaneously and inter-relatedly.

Myth is a dramatic story in which the Supernatural interacts with humans in the human form(s), the myth reinforces belief in the cultic pattern. Theology rationalises the belief system. Both constitute 'the intellectual level of rationalisation of religion'. Development of theology goes along with the 'development of professional priestly class — the religious specialist'. With theology develops a moral code (O. Dea: 1969: 41-46.

Theology has a strong propensity to develop into a body of dogma. Consequently, it often comes into conflict with the dynamics of class changes and power-structure. It tends to generate protest and a variety of interpretations. It thus precipitates schism and splits which are often linked with the interests of the common people of the laity and literati.

When a cult develops and standardises norms of ritual worship, initiation and membership, of resolving the problems of continuity and succession and doctrinal matters and of managing its expansion, it may be said to have taken the form of a religious organisation (group). The system of worship and rationalisation of its belief-system defines its boundary.

A religious group originates as a primary group, dividing the humanity between believers and non-believers. But, it also grows and multiplies because of inner differentiation of the total society and the group itself and growing enrichment of religious experience. With the emergence of religious specialists such as priests and son on there appears the organisation distinction between laity and clergy. The clergy owes its existence to the hierarchy or ordained offices, having the elements of bureaucracy. The office and not its occupant has the touch of the Supernatural.

12.3.3 Universal Features

Symbolised by its rituals, beliefs and organisation, a religious group displays a new spirit of coherence and unity. Nevertheless, it adjusts with the differences based on position and function and often tolerates the order system of statuses which it desires.

Acquiring a revolutionary character, a religious group may recognise and accept the established society. Or, it may reject the established society only in spirit to promote the attitude of equality within the group, as was the case in Buddhism. It opposed the conservative society and took equality as an ideal. The internal structure of religious group is a dynamic process. It operates at two levels. On one hand it creates internal differentiation and on the other hand it organises and institutionalises itself.

Activity 1

Analyse the characters and contents of a myth associated with a cult in your family/neighbourhood. You can compare your notes with others at your Study Centre.

12.4 THE CHURCH-SECT TYPOLOGY

When a religious grouping establishes its beliefs, norms and practices into an organised form it takes an established religious organisational form. In a very loose sense a

Church can be described as this. At the same time an organised religion has multiple strands because of internal differentiation. In this section we will try and understand the dynamics of church, sect and cult.

12.4.1 Ecclesia (The Church)

The Ecclesia was founded on the religious experience of Christ as described in the Bible. Christ being the divine mediator between man and God, in the ecclesia, his experience is viewed as revealed and, hence, infallible. Since this revelation is for man's salvation, man must adopt it. It must be followed by many and people who oppose it (heretics) must be punished or converted.

This doctrinal and rigid approach has tended to make the Ecclesia a highly proselytising religion, so much so that Raja Ram Mohan Roy distinguished between the precepts and practices of Jesus and Christianity preached by the missionaries (Sarkar, B.K. 1937: 619-624; Bhatt, G.S. 1968: 34). Since it could be organised and people who did not belong to it could be converted (proselytise), it grew to be international with national, regional and local variations.

The Christian religion has a vast number of Church based rites which cover the entire life-span of its members.

Having the organisational distinction of the laity and clergy, the Ecclesia is an apostolical order. The clergy consists of the ministers of Christian religion. They are trained, selected and appointed. They are knitted into a hierarchy of allotted offices, their functioning is bureaucratized. Clergy-hood is a career. A member of the clergy derives his religious qualities from the office which he holds by virtue of appointment and ordination. It is quite obvious that the entire situation is hierarchical and bureaucratic in its functioning.

The priest and his office are pivotal to the Ecclesia. Being viewed as spiritual-religious guardian of the members of his parish, the priest can take confessions and grant pardon from sins. He solemnises marriages and counsels even in the secular needs of the members of his church. His main function is to preach and to convert.

Historically, the Ecclesia is characterised by a conflict and consequent adjustment between monasticism and protestantism. Monasticism is said to have grown out of a view that God cannot be experienced by human knowledge and also they believed in the 'original sin'. Because of the concept of original sin which created a deep anxiety and even fear of sex, self-denial in the service of God became primary. The monastery, however, was open to both men and women.

Protestantism separated the world and God. The world was accepted as real — an area for man's activity and worldly achievement. Charitable social work and management of large charitable institutions was added to the Church's activity and has since remained its trait. In this process of adjustment 'monks became assimilated into clerics and clerics to monks'. Together, they made up the Church — rather its two classes, men of religion (the clergy) and the men who lived in the world (the laity).

Combining the elective and appointed offices, the Ecclesia has tended to grow and expand as a self-contained unitary-federal structure. Its head, the Pope is elected by a small college of appointed officials. The rest of the hierarchy of officials is appointed. Among these, only the office of the priest may be said to be religious in the true sense of the term while all others are managerial.

The Ecclesia trains and recruits its personnel through its theological educational institutions. For a dynamic definition of its creed, it also organises research institutions, study centres, seminars and workshops. It publishes journals and maintains printing presses and publishing houses. It also establishes and controls schools and colleges for secular education where imparting of secular education is combined with preaching as its primary aim is to spread 'the World of God'.

Along with the pursuit of spirituality, the Church also develops vested interests in wealth and temporal power. It also develops vested interest in the established social order which legitimises its power, possessions, privileges and interests. This involvement in secular matters brings it into conflict with the secular-political structure, sometimes leading to schism as in the case of the development of Church of England.

Secular interests of the Church also tend to make the clergy conservative. That may also lead to conflict. But, conflict with the secular world is not a dominant feature of the Church. Many times the Church does come to terms with the secular-political world and accommodate itself to secular life.

12.4.2 Sect

As a religious group, the Sect stands for those who dissent from the interpretation of the doctrine from an established church and (the united works) as a communion of religious brotherhood with a well-defined creed. Its ideal type is a contrast to that of the Church though it may share some traits with the latter. Unlike the Church,

the membership of the sect is not compulsory. It is voluntary, relatively exclusive and often qualified ritually. The fact is that the sect arises from people's dissent with the Church over many differences of dogma and perception of the social situation. These make the sect have a clear dogma and values of it's own.

The Sect does not stand for unqualified universal conversion. God's grace is not for all, nor is it bestowed automatically. It is won by the individual's personal faith and ethical behaviour. Therefore, the Sect has a disdain for 'the refined verbal spinnings of ecclesiastical theologians' (Johnson: ibid: 427).

The sect is often intolerant toward other religious groups. It may or may not proselytise. Obliteration of distinction between the clergy and the laity is its chief characteristic. In its organisation, the Sect is usually democratic. It may be this worldly as well as other wordly.

The Sect takes birth in protest and rebellion. Its relation with the political authority may or may not be smooth. If rebellious, the Sect may be prosecuted.

Sectarianism has been quite pronounced in Christianity. Its cause is said to be partly in the Christian tradition itself. Christianity grew in protest, so does the Sect. The Christian Sects arose mostly to uphold 'the value of radical individualism, the ideal of love and brotherhood and a conscious concern for the poor'.

Protest against the Church' view that 'religious authority inheres in the office and set of ritual ordination and not in the individual soul' has been another cause of sectarianism in Christianity. A third cause is resentment against the social institutions the Church supports. The sect is an expression of social justice. The question relating to the neglect of the poor and purity of the Gospel often precipitated a sense of injustice, discontent and dissatisfaction.

A sect encompasses not the whole but a part of a society. Attaining identity easily, it tends to provide a sense of greater self-esteem to its members and, thus, it derives its relevance. The greater the rebellion, the greater the criticism, the more is the sect's self-esteem and inner unity. Persecution of a rebellious sect all the more enhances its self-esteem and inner unity.

12.4.3 Denomination

The Denomination grows out of the Sect as the latter grows out of the Ecclesia. As Johnson observes, "The line between ecclesia and denomination is not always clear-cut nor is the line between sect and cult…denomination is what usually results when a sect becomes 'respectable' in the eyes of middle class society and relaxes its religious vigour." (ibid. pp. 433-35). It is also observed that a conservative type of sect is more prone to change into a denomination.

A denomination, thus, grows out of a sect and shares many similarities with the Ecclesia. Socially, it is a middle class phenomenon, bound essentially by middle class-status-identity and respectability. Its membership is voluntary and relatively open but is largely defined by the class-status-consciousness. The denomination is thus the result of the Sect becoming larger in terms of members and is in fact much closer to the Church than the Sect ever was. It also means a change of the various dogmas ethics and codes of the denomination.

The binding chord of 'fellowship of love and religious service' which is a distinguishing trait of the cult, becomes weak, almost nonexistent, in the denomination. For the member of a denomination religion is one of his interests, almost one of his recreations. Church-going is just a duty, which he imposes upon himself, his wife and children.

The employment of clergy, too, becomes a status-symbol. Members of the clergy are sometimes trained in psychology and/or in theology. Working as ministers and counsellors, they are not supposed to possess any supernatural powers and are not regarded necessary for one's salvation.

The dilemma of the church becomes more acute in the denomination. It is the dilemma of religiosity vs. secularism, the rich vs. poor and spirituality vs. mundanity.

12.4.4 Cult

The social reality of the Cult is essentially rooted in the 'cultic act' (ibid : 39-44). This act is a system of worship — a complex of feelings and attitudes, symbols (gestures, words, rites and rituals) and primarily a relationship with sacred object and the world beyond. It involves co-activity and a social boundary. In it the relationship between the laity and clergy is not negligible but secondary.

Box 1

O'Dea (ibid. p. 41) Observes :

"...The cultic act is social congregational act in which the group re-enacts its relationship to the sacred objects and, through them, to the beyond, and in so doing reinforces its own solidarity and reaffirms its own values, in it, relationship of fellowship, and of leader and followers, are acted out, reasserted and strengthened. For the individual, it incorporates him into the group which provides him with the emotional support, and by its re-enactment of the religious experience relates him to the source of strength and comfort".

The Cult is a voluntary organisation, open to all who wish to join or participate in it. But, where secretive, it tends to be highly exclusive. Says Johnson (ibid : 438). "In general cults are not strict except in financial matters". Yet, it tends to regulate its members as per its doctrine and system of rituals which are well-defined. A cult emphasizes one doctrine (above all others) or it focuses upon a God or Goddess with certain definite characteristics.

Cults seem to flourish in metropolitan centres where culturally heterogeneous populations are thrown together and they widely feel the impact of most rapid and impinging social change. It creates situations of contingency and powerlessness and, thus, the problems of adjustment. The cults help to meet that situation (for details and illustrations see Johnson : ibid : p. 438).

Check Your Progress 1

i)   Write a note on Ecclesia. Use about five lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

....

ii) Name a sect which has acquired the distinction of a denomination.

....

iii) Give two reasons for the rise of sectarian tradition in Christianity. Use about five lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

, ...

....

12.5   THE RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN INDIA

We have studied the genesis of religious groups and various factors which contribute to the establishment of perpetuation of religious grouping in general. In this section we will try to understand the religious grouping in particular — in the Indian context. We will be studying :

- The Math, Marg and Sampradaya

- Sangh

- Mat

- Panth

12.5.1   Math, Marg and Sampradaya

In the Indian perspective, a religious group primarily originates in a **math**. In the given context, it would mean opinion/viewpoint of a charismatic person (the Original Preceptor) and/or of a group about the existence/non-existence of God and meaning of man's social existence. In this perspective even the atheistic Buddhism in a **math**, the **Buddha math.**

A **marg** (i.e. path) is essentially defined by the rituals of worship relation to its **math**. The marg also defines the relationship between the preceptor and his successor and followers in relation to God/Dharma and in relation to themselves. It defines the social circle of the **math**.

When the complex of a **math-marg** grows into a tradition of dogmatic knowledge, handed down both in time and space through an organised body of believers and expounders, it takes the form of a **sampradaya**. Reaction against dogma and/or its interpretation precipitates a new **math**. Hinayan,. Mahayan and Virayan are referred to as Sampradayas and as Buddha **Math**. As a hypothesis, it may be propounded that religious groups arise out of the dynamics of **matha, marg** and **sampradaya**. Out of this dynamics, in different periods of India's social history, have arisen religious groups, the main ideal types of which are the **Sangh,** the **Mat,** and the **Panth** and the **Samaj.**

12.5.2   Sangh

Founded by the Buddha the Sangh has grown to be international with significant national variations. It has assimilated from local traditions and also from the Ecclesia. However, it is not an ecclesia. The term Sangh means 'any close contact or any number of people living together for a certain purpose'. It also means 'society and association'. As a religious organisation it has two well-defined objectives : (1) To provide best possible conditions for individual development: (2) To teach **dhamma** (dharma in Sanskrit) to mankind. (Humphreys, Christian: 1951).

Members of the Sangh do not own property individually but the Sangh does own

property as a corporate body. It has a sect of hierarchy of appointive and elective offices. It is secular, empirical and rational. It can easily be compared to an association.

It is structured on the concept of **tri-ratna** (three jewels), i.e., the teacher, the teaching and those who followed it. As Buddha decreed, after him, the **tri-ratna** came to be guided by Dhamma and Vinaya. To Buddha, Dhamma symbolised not religion in the usual sense of the term but a set of empirically-rationally derived rules of conduct and duty which lead the individual to the 'Right Path' and safeguard against suffering and pain. In due course, the Sangh has grown into "...the order of yellow-robed monks requiring two hundred and twenty seven rules of observance and fortnightly confessions of infraction". (Bahm, A. : 1958 : p.131).

The Sangh grew into a democratic-oligarchic-secular organisation (Bapat, H. 1956, 4-6, Panikarak. M. 1954: 20). It grew along with the growth of monasticism of Chaitya and Vihara " the dwelling places of mendicants, in this case, Buddha **Bhikkhus**/monks. The monasteries were organized as disciples grew, grooves and properties gifted and audiences flocked to listen to the teachings of Buddha. The Sangh originated as an assembly of monks to elect and appoint office-bearers to supervise new constructions, to look after property, the distribution of clothing, the allotment of dwelling places and acceptance of property as a gift to the Sangh. Besides its rules of procedure, the Sangh mainly rested on Bhikkhu-hood, i.e., the Order of Bhikkhus are organised in a hierarchical order. At the bottom of that hierarchy stands the Sammera (the novice). When given a new name and robes, he rises to the status of new Bhikkhu. The Jhera (The Elder) belongs to the next stratum and the Mahathera to the highest stratum. The head of the monastery is the Nayak.

One enters the Sangh as a Bhikkhu through a prescribed initiation ceremony. As in Buddhist doctrine one's status in society is determined by one's Karma and not by one's birth, admission to Bhikkhuhood is open to all free men above twenty and healthy. The Bhikkhu is expected to lead the life of celibacy and mendicancy, to seek self-enlightenment through study and meditation and to teach Dhamma to the people.

Buddhist monks at prayer. Note that the monks have a shaven head.

The Bhikkhu is also expected to practice a simple, austere and inquisitive living, taking only as much he needs. His belongings consist of three robes, a waist-cloth, begging bowl, a razor, a water-container and a needle. He may also add to this an umbrella, a pair of sandals and a few books.

A Bhikkhu, particularly the Novice (The Samnera) is obliged to go out for begging in the morning and return by noon to take food. He spends the rest of the day in study, meditation and teaching. Excepting the rainy season, the Bhikkhu is expected to travel and teach all the year around. In rainy seasons, he returns to communal life to study and revise the rules of Dhamma. To carry the gift of Dhamma to the people is Bhikkhyu's main duty. To progress on the path of Dhamma is the individual's business and not of his. He is not a priest/missionary in the Christian sense of the term. He does not belong to an 'apostolic order'. He is just a preacher of Dhamma (Humphreys: ibid: p.138).

1) **Organisation:** Every Buddhist monk could be a member of the Sangh of a particular area. The members were supposed to come from all the four directions **(chaturdisha)**. The quorum of ten members is a norm but, today, it is not universally uniform. Deliberation and decisions of an assembly without complete quorum were invalid. They could not be validated by taking the assent of absentee members.

The Sangh had pre-ordained rules for the seating arrangement. The questions to be decided at the Sangh had to be formally presented. Every member had a right to express his opinion and to vote, for, decisions were taken by a majority vote. Complicated questions were referred to the select committee and its recommendations were placed before the Sangh for rectification. To decide the questions of fundamental principles a religious council was convened. However, novices and women were not entitled to vote or to constitute the quorum.

Buddha, though reluctantly, also created the fraternity of ordained female monks (Bhikkhunis or nuns). Always subservient to men in rank and observance, the order of Bhikkhunis declined in India by Ashoka's time. Today, even in countries which have Therawad tradition there is no woman member of the order.

2) **The Sangh and Society :** In Buddha math, the Sangh is supreme, the final arbiter almost in all the matters of social life, "I submit to Buddha, to Dhamma and to the Sangh", so runs the prayer of a Buddha. It may be derived to imply willing submission to Dhamma and, ultimately, to the Sangh by following the path shown by the Buddha.

Each religion has a vast set of icons and symbols which communicate religions insights to the believers.

Since Buddha preached to take things as they are, it may be said that the Sangh philosophically takes a neutral view of the political powers that be. By and large, political power was friendly to it but not in all situations. As has been evident recently in Burma and Ceylon, it has tended to dabble in wordily politics (Humpreys: ibid: p. 139).

Today, the Sangh largely remains the same though in the process of diffusion and acculturation, it has undergone some modifications as well. The Bhikkhu has lost the role of village-teacher because of growing secular control over education as a part of the process of modernisation. In Japan, a Bhikkhu is just a communicator and-not an exponent. If he likes, he can lead a married life. The Sangh has now lost its earlier vigour.

12.5.3 Mats

The Mat was founded in the eighth century A.D. by Adi Shankaracharya, popularly known as Shankara. He is also the founder of **adwaita** philosophy which combines both **jyana** (knowledge) and **bhakti** (devotion) and seeks to unite divergent beliefs at a higher level of thought. The word Mat means the dwelling place of **sanyasins** (medicants) who preach the doctrine of **adwait** based on **nirguna** (formless)/ **Saguna** (having a human form) **mat.**

The Mat is also the place where students reside seeking the highest meaning of life and knowledge for the goodness of others. By this the Mat becomes a theologically oriented educational institution, devoted to the cultivation and preaching of the theistic doctrine of its founder. Shri Chaitanya Mat preaches **Krishna Bahkti** of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Ramakrishna Mat teaches the unidirectionality of all religious experiences, mainly of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

The Mat is said to have its ancestry in the Sangh. Organisationally, it shares much **with the Sangh though, doctrinally, it differs. The Sangh is atheistic. Rooted in Vedanta, the Mat is theistic. The Mat and adwaita** and their organisational inter-relatedness grew out of protest against Buddhism and the **Mimansaka**. Shankara established four Maths at the four corners of India (Badrinath, Puri, Dwarka and Sringeri) to "emphasise the growing consciousness about the geographical unity of India" (Nehru, J.L. : 1960: 182). The Mat is also viewed as a product of Hindu reformation in the eighth century (Pannikkar, K.M. 99-101).

The Mat was founded to organise and train selfless spiritual preachers to preach **adwaita mat** oneness of belief.

This trait of Mat-tradition reverberates with greater vigour and emphasis in the teachings of Vivekanand, the founder of Ram Krishna Mat. Shri Chaitanya Gaudiya Mat aims 'to build national character' and 'to help people to visualise the underlying thread of unity amongst people in spite of diversity'. Combining the sacred with secular (**parlaukik** and **ihlaukik**), the tradition with modernity and theism with charitable social work, the Matis today a medieval-modern tradition of a philosophical worldview and its propagation. Socially, it is an upper-caste — middle-class phenomenon. Its lay members are mostly drawn from amongst the professionals and businessmen, from the new rich. With the growth of middle classes, it has tended to multiply and diffuse.

The Mat is rather like a pendulum, moving between exclusiveness and inclusiveness. Its theistic doctrine, its ritual structure, its clergy and laity and their social background tend to give it the aura of exclusiveness though, theoretically, it welcomes all. As

is clear the **Mat** is an organisation of members who may themselves differ on crucial issues, often leading to one or more schisms over time. This is the usual path taken by a **Mat** when differences of opinion or dogma-interpretation is done with mutually differing stands on almost every issue. This leads to schisms in **mat** over time.

The Mat has three objectives. (1) Its primary objective is theistic—to define, maintain and preach the theism it upholds. For that it creates institutional means to train and appoint preachers of its theism. (2) It strives for inculcation of ethical-moral values, the main aim being to rehabilitate the individual in family, polity and society. (3) Organisation of charitable social work is the third objective. It includes running of dispensaries and hospitals, educational institutions and **Sanskrit** pathshalas (schools). In pursuance of its theistic aim, the Math often maintains a printing press to publish books and journals. It may also maintain a library for education and research.

These days, the Mat mostly functions as a registered society organized under a constitutionally regulated Trust. The tendency to convert the Mat (and also Ashram) into a Trust has been on the increase and for that many reasons are advanced. It is the best available institutional safeguard for the property of the Mat. The customary rule of inheritance by a nominated/initiated disciple creates conflict and cannot, in all circumstances, save the Mat property from being squandered and misused. It also facilitates raising of funds as a certain percentage of one's income is exempted from income tax if given as a donation to a registered charitable institution.

Box 2

The Organisational Structure of Chaitanya Mat

The Math has a seat and head Office which are not located at one place. It has two-tier membership—ordinary and special. Election and nomination is confined to special members who are selected by the Governing Body but that selection is subject to the ratification of President-Acharya. Those paying a donation of Rs. 1000/- or more are its patrons but they do not play any role in its governance.

At the apex, the Governing Body is presided over by the Founder President Acharya and by his deputy. The Executive President is Acharya. There are three categories of secretaries — the Secretary, the Joint-Secretaries and the Assistant Secretaries. By rule, the latter are required to be on a constant tour of India to preach and supervise the branches of the Mat.

The local Mat — a branch — is headed by the Mat Rakshak, appointed by the Governing Body and the President Acharya. Below him are the Mat Sewaks who undertake cooking, cleaning and other menial jobs of the Mat. For them, it is **sewa** (service of the God). The local Mat consists of **Bramacharis** (the student-sewaks), **Vanaprasthis** and **Sanyasins.** After serving the Mat as a **Bramhachari**, one has freedom to return to **grihasth ashram** (the life of the householder). After fulfilling the duties of the householder, one may return to join the Mat as a **Vanasprasthi** and, finally, to get initiated into Sanyas, the service of the Mat and humanity.

The saffron-robed functionaries of the Mat are Prabhus/Maharajas. They are knitted into a hierarchy which is based on seniority, recognition of one's spiritual attainment, learning in the religious lore of the math and meritorious services rendered towards the cause of the Mission. The title of Vishupad is indicative of the highest position and that of Prabhupad of the next

position in the hierarchy. One devoted to the service of the mission by body (kaya), mind (mana) and speech (vak) is Tridandi Swami. The Acharya has the right to initiate one into the order of the Mat, particularly into that of the Sanyasins. This power can be delegated.

12.5.4 Panth

As a religious organisation, the Panth (meaning path) is a distinct type though it draws much from the traditions of the Sangh and the Math. The Panth grew out of the protest and religio-social reform and reorganisation which was generated in India under the politico-religious domination of Islam. The Panth-tradition continues since then.

It is also a product of **Nirgun School of Bhakti** (devotion to the Formless), also called the **Nirgun Panth.** Though monistic, it denies the concept of eternal **moksha.** It is more this-wordly than the **adwait** of Shankar. Socially, it hinges on the Bhagat (the initiated) and the Guru (the initiator). The **Bhagat** is attached to a guru and his path. His discards ritual formalism and is expected to be a staunch vegetarian and teetotaller. He is also expected to lead a simple and austere life. Devoted to his **guru,** his theistic doctrine and school (the panth), to family and to his caste-based economic pursuit in life, the Bhagat is the Grihastha Sadhu (one who combines renunciation with family life).

The Panth protests against **varnashrama,** the birth-based inequality of caste, ritual formalism and rigidity of both Hinduism and Islam. It emphasises the piousness of means and **Karma**-based mobility and equality of all before the God. In real life, the Panth could not avoid ritualism of its cult which is simple and not elaborate. The Panth cuts across Hinduism and Islam but it also grows in and along each of them. It denounces and cuts across caste but it also grows along caste. It could not completely avoid the grip of caste.

The Panth is a religious brotherhood bound by the panth shown by the Adiguru (the original preceptor) after whom it is often clubbed (Kabir Panth, Dadu Panth etc.). The successor in line may symbolize the charisma of the **Adiguru.** The poetic compositions of the original Guru or his successor(s) constitute the religious lore of the Panth and explain its theistic doctrine. Besides Guru, the common theistic precept, the cultic rituals and ritual marks and insignia of identity, usually adopted as personal paraphernalia of the followers, bind the panthic brotherhood and endow it with a touch of exclusiveness.

The Panthic political structure is oligarchic. The charismatic gurudom of **Adiguru** passes either through inheritance or nomination. Under the **Adiguru** or his successor, there is a hierarchy of **gurus** and **mahant**(s). The Panth, too, is associated with a seat (the **Gaddi**) where it was originally founded. The original **gaddi** may divide into **gaddis,** i.e., branches located in different centres. A branch is managed by the local **mahants** and functionaries who are appointed by consensus by the local brotherhood.

Activity 2
Identify a religious group of the religion you follow and outline its group characteristics. Repeat the same exercise with a religious group other than yours.

Because of the importance of the Guru, in the panthic organisation, **gurudwara** attains a significant social-communal importance. With **gurudwara,** the **jhanda** (flag) cult occupies a crucial place in the total cultic structure of the panth. However,

Gurudwara is the place of daily, occasional and festive congregations. It strengthens brotherhood. It is a medium of religious-social communication. Panths such as those who have allegiance to a saint or master also experience Schisms when the preceptor dies and different groups emerge in the Panth.

The Panthic grouping is also subject to protest, schism and fission. The fission is not as much caused by doctrinal issues as by internal differentiation and intra-group competition for power, both sacred and secular. The brotherhood is dichotomized between the **sant** (saint) and the commoner (the laity). The **sant** is the theologian of the Panth. He expounds its doctrine and is its preacher, a touring missionary. He may have renounced the world or he may be a householder-saint. He may be dressed in the saffron robe or his robes may be of a prescribed style of colour. He may be ordinarily dressed if he were a householder-saint (**grihastha sadhu**). But he must carry the insignia of the Panth.

Having its distinct initiation ceremony, the Panth is an exclusive-sectarian brotherhood. To be initiated into the Panth means owing allegiance to the Guru or to his ordained successor. In a Panth the Guru and the Mahant may be combined while in another they may be different. Mahant, in fact, is not a **guru**; he is head of a Math or of a group of saints. A highly exclusive **panth** may have secret rituals and a code language. Till recently, the Shivanarainis did not admit the uninitiated into their **gurudwara** and they have a code language which is now dying out. They also did not allow women to enter the **gurudwara**. A Shivanaraini is expected to carry with him his identity card (the parwana) issued by the presiding Mahant of the **gurudwara** he belongs to.

Box 3

Through the doctrine of **bhakti** and organizational instrument of the Panth, the high elite took the Sanskritic way of life. The doctrine of **bhakti** emerged in the South and its early preceptors were Brahmins though as a thought its ancestry is deeper. In the North, it was introduced by Ramanand, but the founders of the Panth mostly came from the castes of the middle and lower levels. Nanak was a Khatri and so was the founder of Radhasoami panth. The Shivanaraini panth was founded by a Rajput (Shivanarain). Ravidasa was a chamar by caste and Kabir came from the Muslim weaver caste (the **Julaha**).

Significantly, the followers of the Panth have been and are mostly drawn from lower levels of caste-structure and only occasionally from the middle level. Opposing **varnashrama**, the Panth stimulated a strong popular version of sanskritisation. Not being complex ritually, it tended to stimulate doctrinal and ritual-social mobility of caste though it could not go very far.

By protesting against **varnashrama**, it tended to protest against the power-structure entitled therein. In some cases it received political patronage from the political power and in some it came into conflict with it. The conflict is often caused by the secular interests of its leaders. However, the sharper the conflict, the more aggressive is the Panth.

A Sikh ceremony in progress.

Today, like the Math, a panth may be constitutionally regulated and functioning as a Trust. It tends towards fundamentalism and political throwback. At certain levels, as among the Chamar, there has been a shift in panthic allegiance. In the Ravidas panth, in Bijnore, they moved towards **Sikkhism**. At Dehradun, the Chamar migrants from Bijnore moved towards Arya Samaj. Now, neo-Buddhism seems to make a greater religio-reformist appeal. Many times inner differentiation of the caste also tends to generate schism and fission (Bhatt, G.S. 1961:229-241).

Check Your Progress 2

i) Write how the Sangh is different from the Ecclesia. Use about seven lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

ii) Who is the founder of Advaita Philosophy?

....

iii) Name the four Mats established by Adi Shankaracharya.

....

....

....

iv) Write a five lines on the Panth as a religious organisation. In what way it is similar to a sect?

....

....

....

....

....

12.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed and observed the following.

Complex religious organisations grow essentially out of and after the religious experience of a charismatic personality (e.g. : Christ, Mohammad). It then develops into a pattern of ideas and practices or rituals (see Unit 20 of Block 6 of ESO-1—The Study of Society for a discussion on complex form of religion).

The Semitic religions like Christianity and Islam are monotheistic which enables them to organise on a more systematic way. The Church or the Ecclesia is thus

far more organised than its equivalents that we may find in India. This raises the question whether we can use the Church-Sect typology, offered by Western sociologists to understand the Indian religious organisation. Though we find no exact equivalents to the Church-sect typology, it enables us to have a comparative perspective.

This unit also discusses the dynamic process of a religious organisation, the origins and development. For any religious group to be an established organisation and a creed it evolves a system of worship, a philosophy which binds and inspires ensuing religious brotherhood.

The sect and the cults are results of internal schisms and dynamics, which soon institutionalise themes for the survival of the religious organisation. This aspect has also been discussed in this unit.

12.7 KEY WORDS

Ecclesia : The organisation of Church.

Dogma : Belief or system of beliefs, put forward by some authority

Laity : All those persons who are not clergy.

Literati : The learned, who have studied the Scriptures.

Transcendental : Going beyond human knowledge, that which cannot be discovered or understood by practical experience.

Creed : System of beliefs or opinions especially on religious doctrine. Also, the summary of Christian doctrine.

Atheist : A person who does not believe in the existence of God.

Renunciation : Denial, giving up the wordly possessions, desires and attachments.

12.8 FURTHER READINGS

O'Dea, Thomas F. 1969. *The Sociology of Religion*, Prentice-Hall, New Delhi : (Chapter III).

Johnson, Harry M. 1968. *A Systematic Introduction*, Routledge and Kegan Paul : London (Chapter 16).

12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i)   The literal meaning of Ecclesia is a popular assembly. However Ecclesia as a Church has a religious connotation. The Ecclesia was founded on the religious experience of Christ as compiled in the Bible. Christ being the mediator between God and man his experience is viewed as revealed and infallible. This revelation must be preserved and carried on to serve as a guide to man's salvation.

The Ecclesia or the church functions like a bureaucracy with hierarchy of offices. The member of the church-clergy derives his/her religious status qualities from

the office he holds the virtue of appointment and ordination. Its head the Pope is elected by a small group of officials. The rest of the hierarchy of officials is appointed.

The Ecclesia trains and recruits its personnel through its theological educational institutions. It organises research institution, study centres, seminars and workshops. It also establishes schools, colleges for secular education where imparting secular education is combined with preaching on God.

ii) Calvinism arose as sect of Protestantism to become a denomination.

iii) Sectarianism is quite pronounced in Christianity, the cause for it lying only partly in Christianity. One of the chief reasons for the rise of sects is the value for individualism. Another important reason has been a resentment against the social institutions the church supports. And by opposing, it hopes to bring social justice.

Check Your Progress 2

i) The Sangh was founded by Buddha which essentially meant as an organisation or association coming together of people for certain purposes. The Sangh is different from Ecclesia by the fact that it is secular, empirical, rational. The Dhamma that it teaches is not, religion in the usual sense of the term but a set of empirically rationally derived rules of conduct, a duty which guides the individual in his life. The Dhamma that is preached is not a revelation of God and thus is not infallible.

ii) Adi Shankaracharya or Shankara as he is popularly known is the founder of adwaita philosophy.

iii) The four Mats established by adi Shankaracharya are at Badrinath, Puri, Dwarka and Srinegeri.

iv) The Panth grew out of the Bhakti movement. It is basically a protest and social reform movement.

The Panth protests against the birth based inequality of caste, ritual formalism and rigidity of Hinduism and Islam. The followers have their own rituals, insignia and identity which gives it a touch of exclusiveness. The followers are expected to lead an austere and simple life of devotion to a formless Govt.

The Panth is similar to the sect for like the sect the Panth originates as a protest to some percepts of the dominant religion and like the sect the Panth stresses on individual salvation and devotion.

UNIT 13 RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS : SHAMANS, PRIESTS AND PROPHETS

Structure

13.0 OBJECTIVES

The present unit deals with the nature of religious specialists, focussing attention on three particular types: the shaman, the priest and the prophet. We hope that once you have studied the unit, you will have gained some idea about the following

- the nature and functions of specialists

- how these developed over time and how their position today may not be as socially significant as it once was

- the role they play in mediating between the human and the divine world

- the changes that have taken place in the nature of these specialists.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit is concerned with the nature of religious specialists. It is important for us to briefly understand who they are. As such, they are persons who because of certain charismatic qualities they possess, are accorded the status of being intermediaries of mediators between the world of the human and that of the divine

23

or magical. This act of mediation may either be performed by a single individual or a group of individuals, where each performs a separate task. Such performances may occur on special ritual occasions, as a matter of daily routine, or during illness.

There are different kinds of specialists who derive their power from the functions they perform, the doctrine they adhere to and by the nature of their following. To name a few, we have priest found in temples, prophets such as Muhammad, cultic leaders such as Sathya Sai Baba, shamans such as those found in Nepal and Tibet, sectarian leaders like the late Swami Prabhupadji of the ISKCON, and so on.

The significance and role of these specialists varies from society to society, and it is related to an extent to the nature of the religious system in the particular society. The functions of the specialists are usually meant for achieving positive ends and benevolence, but often they may even be aimed at inflicting harm. We often find men seeking the services of the specialists even when they are not required. Even the assis tance of the exorciser, medicine man and magician are sought as a normal routine. This unit will therefore deal with the development of three particular categories of specialists, the priest, the shaman and the prophet, and their functions and social significance. We will support our description wherever we can with examples.

13.2 RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Before we proceed into a detailed discussion of the nature of the three specialists, it is imperative that as students of sociology, we look at what the sociology of Religion has to say about them. "A religious specialist is one who devotes himself to a …religious system" (Turner in *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, p. 437). In societies where such power is considered as impersonal anthropologists have described it as magic and the specialist who manipulates the power as a magician; and where power is personalised, as deities, gods, spirits or demons and the life, anthropologists talk of religion. In reality, no clear demarcation can be drawn between religion and magic. Religious systems contain both religious beliefs, practices and magical elements. The role of religious beliefs, practices and magical elements, the role of religious specialists, is thus overlapping.

Early anthropologists such as Frazer, Durkheim, Malinowski did not specifically identify religious specialist as a distinct phenomenon for theoretical discussion. They considered the specialist a part of the religious system which according to them is a distinct 'social' phenomenon.

Max Weber provided the necessary breakthrough. His comparative study of world religions, which focused on theory of religious ideas, brought focus directly on religious specialist as agent of social transformation or as conservation of tradition. Weber wrote extensively on religions, its social consequences and the nature of religious functionaries. Before we go on to detailed discussion on what Weber has to say, we will have a look at how anthropologists have distinguished different religious specialists.

Max Weber, though aware of the numerous instances of overlap distinguishes between a priest and a prophet. A priest, he writes is always associated with the functioning of regularly organised and permanent enterprise concerned with influencing the gods. In Weber's view the prophet is distinguished from the priest by personal call. The authority of the prophet is founded on revelation and personal charisma.

Box 1

Anthropologists, who, unlike Weber, are less concerned with the genesis of religion as a force of social change or reinforcement have looked at shamans

as part of the working of religious systems in simpler societies. The editors A. Lessa and E.Z. Hogt devote a whole section to this aspect in their *Reader in Comparative Religion* (1958). They find that shamans tend to predominate in food-gathering societies. Where the shaman offers personalised service to one or two individuals or a group whereas the priest, according to them, is characteristic of more structurally elaborate food-producing, or agricultural societies, where there are common ceremonials or rites for the benefit of the whole community.

Raymond Firth regards the shaman as a specialist who exercises developed techniques of control over spirits. The emphasis, here, is on control exercised over spirits. Thus he "serves as a means of communication between other human beings and the spirit world" (Firth, 1964: p. 689).

Although, we sometimes find the functions of these specialists overlapping, the priests, prophets and shamans clearly constitute a subtype of a single type of religious functionary. Let us briefly consider what Weber had to say about religion, before we proceed to consider in general the role of religious specialists in everyday life.

13.2.1 Weber on Religion

Weber believes that the behaviour of individuals in a society is motivated by religious and magical factors. He discusses in his work the plurality of gods and their potential. He also traces out the development of monotheistic religions such as Islam and Judaism, and, polytheistic religions such as Hinduism. In an attempt to classify religious experiences and specialists, he points out how men relate to supernatural forces through prayer, sacrifice and worship. They are helped along here by mediators such as priests. Often charms and spells are used when prayer does not work. In such cases they turn to the magician. One can say that religious specialists relate to the divine through rituals and religious activity while they relate to the evil or malevolent, through magical activity. There are some societies where both functions are performed by the same religious specialist, for example the Leopard Skin chief among the Nuer tribe of Sudan, Africa.

Other than the above mentioned functionaries, Weber also recognises the presence in society of the religious leader or the prophet. The prophet could be the founder of a world religion such as Islam or a cultic figure such as Sathya Sai Baba in India. Let us now examine each specialist independently.

13.3 THE PRIEST

We have here first a description of the priest as Weber understood the category and then undertake a general explanation.

13.3.1 Weber's Understanding of the Priest

According to Weber, the priest is a functionary who performs regular, permanent and organised functions that are related to the divine. He does this usually through the act of worship either on behalf of an individual or for society as a whole.

The priest belongs to a social organisation and occupies a hereditary office. He is expected to have some specialised knowledge of texts and doctrines. According to Weber, the priest would have attained significant social and religious status through both rigorous training and by virtue of being born into a particular social group.

The priesthood is based on a code of behaviour and ethics. They dedicate their life

to the task of communicating with the gods and are associated with either a place of worship, a social group of a following of disciples. The development of a 'doctrine' which involves the rise of a rational system of religious concepts and ethics is also associated with them.

13.3.2 Priests and Priesthood : An Overview

Priests and associated organisations are found in both simple and modern societies. The rise of priests is associated with the need felt by primitive man to come to terms with the supernatural world.

In simpler societies we find that not just priests but also magicians are associated with the ability to communicate with the divine world. It is believed as such that priesthood is as old as religion itself.

In both primitive and advanced societies priests and magicians are functionaries who through their specialised knowledge and powers, are associated with and overcome malevolent and benevolent forces. The need for such duality was considered necessary so that the unknown supernatural powers would not be harmful to the human; instead, they would bring prosperity and goodwill. These early religious and magical practitioners who offered guidance in such matters, have been regarded as the pioneers of an organised priesthood. We find that in the early periods of religious evolution there is no priesthood and men perform rituals or invoke the Gods themselves. There are some people such as tribals of Melanesia and Australia who
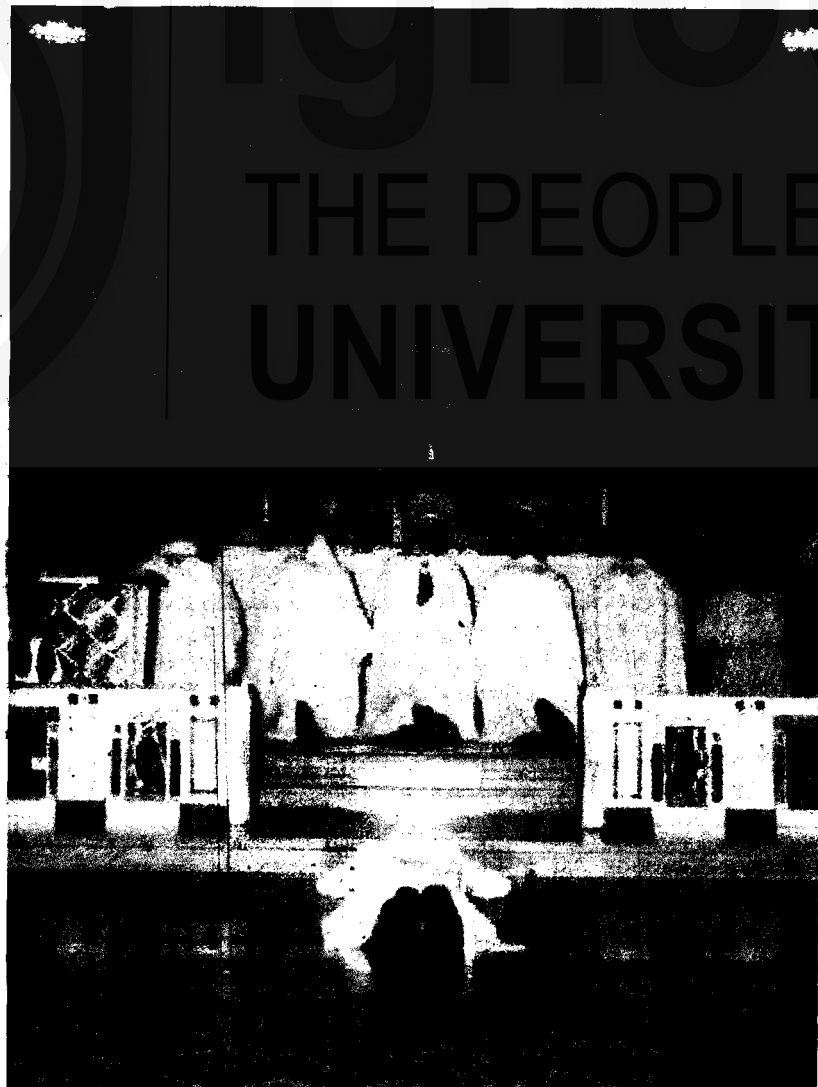
Priests and related organizations (e.g. Church) are found in both simple and complex societies.

even today do the religious and magical rites themselves without the help of any intermediaries or specialists.

Often in the early ages we find that in a collective group, one person would attain a certain significance in terms of his ability to deal with the supernatural or predict certain events or even acquire an expertise in performing certain ritual acts. Such a person would soon enough be regarded as an intermediary and gain priestly functions. As an example, we find that in certain Dravidian tribes, the head of the household would be the officiating priest at any type of family event. Before a regular priesthood arose, we thus find that men, other than priests, performed specialised functions. Into this category of specialists were also included those:

i)   who underwent ecstatic experiences by going into trances and then would make predictions such as a **darvesh**:

ii)   those who looked after places that have for some reason acquired a sacred significance and thus considered holy;

iii) those persons or 'holy men' who exercise some kind of religious authority by performing miracles or curing illnesses.

Other than the above mentioned functionaries, magician too had a role to play in the lives of the people, for both their well-being and for inflicting harm. Those individuals who were able to exercise greater authority were the ones who over time gained significant status and were able to gain respect. They gradually came to form a category of specialists who officiated for individuals and groups and were both respected and feared.

13.3.3   Priests and Royalty

We find that in most societies an interesting relationship also arose between priestly authority and the royalty. There are many examples in history of kings who were priests also, such as, among the tribes of Polynesia and Melanesia or even in India where ancestor worship made it necessary for the king or family head to perform priestly functions. We also have examples of kinds who were raised to the status of divinity and were believed to imbibe in their beings, the essence or life of the tribe or nation. Thus if a kind weakened or became ill, it signified misfortune for the whole social group. Thus we find in many societies, the leader would be put to death prematurely and a successor chosen immediately to prevent society from breaking up.

We also find examples in history of a close relationship between priesthood and kingship such that each was dependent on the other. We refer here to the sacredotal role of the priest, found in many societies, of bestowing upon the king his rights as a ruler. This could be seen in the coronation of the king as found in Europe, where the Church played an important role, or in the form of the **raja abhisheka** of the Indian kings that was performed by the Brahman priest. Further it was the duty of the king in the former case to protect the religion of the State and in India, the priests were protected by the kind.

13.3.4   Priestly Qualifications

Certain qualifications are laid down as being basic to priesthood. We mention here some of them without going into details.

i)   The priest's primary task is to mediate between the human and divine.

ii)   Priesthood is usually a hereditary institution.

iii) The priests communicate with the divine through prayer, worship, rituals and so on.

iv) Priests have to undergo initiation into the profession. A certain self training is considered necessary.

v) The priests are expected to uphold their status through knowledge of natural phenomena and the elements and may have an eccentric appearance. They are also expected to be able to perform miracles.

vi) A certain aura of mystery surrounds them.

vii) They are expected to maintain certain restrictions in their personal life particularly in relation to the sexual realm, food and language.

It may finally be noted that both religious and magical practitioners are included into the category of priests. While the magician uses magic spells and tries to coerce the known world of the supernatural, the religious functionary or priest brings about the desired results by propitiating the unknown through religious rituals and observances.

13.4 THE HINDU PRIESTHOOD : AN EXAMPLE

We now consider an example to support our description of priesthood. We take up here the Hindu case by examining what the various scriptures have to say about priests, down the ages. The priest in traditional India may assist in the performance of a ritual, at home, or in a temple. In Hinduism, he is born into a preistly caste, by virtue of which he gains these functions. We trace here his development as laid down in the texts.

13.4.1 Vedas

In the Vedas we find it mentioned that the social group of **brahmana** was the priestly class. We find described in the Rig Veda the priestly activities of some of the families of the Vedic tribes. In the **Samhita,** the title of **brahmana** is given to that priestly class who worked for kings and wealthy nobles. These priests strictly adhered to their occupation and were also believed to have a knowledge of medicine. The Rig Veda also mentions subdivisions within the priestly class, on the basis of functions and rituals performed, such as the **soma** sacrifice. Two important priests found mentioned are :

a) the **hotr** or one who recites hymns to celebrate the Gods and make offerings to them;

b) the **prashastr** or one who makes the **hotr** recite his hymns.

The Rig Veda also mentions a third office, that of the **purohita**, who was the domestic priest of either the king or a noble. He often assisted the king in other activities as well. For example from Indian mythology we know of how both Vishwamitra and Vashishta served their kings during the war.

13.4.2 Brahmanas

In the Brahmana literature which includes the period up to 6th century B.C., the priests are seen as a separate and hereditary class that was expected to maintain its distance and purity from others. Here also we find the priests performing sacrifices and there arise subdivisions here within the priestly class on the basis of functions performed. This period shows the functions of the **purohita** having increased in significance.

It is however the **brahmin** who is given more importance here and the best offerings of a sacrifice would go to him, rather than the king and he had greater jurisdiction than the king.

13.4.3 Upanishads

By the time of the Upanishads, priestly functions had become more differentiated. The priest now other then performing sacrificial functions was expected to engage in philosophical studies and to take on disciples and pupils. The Upanishads also specify the four stages of life or the **ashramas** that a Hindu had to follow. We refer here to **brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha** and **sanyasa as the four phases in a man's life.**

The priest in traditional India may assist in the performance of a ritual at home or in temple.

The above mentioned teacher-pupil relationships in this period of history is seen to have given rise to two important religious movements as alternatives to Hinduism.

These were Buddhism and Jainism. In these two religions also the role of the priesthood and the order of monks was considered important.

13.4.4 Early Hinduism

In early Hinduism the priests are seen to have full control over the divine and the power of the king. In fact there have been many priests in history who have gained knowledge of not only rituals and worship but also of administration. A well known example was that of Chanakya. But in this period the priest was seen to have become learned in astrology, divination and magic as well. Stories about the process of such priests can be found in the **Jataka Katha.**

13.4.5 Medieval and Modern Hinduism

According to the Puranic texts, this period represents much the same features. We do however see a division of the priestly class into tightly knit endogamous and hereditary subunits. As these subunits grew, an occupational diversification was also seen to occur. The **purohits** along with his priestly functions also came to perform astrological horoscope preparations, fortune telling and the performance of magic.

The temple priest became significant and came to look after the village temple deity. There also arose a group of priests who concerned themselves primarily with the imparting of knowledge and learning and came to be recognised as the **guru.**

Often the functions of the temple priest and the **guru** were combined along with the ability to perform magic and miracles as among the left handed **tantrics.** These individuals were both greatly feared and respected. Similar to the tantrics were the ascetics who undertook penance and sought to achieve ecstatic states and salvation.

In the more recent context we find that the sacrifices of the Vedic period have lost their significance and have been replaced by temple rituals and popular festivals such as Holi, Deewali, Makarsankranti and so on. This period is also characterized by the rise of religious movements such as the **bhakti** tradition where the priest corresponds to the wandering poet, musician and teacher who challenges Hindu orthodoxy. The **brahman's** as a priestly class came under criticism here.

From the 19th century onward, further change towards a unification of priestly methods as well as religious teachings has occurred. We do continue to find temple priests and family priests in most parts of India where the latter are usually present on most life cycle events such as birth, marriage and death, to signify the well-being of the family.

We must keep in mind that here we are referring to 'priest' as a blanket term. In fact there are different levels of competence and authority vested in different practising priests.

13.4.6 Tribal Context

When examining the nature of priesthood in the Indian context we cannot ignore

the role of the priest in the tribal context. Here he is seen as a medicine man, a healer and a person who not only has divine powers but also powers of magic and sorcery. We have examples of temples being built by tribals, served the non-brahman priests such as among the Tiyans of Malabar. Because of their association with magic and healing, they are considered more as magicians than priests and are called shamans. We consider them in detail in the next section.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Briefly discuss who religious specialists are.

2) State in a few words what Weber's understanding of the priest is?

3) Match the following :

i) One who has ecstatic experience	a) prashastr
ii) Reciter of hymns	b) purohita
iii) One who makes happen this recitation	c) brahmin
iv) The domestic priest	d) darvesh
v) The priestly class	e) guru
vi) Priests who impart knowledge	f) hotr

13.5 THE SHAMAN

Having examined in detail the nature and role of priests and priesthood, let us know proceed to look at the shaman as a specialist. In the previous sections we have been constantly referring to the need very often felt by a society to turn towards magical aid when religious rituals fail. We have also discussed how often the same individual would combine both priestly and magical functions.

As far as the shaman as a specialist is concerned (section 13.4.6), we have narrowed down his role to the tribal context as that is where he is largely seen to operate. In this section we will try and describe the shaman and his social role.

13.5.1 Weber on the Magician

If we examine Weber's work on religious specialists we do not find any mention of the shaman. He does however talk about the magician. We briefly examine what he has to say about the magician as, it is in magical acts that the shaman has his antecedents.

Weber believes that the relationship between the human and the supernatural could be expressed not just through religious worship assisted by a priest, but also through magical chants or sorcery. Weber also points out that, it is in magic that prayer and sacrifice have their origin. Sacrifice is seen as a major method of coercing the gods into submission to a supplicant's needs. It was also seen as a method of directing the anger of the gods towards another object. It is believed that the sacrificial rituals of the Brahmans were magical in their intent and implication. However not all sacrifices have magic or sorcery. The magician is understood by Weber as dealing with evil spirits on an individual level. His efforts may have both positive and negative consequences. The magician is usually self-employed though he may be the member of a hereditary caste or an organised guild. Rather than using a specialised doctrine of knowledge, the magician may derive his influence by virtue of personal gifts and knowledge of the supernatural world. The magician can have

considerable power among his community and may be respected more out of fear than faith. He does not necessarily have a following as the priests do.

Activity 2

Locate a travelling magician and enquire from him what he feels about his work. Note down the important points of the conversation and share this information with other students in your Study Centre.

13.5.2 The Shaman : A General Overview

Earlier we have outlined some of the broader features of the magician as a specialist. As far as the shaman is concerned, he represents all of the above features and more. He is found to use his magical abilities for purposes of well-being as well as for harming, usually in the context of pre-literate society. (They or their counterparts may even be found in modern societies). For instance a shaman may engage in an act of magic or sorcery to cure an illness, exorcise a possession, inflict injury or illness on someone or influence the forces of nature to bring rains. In other words his is a multifunctional role which gives him his status and respect. The shaman is found to occupy an important position in most tribal societies. In fact shamanism is a native and tribal religion.

Once greatly feared and misunderstood, today we find him using his abilities in social and political spheres in simple societies. For long time in early anthropological literature, he had a negative image of being a deviant. In later years however his significance as playing a psychological role, was recognised. In fact it has been pointed out by the French structuralist, Claude Levi-Strauss, that the shaman provides for the sick, a language that helps them to express their condition which they normally would not be able to do.

13.5.3 The Functions and Role of a Shaman

As mentioned above, shamanism is a native religion. The word shaman is of North-East Asian origin and comes from the Tungusic word **saman** which means one who is "excited, moved or raised". We find that the shaman is usually seen as a medicine-man who employs exorcism and sorcery as his tools. He derives his powers from association with the supernatural and it is believed that he is assisted by a medium or a spirit to attain his ends. Very often, the shamans ability to achieve results demands that his state of mind is altered and he either enters into a trance or an uncontrolled condition of excitement following which he communicates with the supernatural.

Shamans belonging to different tribes would use different means to achieve their ends. Certain factors are however found in common. They are as follows:

a) either the office is hereditary or one's personality allows one to be chosen to the office;

b) the shaman may have a peculiar mental state or even a physical shortcoming so that he may be considered neurotic or epileptic;

c) the above abnormal qualities are central to his role;

d) he may undergo training and austerities under the tutorship of an older shaman and may develop a peculiar disposition; the shaman may go into a trance or enter into an excited condition to make his predictions, or to cure the illness or get rid of a spirit.

> **Box 2**
>
> Among the Public initiation ceremonies of Siberian Shaman, those of Buriats are among the most interesting. The principal rite includes a climb over the birch tree. A strong birch tree is set up in the Shaman's tent, its roots in the heaven and its crown coming out of the smoke hole. The birch tree is called **Udesi burkhan** — the guardian of the door, for it opens the door to Heaven to the shaman. The birch tree always remains in his tent — serving as a distinguishing mark of shaman's residence. On the day of this sacred ceremony, the candidates climb to the top of the birth, carrying a sword in one hand. Emerging through the smoke hole he shouts for the aid of the god. After this the master shaman, the apprentice and the entire audience go in a procession which halts by a particular path, a goat is sacrificed, and the candidate stripped to the waist, has his head, eyes and ears anointed with blood, while the other shamans play their drums. The candidate then climbs it, followed by other Shamans. As they climb they all fall — or pretend to fall in ecstacy.
>
> There, the birch or pole is compared to the tree or pillar that stands at the centre of the world and that connects the three cosmic zones — Earth, Heaven and Hell.

As far as the functions performed by a shaman are concerned, it is believed that he combines the functions of priest, prophet and magician, all in one. He is known to perform priestly functions and uses sacrifice as a central act in the process of healing and divination. He also performs rituals of sacrifice and appeasement to the gods or spirits once they have been forced to submit to the shaman's needs.

Finally, because of fear of the shaman and his powers, he acquires a charismatic personality and qualities of leadership similar to a prophet. He may wear unusual jewellery and clothing, wear his hair long and matted, paint his body with colour or ash and carry either musical instruments or bones. His eccentric appearance and qualities have often earned him the name of a neurotic and a trickster.

13.5.4 Organisation

As far as the hierarchic organisation of the shamans is concerned it is not as clearly identified as that of the priests. Within the community however, on the basis of the power and control a shaman has over spirits, he has a particular ranks. They are also classified in terms of whether they perform positive magic (or white magic) in the well-being of a person or negative magic or black magic to make someone ill. Accordingly, they are either revered or feared and have higher or lower status. A shaman does not undergo indoctrination in an institution as a priest does not have to master tests except those that are special to his functions.

Unlike priesthood, we do find women included among the shamanistic category. Female shamans are usually associated with witchcraft and with sorcery. They are called shamanin.

The shaman is regarded important enough to be buried in a special way. Often where a shaman is buried a sacred site is created, entry into which is restricted. A dead shaman's body may even become the object of a cult. The shaman is found to play a significant role amongst the people of Tibet, Nepal, the Red Indians in America and in some south Asia communities. In the Indian context we find they are found to play an important role in some tribal communities. In our next section we take an example to illustrate this point.

13.5.5 An Example : The Oraon Shaman

As we have already mentioned, the shaman is closely associated with tribal life and medicine. We take here the example of a tribe among whom the shaman has great significance. We refer here to the Dravidian tribe of Oraons found in east India in the Chota Nagpur plateau. The shamans here and the tribe in general, were first studied by the Indian social anthropologist S.C. Roy, in the 1929s. The Oraons live in a hilly and forested region. They practise agriculture and both men and women share in farming. Their life is coloured by festivals and they have sacred groves for their village deity. Important in the life of the Oraon is the **bagat** or the shaman. His residence is identifiable by coloured flags on bamboo poles that stand outside it. These flags represent the gods and goddesses, that are worshipped by the **bhagat**. It also includes the flag of the special deity that enters the **bhagat** during his trances, and helps him to heal and cure. The position of the **bhagat** is hereditary and usually only one son or daughter is handed down the knowledge in a family. An Oraon can become a shaman, only if he has special qualities that are recognised by the person to whom he is apprenticed. The life of the **bhagat** is simple and strict in matters of food and drink and is governed by the prescribed conduct and rules of shamanic training.

The Oraon **bhagat** need not become a shaman by inheritance only. He may be chosen by divine interventions, through a dream or a possession by a god who informs the chosen person of how to go about learning the knowledge to be a shaman.

The **bhagat** usually deals with illnesses that come from demonic possession; or illness or madness that comes from psychological stress. The treatment can be in the form of a healing ritual or an exorcism, better known as **jhar phook.** These rituals are of various kinds and extent, depending on the depth of a person's illness. Thus the **bhagat** is seen to perform both rituals associated with good spirits and the bad. They are seen not only to perform both rituals associated with good spirits and the bad. The are seen not only to cure and provide remedies for illness but much of their success comes from faith healing and divination. The **bhagat** is also known to go into trances and an ecstatic condition to reach the root of his patient's malady. It may be pointed out here that the range of a shaman and his personal power vary greatly from one societal context to another.

If we look at the above example, even though discussed here briefly, we find that the **bhagat** or shaman among the Oraon is very similar in his personality and life to the shaman described in general. Having considered the nature of the shaman and his role in social life specific to simpler societies, let us now proceed to examine the nature of the prophet and prophecy as the final form of religious specialisation.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Briefly discuss what Weber's understanding of the magician is. Use about three lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

2) Who is a shaman? Use about four lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

3) Briefly describe the shaman of Oraon. Use about four lines for your answer.

....

....

....

13.6 THE PROPHET

Having discussed the nature of the priest and shaman as religious specialists who have different and significant functions to perform particularly in relationship to the world of the supernatural, let us now turn to the prophet. The prophet is also a religious specialist but not of the kind that the priest and magician (shaman) are. He is more recognizable as a leader of a religious movement rather than as a functionary fulfilling a role within a movement. Prophets have also been the source of new world religions such as Islam or Zoroastrianism, or **leaders of sectarian religions**. Let us first consider what Weber had to say about the prophet.

13.6.1 Weber on the Prophet

In his book on religion, Weber has devoted a whole chapter to the understanding of what a prophet is. He defines the prophet as an individual who is capable of proclaiming a religious doctrine or a divine commandment because of his charismatic qualities. The major difference between the priest and prophet is that the prophet regards his mission as a "personal call" and derives his authority from personal revelation and charisma or an exceptional quality. The core of the prophet's mission is to carry forward the commandment or doctrine he has received as revelation. Often the prophet may use magic to establish his authority. The prophet is usually successful and respected till his ability to convince and prove his uniqueness of purpose is intact.

Prophets also engage in healing and counselling. Weber points out that the prophet usually does not belong to an organisation and neither does he receive economic rewards for his ideas. He is not a professional and has a following of disciples or a **laity** because they believe in his or have faith in him. The prophet makes prophecies which become often the guiding principles of a religious sect or cult or even an entire religious movement. The prophet besides making prophecies, is a teacher of religious and philosophical wisdom.

To put it simply, the prophet may be seen as an individual who is an instrument for carrying forward the will of god and he is obeyed because of the ethical nature of his mission. He may also be a person who individually sets an example of attaining salvation as did Buddha. This latter form of exemplary prophetism has been found particularly in India.

13.6.2 The Prophet : An Overview

The prophet has been found to rise in the context of almost all world religions in some form or the other. In this section we briefly consider some features of a prophet and an example as we have already outlined in general with the help of Weber's work. We have already noted that the prophet does not belong to an

institution as such and may be on a purely personal mission; we therefore do not examine the nature of organisation here. As such prophets have varied in nature from religion to religion and society to society, depending upon the nature of their mission. This has also determined the nature of the prophecies they have made. It may be noted however that the category of the prophet is absent in India's indigenous religious traditions. We mean by this that the idea of the prophet such as Moses, Jesus or Muhammad, who bring to mankind a message or a commandment from God, are absent in India. In fact we do not even find them in the Indian tribal context as we find the shaman.

We do however have another category of prophet in India who by virtue of his ability to forsee, to predict and to use clairvoyance, transcends time and space and makes prophecies about the future. He often is seen to use magic or miracle-making to convince the followers about the truthfulness of his prophecy. We consider here the example of such a prophet to illustrate the above.

13.6.3 Sathya Sai Baba : An Example

Sathya Sai Baba is regarded as modern India's most famous miracle maker and deity saint. He is easily recognisable by his appearance and clothes. The major part of his devotees come from the high caste middle and upper-middle classes in India. He can be regarded as a deity as he receives the homage of his devotees he returns these with blessings and grants boons. But above all he is known for his ability to make miracles and predictions come true. It is believed that only the real followers and believers of Sathya Sai Baba are really able to recognise him. His devotees have been seen to regard him as an **avatar** or manifestation of God on earth.

Sai Baba receives this special status not because or any mission that he heads of religion that he leads but as a consequence of the fact of his unusual capabilities and charismatic personality. His birth in 1926 in a village in Andhra Pradesh is seen as divine because of the mysterious occurrences that took place then, such as a cobra suddenly appearing under his bed. At the age of thirteen he is believed to have suffered a seizure and then began performing miracles and later claimed to be 'Sai Baba', the saviour of his people, and a reincarnation of the earlier saint, Sai Baba of Shirdi.

In 1940 he broke away from his family and set out on a career as a holyman and accepted devotees. He by now had begun performing the act of producing ash or **vibhuti** and other items. Although be became famous for his miracles, he also came to be known for his ability to cure and heal. In 1950, an **ashram** was constructed in the village of his birth and he had come to be recognised all over India as a god man, with a large following.

The important thing to note here is that his followers were there not because of what he professed but because of their faith in him as a divine person. He is known to go into trances and seizures to cure the illness of a devotee, by taking the illness upon himself.

He has predicted that there will be one more incarnation of Sai Baba, after him, and also tells of the place he will be born in Karnataka next. He claims himself to be an incarnation of Shiva and Shakti and much of the cult symbolism revolves around Shiva, though the cult and its membership themselves are very ambiguous. He remains the central charismatic authority of this cult and a modern day prophet and **guru** who does not preach a doctrine. Those who believe in him, are his devotees, and those who do not are not his devotees.

1) Who is a prophet? Explain in five lines.

....

....

....

....

....

2) Differentiate between a priest and a prophet in five lines.

....

....

....

....

....

13.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have studied three different types of religious specialists. We have begun by examining who a religious specialist is and what kinds of functions he performs for a society.

We have then proceeded to examine the major contribution made by Max Weber to the sociology of religion as well as his specific ideas on the priest, magician and prophet.

This unit has also tried to deal with each specialist: priest shaman and prophet, separately, outlining the features and functions of each. We have tried to show how each of the specialists has significance within a given context and how each associates with the layman differently. The purpose of examining these three different kinds of roles is to show how mankind relates to the world of the divine and supernatural, differently. Finally, wherever we have been able to, we have tried to support our presentation with examples from the Indian context. Our presentation has however been limited because the field is too diverse to be incorporated into a few pages.

13.8 KEY WORDS

Brahmacharya : the first phase in a pious Hindu's life where is a bachelor engaged in learning.

Charisma : certain supernatural or divinely gifted talents or something received from divine grace.

Clairvoyance : the ability to see mentally into the future.

Cult : a system of religious worship.

Doctrine : a reference to religious belief or teaching.

Ethics : reference to the science of morals.

Exorcism : to get rid of evil spirits or expel spirits from someone's body through invocation and rituals.

Grihastha : the second phase of life as a householder.

Monotheistic : a doctrine that believes in only one God.

Polytheism : a doctrine that believes in the existence of many Gods.

Sacredotal : related to the sacred or consecrated sphere.

Sanyasa : the final stage of life when one renounces the material world.

Sorcery : the use of magical arts to achieve something.

Vanaprastha : the third phase of life when one, having completed, one's duties, proceeds to the forest to meditate.

13.9   FURTHER READINGS

Babb, Lawrence A. 1986, *Redemptive Encounters : Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition*, Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Elwin, Verrier, 1955. *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Fuller, Christopher J. 1990. *Servants of the Goddess : The Priests of a South Indian Temple*, Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Madan, T.N. 1991. (ed.) *Religion in India*, Oxford University Press : Delhi.

13.10   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1) Religious specialists are people who because of certain special qualities they possess are able to mediate between the human world and the supernatural world. The priest, the magician, the shaman are all examples of religious specialists.

2) According to Weber the priest is one who performs mediatory functions directed towards the world of the supernatural and divine. The priest belongs to an organisation or is related to an institution. He may even be attached to a family. He undergoes indoctrination and organisational learning. He has to abide by certain defined codes of behaviour. He is also expected to perform periodic rituals and sacrifice for the propitiation of the divine or the Gods and Goddesses.

3) i) (d)

   ii) (f)

   iii) (a)

   iv) (b)

   v) (c)

   vi) (e)

1) Weber understands the magician as a specialist who uses his knowledge of the supernatural, sorcery, miracle making and exorcism to carry out rituals and acts that are both beneficial and harmful. He deals with evil spirits and tries to overcome illness through his magical powers.

2) The shaman is a tribal magician and leader. He is known for his powers of sorcery and exorcism and similar to those of the magician he performs both positive rituals of well-being, and negative rituals of ill-being.

Check Your Progress 3

1) The prophet is a person who by virtue of his charismatic personality and qualities is capable of being a leader and gaining a following. The prophet leads a mission not for economic reasons but as he sees it as his personal calling or as a divine mission. The prophet may either lead a mission or he may be the founder of a world religion. To put it simply, the prophet is seen as a messenger or instrument of God's will.

2) The difference between the priest and prophet is that while the priest is a religious specialist who is attached to an organisation and performs rituals on behalf of others, the prophet is an independent person. He performs no rituals on behalf of people as such and is not a member of an organisation where there are others like him although, he may lead one. Secondly while the priest inherits his authority by birth in a family or through indoctrination and specialised knowledge, the prophet's authority comes from his personal charisma.

UNIT 14 RELIGION : SOCIAL STABILITY AND CHANGE

Structure

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to

- explain the relationship between religion and the social order

- access the impact of religion on society, keeping in mind sects, cults and denominations

- appreciate the fact that religion can preserve the existing social order, as well as change it drawing instances from the various facets of social order viz. political, economic and cultural

- comprehend the factors and contexts which determine impact of religion on society: stabilisation or change.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Are you finding this intellectual voyage through religion, guided by the sociologists, interesting? We are sure most of you will. Religion is such a complex reality, that even as you explore yet another mystery unfolds. Through this course, we are only introducing you into this voyage, and it is out of your own interests you have to sociologically explore religion using wherever necessary, the concepts and theories which are provided to you.

So far you have read and understood thirteen units on religion spread over three blocks. Block three deals with various aspects of religion like religious organisations, religious specialists, fundamentalism, secularisation and so on. One of the very interesting properties of religion is that it can justify, explain and conserve the social order as well as it can demystify, de-legitimise and change the social order.

This important property of religion will be explained to you, in this unit. In 14.2, we shall recapitulate the basic ideas like religion, social order, stability and change with which you are already familiar with. In 14.3, we shall demonstrate to you that sects

and cults arise due to the impact of religion on society. The main task here will be go give you instances where sects have changed the social order as well as established a new social order. Assuming that social order has various facets, for example economic order, cultural order, political order, in the section 14.4 we shall explain that religion can preserve, stabilize or change each one of these facets of social order, drawing various instances.

14.2 RELIGION AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

Religion, social order, stability and change are four conceptual tools required to grasp this unit. In this sub section we shall learn the nitty gritty of these conceptual tools. Though you are already familiar with them, go through sub sections 14.2.1, 14.2.2 and 14.2.3 in order to understand better the nature and complexity of interaction between religion and the social order.

Religion is a system in itself and it is also a sub-system of the larger society. It is constantly in interaction with other sub-systems of the society like family, education, state and economy. As you know there are specific manifestations of this interaction between religion and the social order. Sects and cults are specific and explicit manifestations of this interaction. Religion in the course of its interaction with social order can stabilize the social order — justifying and legitimising it through explanations. On the other hand religion can also change the existing social order. Religion can be status-quo or revolutionary. The nature of the interaction and its fall out depends on a number of factors, which we shall outline in sub-section 14.2.3.

14.2.1 Interaction between Religion and Social Order

What is social order? More discerning learners amongst you will recall that 'social order' is a concept within the functionalist understanding of society. The origin of this idea, can be traced back to the medieval ages, when people were searching for 'order' amidst chaos generated by devastating feudal wars, and catastrophic natural calamities and endemic plagues. In our times, this idea has been popularised by the thinkers who advocate a functionalist understanding of society, drawing at the same time a comparison between the dynamics of human body and society, in short, organismic analogy.

'Social Order' as a concept may imply one or many of the following meanings: (i) Arrangement of institutions in the society; (ii) Arrangement of roles and statuses in the society; (iii) A smooth, well-coordinated functioning of this 'structure'. In other words, 'structure' and 'function' are the twin dimensions of any social order. Individual and society held together in a harmonious relationship, is the crux of a social order. A most significant but questionable assumption behind the idea of social order is that, social order is a 'self-regulating', 'self-balancing' order in equilibrium almost like the natural Order.

An important issue which arises from the functionalist interpretation of social order is like this : the social order also contain inequalities of power, wealth and life opportunities and a struggle between various groups to gain access to these resources. Are these inequalities to stay and accepted as 'natural' or 'given' or 'consensus-determined'? Shouldn't we change this conflict-ridden social order? These are questions of perennial debate among sociologists. There is a specific group of sociologists who tend to conceptualize social order as a conflict between groups which aspire for resources.

What does religion say about the social order? Does religion accept the social order of the day as it exists with its inequalities of power, wealth and life opportunities? Does religion say that social order is natural and given and hence beyond change?

Does religion say that an unjust order is the manifestation of divine will and creation? Does religion say that human beings have to accept the social order, because it is the result of individual commissions and omissions (sin, karma etc.) and hence they cannot change it?

Before deliberating on these important questions, let us recapitulate some of the salient features of religion.

i) Religion has a cognitive function: It provides us the categories of understanding, in other words a framework of intelligence (ideas of time, space, class, person, etc.) (Durkheim, E. 1965 (1912):9).

ii) Religion has an intellectual function: It explains the meaning and purpose of human life. It gives and supports values and norms governing the society. To be more specific, religion plays a significant role in goal-setting and value-orientation in a society. Apart from this religion explains the natural processes like birth, death, misery and evil.

iii) Religion is a social institution because community of believers constitute the basis of any religion. Religion is an organisation because it consists of a hierarchy of deities, priests, prophets and believers.

iv) Religion is an ensemble of rituals and beliefs centering around a notion of the sacred.

14.2.2 Social Stability and Social Change

In the previous section, 14.2.1, the twin ideas of religion and social order were explained in detail for you. That illustration along with the questions posed, should have helped you in grasping why and how does religion interact with social order. Thus after comprehending the nature and complexity of the interactive relationship between religion and social order, let us now proceed to analyse the impact/result of the relationship.

When religion and social order interact, two broad effects may result: (i) Religion can change the social order or religion can stabilise the social order: (ii) Social change can lead to changes in religion itself at various levels or existing social order can defend and justify the religion which at times is oppressive and atrocious. Stabilisation and change are not the only likely fall-out of interaction between religion and social order. Sometimes at certain specific places, even a continuity may result. In other words some of the features of the bygone era can be retained, changing few others. New emergent situations may necessitate the adaptation of some of the principles of the past.

Religion stabilises the existing social order by its explanations of human misery and social inequalities. It can stabilise the society by socialising individuals within a specific moral framework. A particular religion explains doctrines which explain inequalities as natural and God-given. Some religions revolve around the concept of personal salvation so much that, they explain human misery in terms of 'sin' or the 'fallen state of humankind'.

Activity 1

Recall your childhood experiences, and reminiscence how your father/mother/ grandparents taught you 'good'/'bad' through stories, particularly religious myths.

Religion sometimes, begins to act as a force of social change. New interpretations,

of the old scriptures, rituals or dogmas in the light of sweeping changes in the society at large, provide valuable inputs. Religion itself may re-emphasize hitherto marginalised or forgotten principles, in a changed context. This wordly misery (persecution, oppression, slavery, etc.) of the community of believers, may force religion to downplay its other worldliness, in a specific socio-political, socio-economic context. Most often religious sentiments and symbols are invoked, new meanings are attributed to rituals and beliefs, and in the process religion becomes a vehicle of collective mobilization, for a group of believers who would like to be 'liberated'. This group of believers may form a sect and break away from the parent religion itself as protest. Religion also interprets what is an ideal family, best education etc. and this may bring change or stability in these institutions.

As interesting view which emerges from the above discussion is that religion is not necessarily a backward-looking or conservative force as assumed by many people. Rather religion could be a progressive, modern and revolutionary force as well, contingent upon certain factors, a few of which are explained below.

14.2.3 Determining Factors

Whether religion stabilizes the existing social order or changes it, depends upon a host of factors. Some of them are:

- New evidences/researches which cast the message of the scriptures/holy books/ founder of the religion in a new light.

- Social origins (social class, ethnicity etc.) of the clergy, clerics, priests and the community of believers.

- Medium through which stabilisation or change is disseminated.

- Reinterpretation of the Holy Books/Scriptures/Tests in the light of scholarly debates or movements.

- Political status of the religions community-ruled by a colonial regime or themselves.

- Nexus of the religious hierarchy with other sections of the society. In other words, position of power within and outside the religion.

- Emergence of prophets, impact of other cultures, political subordination, economic exploitation of the believers.

- Just as changes in religion may initiate changes in the social order, changes in the society in various realms like education, family, science, industry, stratification may compel religion to explain the social order in a new light.

14.3 SECTS, CULTS AND DENOMINATIONS

Sects, cults and denominations, largely speaking are manifestations of dissent within the parent religion. For example, within the universal church you find numerous protestant sects, denominations, and cults. At a certain point of history, owing to changes in the society and when religion becomes a mere stabilization agent of society, there arise groups of dissent which interrogate the dogmas, rituals and practices of the parent religion.

14.3.1 Characteristics of Sects, Cults and Denominations

The origin of sects can be attributed to the dissent among certain sections of clergy and the community of believers. They may feel that the parent religion (for example,

the church) has failed to articulate adequately the teachings of the founder or the prophet and has just become part of the social order. Urge for change, reconstruction and reinterpretation are at the root of sects.

Through an example, it will be demonstrated before you how a sect attempted to change the social order. But before coming to that let us quickly recapitulate the finer variations between these three levels of religious organisations, viz. sects, cults and denominations. At this point, take care to read Unit 12 (Block 3). It may help you further to understand what is a sect and what is not. Church and the sect have different kind of relationship to the world. Churches accept the social order and lend credibility to its stats, whereas sects are marked by a motivation to dissociate from the existing social order, the status quo. Sects are in a sense non-conformist bodies. **Sect is marked by voluntary membership, whereas membership to the Church is natural, i.e. by birth.** Sects are more autonomous than the church.

The fully developed Church utilises the state and the ruling classes and weaves these elements into its own life; it then becomes an integral part of the existing social order. Thus church stabilizes the social order. Sects generally are connected with lower classes, or at least with those elements who are opposed to state and society; they work upward from below, argues Earnest Troeltsch in his famous work *"The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches"*.

Sect is an idealistic community, and is small in size comparatively. Members seek direct personal fellowship. However, sects after a certain stage may themselves be institutionalised and become denominations. Put differently, denominations are sects in an advanced stage of development and adjustment to each other and secular world. Cult is essentially centered around an individual living or dead. The emphasis on personal fellowship is minimal. Followers of the cult, which is a loosely knit structured form of religious expression seek personal ecstatic experience, salvation and comfort.

14.3.2 Sects Change the Social Order

Let us now learn about a Hindu sect which attempted to change the social order. Veera Saiva movement is a twelfth century Hindu sect, which staunchly advocated protest against the Brahminical ethos of those times. It is this strong element of protest, which makes Veera Saiva movement, a sect per se, though scholars are, hesitant to use the term 'sect' outside the western context.

During the 12th century, Brahminical Hinduism dominated the social order. Rigid caste and ritual systems were the order of the day. Social intercourse between various caste groups were highly restricted and regulated, through an elaborate system of rules which inhibited inter-dining and inter-marriage. Non-Brahmins were subjected to bondage, humiliation and de-humanizing existence.

The Veera Saiva Movement was headed by Basaveshwara, who was the Chief Minister and Treasurer to Bijjala II, the Kalachuri King. The Veera Saiva movement fought a relentless struggle against the oppressive Brahminical Hindu order. It challenged the norms and values advocated and enforced by the Brahmins. The adherents of Veera Saiva movement, held Siva as the supreme God. All those who submit themselves before Siva, are equal irrespective of sex, caste and class, preached Basaveshvara. The Veerasaivites regarded untouchability as an evil and hence restrained from observing caste pollution. They rejected the doctrine of rebirth and believed in jivan-Mukthi. Work (Kayaka) was sanctified. Veerasaivites followed Bhakti Marg in their quest for ultimate reality. The Veerasaiva movement, owing to its ideology of protest against the then prevailing Brahminical Hindu order, attracted many followers, most of them from lower castes. By about 1162 A.D. the movement had gathered momentum and Basaveshvara, Chenna Basava, Alatha

Prabhu and Siddharam were leading it. The ethical code of Veerasaivas called Pancacaras, was based on egalitarian principles.

> **Box 1**
>
> The leaders of the movement created an organisational framework, to sustain, uphold and preach the Veerasaiva doctrines. Maths were established and a priestly order of Jangamas was created. King Bijjala and Basaveshwara came into conflict, and this led to the subsequent emergence of radicals and moderates among the Veerasaivas. Basaveshvara was a charismatic leader, and after his death the Veerasaiva movement had to rely on an extensive order of Mathas and priests. When the Mathas took the leadership after Basaveshwara and priests (Jangamas) replaced the lay leadership, the movement began to consolidate, evolve a wide set of rules and regulations. This Matha-priest institutions were responsible for preservation and propagation of the tenets of Veerasaivism, its canonical scriptures and literature.

After the movement, began to institutionalise itself through an order of mathas, a hierarchy of priests, and sect of rules and regulations, it began to lose its sectarian character, particularly the ideology of protest. Veerasaivism slowly institutionalised itself into an order parallel to that of the Brahmins. Though the Veerasaiva movement aided the emergence of Lingayats (one who wear Lingas on their body as a political group and also propagated education among non-Brahmins, the fact is that it stands reduced to another caste in modern day Karnataka (India).

So far, in subsection 14.3.1, a Hindu sectarian movement which emerged as a protest against the dominant Brahminical Hindu order was discussed. True, the Veerasaiva movement brought a sea change in the social order of twelfth century Karnataka. But eventually it had to succumb to institutionalisation and established a parallel order. Sects emerge as a protest, but in the course of time they routinise and accommodate the social order.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Discuss the nature of relationship between religion and the social order, in about five lines.

....
....
....
....
....

ii) Cite an example to illustrate that sect can change the social order, in about five lines.

....
....
....
....
....

iii) Fill in the blanks:

a) Religion can change the social order or stabilise it; also there is a possibility of ....

b) A particular way in which religion stabilizes the social order, is through its explanation of .... and ....

c) A sect is essentially a .... movement.

d) Interpretation of Scriptures/Holybooks may .... from time to time contingent upon many social factors.

14.4 RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Let us assume that economic order, political order and cultural order are three different facets of the social order. In this sub section 14.4, you will learn specifically how religion can change or stabilize the economic order, political order and the cultural order. As you are aware, the economic order primarily refers to the arrangement of individuals and institutions in a relationship of the production, distribution and consumption of goods. Political order refers to the exercise of power and authority. The cultural order largely includes the configuration of symbols and their meanings. To begin with, let us understand how religious ideas can mould the economic system — changing or stabilizing it as a result.

14.4.1 Religion and the Economic Order

By now, you would have thoroughly understood Unit 10, and you can anticipate many of those arguments in this subsection. Broadly speaking, we can draw insights from Max Weber (1864-1920) to demonstrate that religious ideas can change the economic order. On the other hand, if we carefully understand Karl Marx (1864-1883), it is possible to argue that religion can stabilize an exploitative, miserable economic order. That is to say that the role of religion in society, of which it is an important subsystem, is capable of great harmony and integration; but it can also be a major factor in creating conflict as in fundamentalism.

1) **Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism : Max Weber on Religion**

In the eyes of Max Weber, religious ideas can act as powerful force in determining the course of the economic order. Through his *'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'* (1958, 1905), Max Weber proposed the thesis that various Protestant sects that emerged during the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, aided through their doctrines, the emergence of modern rational capitalism. Max Weber's thesis was part of a larger intellectual debate among scholars, regarding the role of ideal and material factors in historical development.

The doctrines of the Protestant sects, in particular Calvinism, created new attitudes toward work, money and pleasure. These new doctrines marked a significant departure from what has been hitherto preached by the Catholic Church. These doctrines were accepted by the emerging classes in Europe, after the break-down of feudal order, which combined hard work with asceticism. In other words, believers of these Protestant doctrines worked hard but restrained themselves from material pleasures and luxury. This resulted in the accumulation of wealth (capital), which spurred the growth of rational industrial capitalism.

The doctrines of 'calling' and 'Predestination' are the twin ideas, which left a tremendous impact on the believers. According to the doctrine of Predestination, preached by Calvin, God has already chosen some human beings and angels into everlasting life, for his own glory and in his own interests. Those who are not selected are predestined to everlasting death. The most significant aspect of this doctrine is that human beings cannot know the will of God. 'Am I one of the elect?' 'Am I one among the God's predestined invisible church?' 'Am I one among those

chosen by God for Heaven?' may be questions which haunt the believers. But there is no answer for them. On the contrary, believers have to trust in God that they are one amongst the 'chosen' or the 'elect'. To attain this trust, intense wordly activity was recommended as the most suitable means.

A Calvinist has to prove his faith through wordly activity. He has to understand himself as a tool of divine will, and has to indulge in wordly activity for the greater glory of God. The concept of 'calling' elevated wordly activity to a highest form of moral activity which can be attained by any individual. 'Time is money' and 'Credit is money', are the twin cliches which capture the spirit of those times aptly. 'Time is money' implies that waste of time is sinful and to the same time earning money is a sign of God's grace. For a puritan, who earned money but abstained from luxury and pleasure, generating wealth was an end in itself. Prosperity was an end in itself and it was sign of God's grace. It is clear that doctrine of Calvin created a situation where abstemious values and norms meant that there was a great saving of wealth which was put back into the work. This resulted in a tremendous economic boost to the society concerned and made Calvinism a set of beliefs which were very positive towards economic growth.

Thus certain doctrines of Protestant sects changed the attitude of believers towards work, money and pleasure which in turn led to the accumulation of capital, necessary for the emergence of rational industrial capitalism. Whereas Max Weber viewed religious ethic of the Protestant sects as having aided the spirit of capitalism, Karl Marx argues that religion is an ideology of the ruling elite.

2) Religion is an illusion : Marx on Religion

Marx developed his understanding of religion mainly from Prussia. In Prussia, the state defended the Protestant Christian religion. Protestant Christian religion, in that context, acted as an ideology for the new class which arose at the break-up of feudalism in Europe. Since Protestantism helped the growth of capitalism, the State of Prussia supported it.

Marx also argued that religion is an illusion which **veils the real exploitative conditions in society.** At the same time, religion is a mode of protest, albeit a misdirected protest, adopted by those who are oppressed and exploited. To add further, religion is a form of alienation, characteristic of the capitalist society. Religion is a direct outcome of the exploitative conditions in society, and hence religion can be discarded only by changing the exploitative social condition (i.e. capitalism) which gives rise to the need for religion.

Thus for Karl Marx, religion is an illusion, a form of alienation and misdirected protest. Religion stabilizes, the social order, by veiling the exploitation and misery of the capitalist economic order.

14.4.2 Religion and the Political Order

Religion can change the political order as well as preserve it. Assuming that political order includes the mode of exercise of power and authority, various categories like the State, Nation and Sovereignty creep into our analysis. Every religion has a political idea, a sense of community; a mode of power and authority; a particular understanding of sovereignty. In other words, 'Kingdom of God' and 'Darul Islam' are political ideas. Every religion has a specific conception of politics, whose interpretation may change from time to time, no matter whether this conception is actualised in reality or not. In this sense, **there cannot be a strict separation of religion from politics** for religion at times has to be this wordly as well. (See Unit 11 — Religion and Politics/State for a discussion on this).

As you are aware, in the Hindu caste system, Kshatriya is the ruler and his dharma is to protect and conserve the social order. The Brahmin has to uphold the system of knowledge, and values. At a theoretical level, one finds a clear separation of spirituality and power, and power being subordinated to spirituality. But at the level of practice, this is a questionable postulate. In fact, the tension between spirituality and power, State and the religion, can be presented as a universal dilemma. During the medieval ages in Europe (8th to 15th century), many kings (and by implication, their kingdoms) clearly remained subordinated to the authority of the Pope (who is the spiritual head of the Roman Catholic Church). The situation changed in Europe, after the Reformation, and rulers became the head of their respective national churches. For example, Queen of England is the head of the Protestant Anglican Church of England.

The many fundamentalist and revivalist movements which are arising all over the world are also defining their own idea of a political state. The fundamentalist and revivalist are reinterpreters of religion. They go back to, what they consider to be pure, original code of religious behaviour, which involves a total world-view. With the intention of restoring these authentic values the fundamentalists ignore all other values.

Islam, for example, is particularly clear about the conduct of the Muslim community. The universe of a Muslim is circumscribed by his or her religion, where politics and religion are inseparable. The resurgence of Islam in recent decades witnesses this linkage.

In our next unit on fundamentalism, we have discussed the various socio-political and historical reasons which has given rise to Islamic resurgence.

Most often, it is the oppressed communities which use religion as a tool to change the political order. The oppression of Jews, and the consequent diaspora does not prevent them from considering themselves as a nation — Israel. This incipient nationalism of Jews, has its basis in the Bible. Israel has a specific identity, which can be traced to the Bible. And in India, many scholars opine that, Gandhi effectively used Hindu symbols of self-sufficient, autonomous ideal-village communities as Ram Rajya. Numerous tribal uprisings and revolts against the colonial rule, has an explicit religious tinge. For instance, Birsa Munda who led a movement against the exploitation of Mundas by outsiders, began by saying that he has obtained a 'revelation' from God. He claimed himself to be a God (Dharti Aba, means 'father of the world') and tried to perform miracles.

Box 2

Here is an example where religion involves itself with politics to bring about social justice.

Christianity has long addressed the suffering of the oppressed people of the world. Through a belief in a better like to come for the faithful. However a number of religious leaders in Latin America, in a radical move, are emphasising on social justice. This movement in Christianity is called liberation theology. Liberation theology developed in the late 1960s within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. In simple terms, liberation theology believes that the church has responsibility to help people liberate themselves from poverty.

The movement is based on three general principles which are:

1) Human suffering exists in the world on a scale that is barely imaginable by

secure and the rich. Liberation theology is based, first of all, on the recognition of this reality of human suffering.

2) Human suffering on such a mass scale is inconsistent with Christian moral principles that there be equality.

3) Liberation theology asserts that as an expression of faith and conscience, Christians must act to relieve this suffering which entails political action and practical strategies.

Thus a growing number of liberation theologists have allied themselves with the poor in a political struggle against the ruling class in whose hands the wealth is concentrated.

Liberation theology has been strongly resisted by the rich ruling class as well as the Roman Catholic Church. Many liberation theologists have been killed in the widespread violence that engulfed Latin America. The Roman Catholic Church has strongly opposed the mixing of religion and politics. The Roman Catholic authority believes that liberation theology diverts the attention from other wordly concerns of Christianity to get involved in political controversy. Nonetheless, the liberation theology movement continues to grow in Latin America with the firm belief that both Christian faith and a sense of human justice demand efforts to change the plight of world's poor. (Taken from J.J. Macionis, *Sociology*, Prentice Hall : New Jersey, 1987).

Religion can stabilize the power structure and at the same time, it can be used to change the power structure also. So far this has been elaborated vividly. However, understanding certain limitations of the relationship between religion and political order is imperative. For instance, in the case of religions spread over the world, there could be differences between the various local/national religious communities on specific political issues. In other words, you should desist from understanding religions as a monolith, since contingent upon various local factors, religions may differ in their relationship to the power structure.

The Universal Roman Catholic Church stabilizes the power structure everywhere almost, by weaving a network of relationships with other secular spheres. But in Latin American countries, the Catholic Church is radical enough to join hands with the oppressed sections of the society to wage a war against the exploitative local power structures. This radicalism has been the offshoot of a particular modern interpretation of Christian doctrines, known as the liberation theology. In a somewhat similar vein, upon observing closely you will find that Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia supports the process of modernization, whereas Islam in Iran is conservative and backward looking upon comparison.

14.4.3 Religion and the Cultural Order

Assuming that cultural order is an intermesh of symbols which are potent with meaning, it emerges that religion might change the meaning of symbols, and thus the cultural order. As you are aware, religion is something eminently social, in the eyes of Durkheim (1965 (1912). Religious representations are collective representations, and they express collective realities. Totem, which is an object of worship and veneration is an emblem. The totem symbolizes the tribe. In the case of the Arundas of Australia, whom Durkheim selected for analysis, the 'Churinga' is the symbol of a clan. Rituals arise from the 'Collective effervescence' generated by the society. Moreover, religion supplies the categories, classifications required to understand the world. Rituals maintain the solidarity of the group. From the discussions of Durkheim, it broadly emerges that religion is strongly related to the social structure.

Now the interpretation is that, whenever there is change in social structure, there could be a corresponding change in religion and vice-versa. To be more specific, religious symbols could be acquiring new meanings when there is a change in the social structure. Also it is possible that, when religion undergoes rapid change, the non-religious symbols like kinship can acquire a new meaning. For instance, when a simple society is under the onslaught of a colonial power which incidentally is also of a different religion, it happens that the whole simple society re-order its myths, symbols, rituals, beliefs and world view. Let us understand this example: During the year 1810, in Mexico, there arose a revolt of local people against Spanish Overlordship. During this revolt, a particular religious symbol, Our Lady of Gudalupe, acquired meaning from pre-Columbian religious sources, especially from the Aztec mother of the Gods Tonantzin as well as from the Mother of God in Catholic Christian theology and folk practice.

Religious symbols evoke powerful and deep sentiments and everlasting moods. Even then, due to social change, one dominant symbol may acquire different meanings in various socio-historical, socio-political, social-structural contexts. The Eastern Orthodox empty cross stresses on the doctrine of Christ risen, the Catholic Crucifix (with its corpus) emphasizes Christ's humanity and sacrifice, while the Protestant empty Cross implicitly denies the continuing sacrificial character of the Eucharist. Religious symbols are most often manipulated, to facilitate mobilization of a collectivity, around a cause. For instance, when there is an upsurge militant Hinduism, the elephant-headed, auspicious God of the Hindu Pantheon Lord Ganesh is represented as holding trishuls, spears and swords. When there is social change, we find a corresponding change in the representation of religious symbols, and the interpretation of their meaning. Moreover, protest groups may appropriate the symbols and impute new meanings to them. During the Veerasaiva movement, which came to contest the subordination of non-Brahmins to Brahmins in the Hindu social order. 'Linga' becomes a symbol of protest. Every Veerasaivite was supposed to wear the Linga on his body, in order to claim purity equivalent to that of a Brahmin.

The term cultural order, includes our mental classifications (e.g. 'good' and the 'bad'/'evil'), our understanding of time, spare and personality. It becomes evident that, when there is a change in religion, one's idea of 'good' and 'evil', time, space and personality may undergo corresponding alteration. And the reverse is also true. When there is a change in our understanding of good and evil, time, space, and personality due to various forces including media, education etc., there is every likelihood that our attitude towards religion also might change.

Activity 2

Collect newspaper clippings on Buddhism in Japan and Sri Lanka; Islam in Algeria and Malaysia. Draw comparisons, to understand the impact of religion on social order, especially politics.

Check Your Progress 2

i)   How does religion stabilize the economic order, i.e. capitalism, according to Karl Marx? Use five lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

....

ii) Do religious symbols change their meaning owing to social change? Illustrate your answer with an example. Use five lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

....

iii) Match the following :

A. Karl Marx	a. Cognitive function of religion
B. Max Weber	b. Religion stabilizes the economic order
C. Durkheim	c. Religious ideas can change the economic order
D. Liberation Theology	d. Manipulation of religious symbols for political ends
E. Militant Hinduism	e. Religion can change the power structure

14.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, the relationship between religion and the social order was explained. Religion can change the social order or stabilize the social order. This is possible because of the cognitive and intellectual functions of religion. Many of our concepts, which we use to understand the everyday world around us flow from religion. Apart from stability, and change, continuity is yet another possibility. By continuity, adaptation of old principle to new situation is implied. Factors which influence the outcome of the interaction between religion and social order were listed in 14.2.3.

In section 14.3, it was pointed out that, sect which is a protest movement emerging from the parent religion, can change the social order. In this sense, a sect emerges out of an interaction between religion and social order. A sect essentially represents a protest against the dogmas, rituals of the parent religion and hence an urge for change. The twelfth century Veerasaiva movement, which emerged as a sectarian movement within Hinduism, challenged the Brahminical Hindu order and advocated an egalitarian social order.

Section 14.4, establishes that religion can change or stabilize the economic, political and cultural order. Protestant ethic of 16th and 17th centuries gave an impetus for spurt in modern rational industrial capitalism; religion, being a misdirected protest, stabilizes the social order by veiling the misery and exploitation. By veiling the exploitation, religion prevents conflict between the exploiters and the exploited. This is an argument from Marx. Religion can change the power structure or justify the existing mode of exercise of power. As far as cultural order is concerned, religious symbols may undergo a change in meaning in tune with social change, Religion may resist when there is an onslaught on people's understanding of time, space, good, evil and person.

14.6 KEY WORDS

Social Order : (i) Arrangement of institutions in the society, (ii) Arrangement of roles and statuses, (iii) A smooth, self-regulated, balanced, well-coordinated functioning of this 'structure'.

Cultural Order : A mesh of meaningful symbols.

Economic Order : A set of dynamic, co-ordinated institutions involved in production, distribution and consumption of goods.

Cognitive Functions : Religion's capacity to generate classifications, and concepts which human beings use in everyday understanding of the world.

Intellectualist Function : The propensity of religion to explain natural events like rain, famine, birth, death, menstruation etc.

14.7 FURTHER READINGS

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

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

14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

i) Religion can change the social order or stabilize it. This is because religion explains the natural processes like birth, death, menstruation, climate, rain and also supplies the concepts and categories to understand the world. Religion can justify misery, exploitation and oppression or it can be used to mobilize people against them.

ii) Veerasaivism is a fine example, to illustrate that religion can change the social order. this 12th century movement, arose in protest against the Brahminical Hindu social order. This movement preached equality, fought against untouchability, and disseminated a positive attitude towards work.

iii) a) continuity

b) misery and inequalities

c) protest

d) change

Check Your Progress 2

i) According to Karl Marx, religion is a protest against exploitation and misery characteristic of the capitalist economic order, but it is a misdirected protest. Religion is a form of alienation, which also veils the misery and exploitation of the capitalist economic order. By veiling the exploitation and misdirecting protest, religion prevents conflict between the exploiter and the exploited. In this sense, religion stabilizes the social order.

ii) Yes, meaning of religious symbols undergo change in tune with the social change. Especially this is the case, in political mobilization. For instance, when a militant interpretation of Hinduism comes to vogue, the auspicious Lord Ganesh of the Hindu Pantheon is given Spears, Trishuls and Swords in his hands.

iii) A) (b)

B) (c)

C) (a)

D) (e)

E) (d)

UNIT 15 FUNDAMENTALISM : SOME CASE STUDIES

Structure

15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to

- understand how fundamentalist ideas emanate and for what reasons

- analyse similar situations where fundamentalism is said to exist

- distinguish between fundamentalism in Iran and America.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have studied 'Religion' : Social Stability and Change'. In this unit we want you to familiarize yourself with the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism by presenting two case studies. Our unit is divided into two main sections, of which one section is devoted to the rise of fundamentalism in Iran. We begin our discussion on this, by first giving you a background picture of the politico-economic condition of Iran, prior to the establishment of an Islamic state. This we hope will make you understand the reasons or the conditions in which Islamic resurgence has taken place. This will also give you an idea of the nature of fundamentalism. The second section in our unit deals with rightist religious movements in America which call to attention the fundamental or essential ideas of nation and its people. The nature of fundamentalism in America is quite different — there is no religious state in — America, yet the rightist religious ideals seemed to permeate the American political system and life.

By presenting these two case studies we want you to understand some of the social conditions which seemed to usher in fundamentalistic upsurges.

15.2 WHAT IS FUNDAMENTALISM

The very mention of the word 'fundamentalism' conjures up an image which came to characterise an especially militant brand of anti-modernism, anti-liberalism and anti-secularism.

Fundamentalism or revivalism is an effort by religious interpreters who like to go back to, what they believe to be, pure and original values and behaviour.

The forces of social change are important for the emergence of fundamentalism. Whenever there are drastic changes in society and change of pace which disturbs community life, very often there is a loss of identity and rootlessness among people. In such situations people clutch any support for solace. Fundamentalism promises certitude and restitution of an earlier better age. The psychological appeal of this is difficult for people to resist.

To achieve and restitute this earlier, better age the fundamentalist evolve a comprehensive and absolutist, rigid belief system and practice. This belief and practice which promises to bring happiness is capable of motivating intense commitment among its followers. So much so, non-believers are denied their rights. That is why fundamentalism very often takes on a rather aggressive, militant form where killing and terrorism are justified, since the end—usually the establishment of homeland (Israel, Khalistan are examples) justifies the means.

Box 1

George Marsden in a comprehensive study entitled **Fundamentalism and American Culture : The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelcalism : 1870-1925,** explored the earliest use of the term fundamentalism.

He found that the term fundamentalist and fundamentalism came from the name for a series of books published which sought to bring out the fundamentals of Christian faith. These works constituted an attack upon science, especially evolutionism, liberal philosophy and liberal theology even. These they felt were destroying the 'Popular American Culture' which they described as the 'faith once delivered to the Saints'. The effort of these fundamentalists was to bring up the American Culture.

The **fundamentals**, in short, were a series of 12 paperback books published between 1910-1915 which were financed by a wealthy believer. They were edited by popular evangelists and teachers whose intentions were to mark down those basic 'truth' which constituted the foundations of faith. Some three million copies were distributed. While this distribution failed to bring serious public response, the books coined the term fundamentalist/fundamentalism for the analysis of various religious revival movements. (Frykenberg, 1988 : 21-22).

15.3 FUNDAMENTALISM IN IRAN

This section deals with fundamentalism in Iran. As you are probably aware, in 1979, the king or Shah of Iran was deposed and made to flee the land. In his place, an Islamic leadership, headed by Ayotollah Khomeini assumed the reigns of power.

The event stunned the world. One of the strongest monarchies which had extensive foreign backing had been overthrown by a group of clerics. Many anticipated total chaos and did not expect Islamic rule to last more than a few days. But it lasted. What were the factors that brought religion to the political centre-stage? Was Islamic fundamentalism in Iran a running away from modernity? Was it a return to medieval days? Could it become a creative force?

These are some of the issues which we will tackle. We will see how the recent history of Iran has been one of foreign domination and ruthless local leadership. We will see how development occurred in a very distorted form. And we will now see how religion has played a crucial role in social process.

15.3.1- The Monarchy in Iran

The history of Iran's Monarchy dates back 2,500 years. It came to an end with the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty on 17th February, 1979.

We will speak of three dynasties because of their relevance to the political context.

i) The Acheminds dynasty ruled pre-Islamic Iran. Two of its rulers, Cyrus (553-521 B.C.) and Darius (521-496 B.C.) had dreamed of extending their empire from North India to Greece. The dream was shattered when Alexander destroyed the Persian empire in 321 B.C. The Pahlavi kings were deeply inspired by the glories of pre-Islamic Persian civilization.

ii) The Safavid dynasty (550-1779) ruled medieval Iran. Islam had come into prominence. The Safavids made Shiism the state religion and purged the leadership of Sunnis who were identified with the Ottoman Empire. The Shia-Sunni tensions were exploited by both, Safavids and Ottomans to enhance their political power, creating hatred between the two peoples.

To control the Islamic religious establishment, the Safavids claimed descent from Prophet Muhammad's family, and tried to take over both, religious as well as political leadership. The Pahlavis were to continue the Safavid play of keeping Islam as the state religion, yet curtailing its power.

iii) The Qajar dynasty (1795-1924) comprised incompetent leaders, who murdered their political rivals at will. They were heavily dependent upon foreign powers who gave them loans at exorbitant interest rates and consolidated their own interests in Iran.

iv) The Pahlavi dynasty had no aristocratic roots. Its founder, Reza Khan, an army colonel, deposed the government in 1923 and then, the Qajar Shah, and established himself as the new monarch of Iran in 1925.

Inspired by the Acheminds, he named his dynasty 'Pahlavi', an ancient Persian name. In line with the Safavids, he retained Islam as the state religion, and tried at the same time to check its powers. Following the Qajars, the Pahlavis made Iran more dependent on foreign powers than it had ever been before.

15.3.2   The Impact of the West

The discovery of oil in Iran, as in the rest of West Asia attracted the economic interests of foreign powers. Russia and England were the main powers that struggled for economic and political supremacy in Iran. It was during World War I that the British Navy switched from using coal to oil and the British began to look for strategies to exploit the Iranian resource.

Even though Iran's oil production increased at a considerable pace, Iranis themselves could not benefit from it. Despite mass unemployment, oil workers were not hired from Iran but indentured labour was imported from India by Britain. British staff were appointed in all key posts in the oil industry, and all their requirement (clothing, food, fruit, cement etc.) was imported from Britain rather than purchased from Iranian merchants. This lead to considerable resentment towards foreigners in Iran.

The British, to protect their interests, backed Colonal Reza Khan and helped install him as monarch. After World War II, the Americans gained a foothold in Iran. Their need for oil was even greater than that of Britain. Together, England, America, the oil companies and the Pahlavis cooperated and struck up an agreement which on paper, gave ownership of the oil industry to Iran, but in practice, gave full control

of the industry to foreign powers. Production, pricing and marketing were all in foreign hands. Iran, as a whole, suffered, both politically and economically. A consequence of the interference of foreign powers was that feelings of nationalism developed in all segments of society. Iranians had experienced nothing but exploitation and loss of autonomy at the hands of foreign powers.

Interaction with Western countries also ushered in ideas of secularisation or separation of religion from politics, leading to the establishment of various institutes of learning, like the Institute of Arts and Science (Dar-al-Fanun) in 1851. English and French classics were translated into Persian and its ideals were preached by leading intellectuals.

Pahlavi rule made strenous attempts at westernisation and modernisation of the country. Western dress, the use of French and English, Western education were stressed. Reza Khan attempted to delink the political system from religious influence by means of educational and legal reforms. The 'maktab' (mosque school) and 'madrassa' (religious school) were brought under the centralised control of the state. This was a drastic break down from Islamic tradition. The 'Shariat' or religious laws were replaced by a new code of laws based on the French Civil Code.

During Muhammad Raza's reign, an American firm was employed to review the existing educational system.

The net result of the Pahlavi rule, however, was the creation of two diametrically opposed classes; the educated, secularized elite, on the one hand, and the mass of impoverished faithful Muslims, who had more faith in the village mullah than in the western-educated young men.

Its indigenous genius, traditions and life-style had been side-lined. Muhammad Shah Pahlavi, in particular, tried to force the process of modernisation from the top downwards. These policies and were elite-oriented. He had succeeded in alienating the majority of the population, who were ripe for an alternative system which was closer to their heritage and values. The Islamic revival provided this alternative.

15.3.3 The Resurgence of Islam in Iran

According to Bernard Lewis, if we are to understand anything at all about what happened and what is happening in the Muslim world, we must grasp two basic points. The first is the universality of religion as a factor in the lives of the Muslim peoples, and the second is the centrality of their religion.

Lewis points out that unlike Judiasm and Christianity which eventually became separate from the state, Islam, from the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, was synonymous with the state. The history, experience and sacred writings of Islam bring out this point. Muhammad was not just a Prophet; he was a soldier and a statesman, and his followers were sustained by the belief that they could win God's approval by establishing his divine law all over the world.

For the Muslim's religion was not only universal but also central, in the sense that it formed the basis and focus of identity and loyalty. In Iran, as we have seen, the monarchy tried to subvert Islam because of its importance in the lives of its people, and because the clergy would always resist any measure which they felt would violate the divine laws.

It is against this background that we can comprehend the overthrow of Muhammad Reza Shah in 1979. As we have noted, the Shah had succeeded in completely alienating the masses. During his reign, the mosque had remained the only refuge

of political dissent, and the religious network was the only organisation of the people could turn to. The closeness of the 'mullahs' to the common people had made them well aware of the anger and frustration building up against the Shah. It was at this critical juncture that leadership was provided by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1900-1989). Khomeini had over the years spoken out against the policies and activities of the Shah. Here is an extract from a speech in 1964:

"How do you expect to modernize Iran when you imprison and kill the intelligents? You want to turn Iranians into docile and passive instruments in the service of the state and your foreign masters."

15.3.4 A Return to Islamic Roots

Strongly embedded in Islam is the notion of social justice (adalah). The vast disparities of wealth that existed in Shah's Iran were totally contradictory to the Islamic maxim of communal sharing of basic resources.

When we take into account the corrupt political leadership and distorted economic development that characterised, Iran, we can understand why Islam came to be viewed as an alternative that could bring about socio-economic justice.

To dismiss Islamic fundamentalism as an escape from modernism would be too simplistic. On the contrary, some Muslims see Islam as a means of bringing meaningful socio-political change based on social justice. On the other hand, some Muslims also invoke Islam to block changes. The challenge for Iran and other Muslim nations lies in achieving a balance; to return to those fundamental religious values conducive to the welfare of society rather than those that obstruct it.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Fill in the blanks

   a) Cyrus was a famous ruler of the .... dynasty.

   b) .... was overthrown in the year 1979.

   c) Strongly embedded in Islam is the notion of 'adalah' or ....

ii) Answer briefly

   a) Describe the impact of the discovery of Oil in Iran. Use five lines for your answer.

   ....

   ....

   ....

   ....

   ....

   b) How did the western idea of secularisation affect Iranian society? Use five lines for your answer.

   ....

   ....

   ....

   ....

   ....

15.4 PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE U.S.A.

In the earlier section, we studied the upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism in a society which had been polarised by elitist socio-economic policies, and exploited for its oil-wealth by a lot of foreign powers. The Islamic revolution received mass support in day-to-day life and religion. We saw how the notions of universality and centrality of Islam made the establishment of an Islamic state possible. We noted the identity of religion and government throughout Islamic history.

In this section we will study the intimate relationship between the American political life and religious values and the underlying fundamentalistic ideals which exist in the American democracy. To have a better understanding of this we will first describe the background of American history. Then we will go on to the 'religious right' movement which shows how the fundamentalistic religious values have, in many ways, permeated the general life and the political life of America.

15.4.1 The Historical Background

Christianity has had an ambiguous relationship with the State. In its early years, its followers were persecuted. Even after it established itself as the majority religion of Europe, its identity with governance was never absolute. In fact, the separation of the Church and State is a characteristic feature of European history.

The emergence of Protestantism in the 16th century challenged the Christian orthodoxy. The Protestant sects which sprang up asked questions about the enormous store of wealth the Church had accumulated. It signalled a return to the Holy Book, the Bible, and undermined the role of the clergy. Most Protestant sects advocated a one-to-one relationship between God and the follower without the help of intermediaries. Large numbers of Protestants left the shores of Britain and settled down in the American colonies, where they could peacefully practise their faith. In the course of time, America liberated itself from British rule, and the United States of America was born.

The U.S.A., over the past two centuries, has become a melting-pot of religions and cultures. People from all over the world, in search of a better livelihood or victims of religious and/or ethnic persecution have made the U.S.A. their home.

You are well aware that the U.S.A. became a "super-power" after World War II. It is immensely rich in natural resources, technology and trained manpower. Its citizens enjoy a high standard of living. Religion in the U.S.A. has by and large been conducted or practised at the private level. Being a land of so many peoples and cultures, religious pluralism has been a part of the American ethos.

Box 2

An interesting feature of religious life in America has been the high degree of religious mobility, or access to wide range of sects and denominations. It is not unusual to find members of the same family being affiliated to different Churches or denominations. For example, mother may be Baptist, father may be Pentecostal, the son could be a Buddhist and the daughter may renounce religion altogether.

It must be noted that there have been certain communities like the Amish and the Mormons to whom religion has formed the basis of community life. They have zealously guarded their values and life-styles and have avoided and resisted outside influences which could undermine their way of life.

Knowing this background, you will probably find it difficult to understand in the late

1970's, a right-wing, conservative religious movement emerged in the U.S.A. Its spokesmen were certain Protestant evangelists or preachers who broadcast their message on television and radio. They succeeded in capturing the imagination of millions of Americans, who donated large sums of money to their cause. Soon, these evangelists owned and controlled television channels, publishing houses, schools and centres of higher learning. Their control and use of the mass media earned their brand of evangelism the title "television evangelism". We will now study the content of this brand of evangelism.

15.4.2 The "New Religious Right" Movement

In his study of the recent conservative Protestant fundamentalists movement in America, Walter Capps (1990) highlights its main features.

i) The New Religious Right gained national attention by speaking of the relation between individual piety and national patriotism. It compared the tenets of the Bible to the ideals of a democratic society. It visualised America as a "Christian nation" and tried to combine religious values and political commitment. This is what cast it as a conservative version of American civil religion.

ii) Because of its conviction that religion and patriotism go hand in hand, it rejected liberal or progressive ideas which tended to keep religion in the private sphere, away from public life. The conservative religious leaders felt that liberalism was weak, ineffective and had sapped the nation of its vitality without religious conviction. American society could not hope to be revitalised.

iii) It emphasised patriarchal values. The movement gained significance at the very time that the patriarchal ordering of American society was being challenged. Attitudes toward the roles of men and women were changing as were family patterns. Single-parent families, couples living together without marriage, homosexual unions, were very much a part of the social scenario. Most of the teaching of the movement dealt with the sanctity of traditional family values. Abortion, feminism, homosexuality, pornography, were all seen to undermine national values and mobility.

iv) One of the slogans of the movement was to "bring America back again". In this connection, Clifford Geertz's definition of the social functions of religion becomes significant. Geertz speaks of the many and complex ways in which religious motivations and aspirations work to create cohesion and synthesis within a society. The New Religious Right deliberatively and consciously speaks of a happier, bygone era when social cohesiveness is believed to have existed, an era when shared religious and patriotic ideals were one and the same.

The sermons of the New Religious Right frequently take the form of denouncing or condemining all those forces which upset or destroyed the unity and cohesiveness of American society. Such anxiety, they preach, can only be brought back when religion once more becomes a vital force in public life.

v) The New Religious Right opposes some aspects of modernity. The new, conservative religious movement is aware that the secularising tendency in American society was pushing religion into the private sphere. According to these conservatives, the sacred values of American citizens were being undermined by the forces of modernity. American society has become a "permissive" society, it has deviated from what God intended it to be.

vi) Earlier manifestations of American religious conservation and extreme right wing groups tended to be marginal. They preferred to adopt an anti-intellectual and a political stance. They felt themselves to be outside of the national mainstream and

preferred to stay that way. In sharp contrast, the New Religious Right has tried to become part of the national mainstream. It wanted to be taken with intellectual seriousness. Ferry Falwell, one of its most influential preachers, established a college called Liberty University, which he boasts, ranks alongside the best colleges in America.

vii) In addition, the New Religious Right is openly and calculatedly politically minded. It had the political patronage of the Ronald Reagan administration, and it was grooming a candidate for a future presidential election. Its political ambitions were rooted in the belief that religion was needed to revitalise society, that religiousity and patriotism were one and that America must be purged of permissiveness and take up its place as God's special country.

viii) As has been mentioned earlier, the New Religious Right owes its widespread reach and influence to the mass media of communication. It is significant that its important leaders like Ferry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Fim and Tamacy Bakker are skilled television communicators first. As President Ronald Reagan who was described as "the great communicator" utilised television to communicate his most important messages, the New Religious Right used television as the primary medium through which it transmitted its ideological messages. It has moved into the nation's living rooms, where its emphasis on family values found an echo in the hearts of viewers.

The advocates of the New Religious Right have adopted a specific religious worldview which they communicate through images and stores from the Bible. The Bible is considered to be the source of absolute truth. This tendency promotes intolerance of other World views. Threatening conspiracies against the dictates of the Bible and the American way of life are identified and condemned. The ingredients of the world are arranged as polar opposites: something is either good or evil, represents light or darkness, embodies truth or error. There is no middle ground.

The United States is identified as God's chosen land, and American God's chosen people. This way of reading the Bible becomes a basis for contemporary political commentary. Dinstinctive attitudes towards national and international events are culled from the Bible. The movement thus positioned itself close to the centre of national political life.

ix) The movement undermines the heterogeneity of American culture and stresses homogeneity. As earlier discussed, American culture has been fed by many and diverse ethnic and religious streams. Heterogeneity encourages a multiplicity of beliefs and ethical standards. The conservative movement, though, argues for absolutes. It cites the Protestant Christian way of life as the only one compatible with American democracy. Instead of celebrating the variety of religious experiences that are available to humans, the movement preaches correct teaching, correct values, and a distinctly Protestant life-style. It sees outside influences as threatening to the exclusive American way of life.

These, briefly, are the salient features of the new brand of conservative Protestant fundamentalism that spread all over America in the late 1970s and 1980s.

You have already studied Robert Bellah's ideas regarding "civil religion". In his article "Civil Religion in America", Bellah claimed that "there actually exists alongside, differentiated from the Churches, an elaborate and wll-institutionalised civil religion in America". He referred to it as "the religion of the American way of life". He dismissed fundamentalism as irrelevant in the context of what he described. But, according to Capps, the religion of the New Religious Right has attempted to attain the status of a civil religion, by identifying its values with those of American life and democracy.

At the start of this section, we described how secularisation had permeated almost every aspect of American society. The growth of the movement paradoxically occured in an era identified as "the secular age".

This exemplifies the fact that secularisation cannot do away with the religious underpinnings of life. Reichley in his book *"Religion in American Public Life"* (1985) maintained that religious values are indispensable for the vitality of American democracy and the American way of life.

Check Your Progress 2

i)   What do we mean by religious mobility in the U.S.A.? Use five lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

....

ii) How did the New Religious Right equate piety with patriotism? Use five lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

....

iii) What did the New Religious Right mean by the slogan "bring America back again"? Use five lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

....

15.5   LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed fundamentalism. The word fundamentalism in literal terms means the belief in the original or essential truth of the religion, as it emerged and as it seems to exist in Iran and America. Iran is often cited as an example of Islamic resurgence against western modernism. America on the other hand is difficult to label as being any way close to the fundamentalistic state.

In this unit we have tried to show the background in which Islamic fundamentalism arose. The case of Iran shows that going back to the roots, in this case religious roots, is often out of a sense of alienation and rootlessness. Modernity brought in not only economic depravity in Iraninan society but a social, psychological and moral depravity, so the call for fundamentalist state had an appeal for the mass.

The rightist religious movement in America is also hinged on a similar sense of rootlessness. This feeling of insecurity is very often exploited by the advocates of fundamentalistic ideals, whether it be in Iran or America.

15.6 KEY WORDS

Clergy : Holders of appointed office of the religious order. They are learned and knowledgeable.

Cohesion : A sense of unity which brings people together.

Conservative : An attitude which is averse to change and innovation.

Liberal : Broad-minded, not bound by traditions.

Monarchy : A government where there is a single hereditary head of the state and who has absolute power.

Nationalism : A belief and propagation of ideas where there is striving for unity of a nation or of national interest.

Ortodoxy : Belief in established doctrines or opinions.

Protestantism : The new religion which emerged in 1529 as a protest against the Roman Catholism. It believed in the immediate link between God and man without the aid of Popes and Saints.

Secularisation : A process in which the religion is separated from political and civil life.

Universality : A state where all the people without exception are affected.

15.7 FURTHER READINGS

Capps, Walter H. (1990). *The New Religious Right*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, S. Carolina.

Curtis, Michael (1981) *Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado.

Hussain, Asat (1985) *Islamic Iran — Revolution & Counter Revolution*. London : Frances Printer Ltd.

15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i)   Fill in the blanks.

a) Cyrus was a famous ruler of the **Acheminds** dynasty.

b) **Muhammad Reza Shah** was overthrown in the year 1979.

c) Strongly embedded in Islam is the notion of 'adalah' or **Social Justice.**

ii) a) The discovery of oil in Iran attracted the interest of foreign powers. Russia and England were the main powers that struggled for economic and political supremacy in Iran. Even though Iran's oil production increased considerably

Iranians themselves could not benefit from it. Despite unemployment oil workers were not hired from Iran but imported from outside. All the key posts were in the hands of British. Later, Americans also moved into the picture. Together, England, America, the oil companies and Pahlavis Co-operated and struck up an agreement which, on paper, gave ownership of the oil industry to Iran, but in practice, gave full control of the industry to foreign powers. Production, pricing and marketing were all in foreign hands. Iran, as a whole, suffered both politically and economically.

b) Interaction with western countries also ushered in ideas of secularisation — separation of religion from politics, leading to the establishment of various institutes of learning life the institute of Arts and Science (Basal-Fanun) in 1851. The ideas of Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesque, Bentham etc. were preached by leading intellectuals. The Pahlavi ruler Reza Khan attempted to delink the political system from religious influence by means of educational and legal reforms. The mosque school and religious school — the 'maktab' and 'madrassa' were brought under the centralised control of the state. The Shariat or religious laws were replaced by a new code of laws based on the French civil code. This was a drastic break from Islamic tradition.

Check Your Progress 2

i) An interesting feature of religious life in America has been the high degree of religious mobility, or access to wide range of sects and denominations. It is not unusual to find members of the same family being affliated to different churches or denominations.

ii) The relationship between individual piety and national patriotism was brought about by comparing the tenets of the Bible to the ideal of a democratic society. It symbolised America as a "Christian Nation" and tried to combine religious values and political commitment.

iii) The New Religious Right deliberately and consciously speaks of a happier, bygone era when social cohesiveness is believed to have existed; an era when shared religious and patriotic ideals were one and the same. The sermons of the New Religious Right frequently take the form of denouncing or condemining all; those factors which upset or destroyed the unity and cohesiveness of American society. One slogan the movement adopted to drive this point was to "bring America back again".

UNIT 16 SECULARISM AND SECULARISATION

Structure

16.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to

● understand the meanings of the terms secularisation and secularism

● discuss the social and historical background in which secularisation emerged as a social phenomena

● analyse the peculiar nature of secularism which is adopted in India

● understand the problems and difficulties in the practice of secularism in India

16.1 INTRODUCTION

In our previous unit we have studied fundamentalism with two examples of it. Islamic resurgence in Iran and the Religious Right Movement of America are two divergent examples. But both of them show that inspite of inroads made by secularisation and the adoption of the secular state, religion has continued to play an important role in the society.

In this unit, we would like to understand the social process of secularisation and the term secularism which emerged from this process.

In our first section we will introduce you to the meaning of the term secularisation and secularism. To be able to understand how these terms came to be we would like to take you to the historical and social background of these processes. We will

also show the nature of secularisation in contemporary society in our next section. Finally we will be discussing the nature of secularism in India. For you to understand the peculiarities and the difficulties thereof, we would appraise you with various historical as well as contemporary dynamics in the practice of secularism.

16.2 SECULARISATION AND SECULARISM

You must have come across the word secularism and secularisation several times. We are sure you must have wondered what exactly they mean.

The terms secularisation and secularism have no definite definitions. They have different meanings depending on various situations and perspectives. We will try and have a look at some of these meanings. First, we will try and understand what secularisation is all about and then we will go on to the term secularisation, which is an outcome of the process of secularisation.

16.2.1 The Term Secularisation

The word secular is derived from the Latin word 'secular', which means the 'present age or generation'. The word secular came to be associated with the social process of secularisation.

Secularisation came into use in Europe, to describe the transfer of territories previously under the control of the church to the dominion of secular authority or the state. The distinction that was already prevalent in Christian conception between the sacred and secular (sacred as all that is supernatural, and secular as all that is mundane) was brought into the fore to assert the superiority of the sacred.

The term, however, was applied in a different way when the concept of secularisation acquired a more general, sociological connotation.

16.2.2 The Sociological Connotation of Secularization

Social thinkers have used the word secularisation to indicate a process whereby the religious institutions and religious conceptions and understanding have lost control in wordly matters — economy, polity, justice, health, family, and so on. Instead, there emerged empirical and rational procedures and conceptions about the world in general.

Describing the process of secularisation, Bryan R. Wilson writes that in secularisation process "the various social institutions gradually become distinct from one another and increasingly free of the matrix of religious assumptions that had earlier informed…inspired and dominated their operation. Prior to this change, social action over a very wide field of human activity and organisation (including work, social and interpersonal relationships, juridical procedures, socialisation, healing) is regulated in accordance with supernaturalist pre-conceptions. The process of structure differentiation in which social institutions (the economy, the polity, morality, justice, education, health, and family) become recognised as distinctive concerns operating with considerable autonomy. It is a process in which conceptions of the supernatural lose their sovieregnty over human affairs, a pattern broadly identified as secularism. Conceptions of the supernatural are gradually displaced from all social institutions except those specifically devoted to this — these are increasingly circumscribed religious institutions" (Wilson 1987 : 159).

The definition of secularisation is greatly bound by the definition of religion. As long as religion is defined in, not so abstract terms and is defined substantively as beliefs, attitudes, activities, institutions and structures pertaining to the supernatural, it is

possible to assess the extent of decline of religious influence. But if we were to define religion in functional terms, as some sociologists have done, as any set of beliefs, ideas and activities that perform indispensable functions to the society it is very difficult to emply the term secularisation, because when we use the term secularisation we are discussing the process that leads to the decline of supernaturally oriented activities and beliefs in all aspects of life. And a distinct separation of various institutions in the society.

We can see the separation of the supernatural belief from secular activities by the way we approach and understand disease for instance. We don't always have a supernatural explanation to understand disease and illness. We have scientific and empirical explanations instead.

These changes have, in fact, affected even religion itself.

16.2.3   Secularisation within Religion

One aspect of secularisation is that religions modify their doctrines and practices in response to the changing needs of their members and in response to changes in society.

For example, in 1976, the Episcopal Church in the United States of America officially allowed women to become priests. And, in England it was only recently that the Church allowed women to become priests, causing much controversy. We can see how the Church responded to the changing situation ande the position of women in society.

Secularisation also influences the content of religious belief and in doing so it leads, many times, to the development of a sect. We have seen in our discussion in unit 10 and 14 how Protestantism grew against the orthodoxy of Roman Catholicism and brought down religion to 'this world'.

Secularisation in religion is usually accompanied by increase in attention to public issues. Secular and profane activities have become as important as the sacred. Thus we find religious institutions getting involved with running of modern hospitals and secular educational institutions or engaging in philanthropic activities. Religion in industrial societies often reflects the pragmatism of our age, and in doing so, is increasingly moving away from the supernatural.

So far we have discussed what the term secularisation meant in its various situations and aspects. We still have not talked about the term secularism.

16.2.4   Secularism as a Value

Secularism was an ideological goal of the new political philosophy and movement after the French Revolution. Still later in 1851 George Jacoab Holyoake coined the term secularism. He declared it as the only rational basis of political and social organisation. Holyoake questioning the religious basis of civil society, recommended secularism as state ideology which promotes human welfare by material means and makes the service of others its duty.

Secularism as a progressive ideology was a necessary qualification for a liberal, democratic state of the post French Revolution. These connotations are applied even to a modern democratic state now. A modern state by its definition and liberal and democratic policy makes no distinction between groups, classes etc. within society, irrespective of religious affiliation. The political philosophy on the part of the state required that the state shall not impose any religion on people and did not prohibit practice of religion by a section of the people.

Thus, with secularism as an ideological goal, the proponents of this ideology consciously denounce religious orthodoxy as the basis for social organisation and advocate civil values.

The development of secularism as an ideology was partly an outcome of the process of secularisation in Europe. And in many modern states it has been adopted as a state policy, without really going through a historical process which was in evidence in Europe at the time of the emergence of the phenomenon of secularism.

Let us go back into history and see how the process of secularism developed.

16.3 THE SECULARISATION PROCESS

In this section we will discuss the process of secularisation which essentially came about as a result of the struggle for supremacy between the church and the state. The social background to this struggle in a way shaped this secularisation process too.

16.3.1 The Struggle between the Sacred and the Secular

Secularisation has occurred throughout history. Though uneven, it was discernible from the very early times. In primitive societies it was often seen that supernaturalist apprehensions and explanations were intermingled with empirical knowledge and rational techniques. Magical means were mixed with pragmatic procedures. Slowly, the process which Max Weber phrased as the 'disenchantment of the world' removed the natural phenomena of their magico-religious meaning as mean acquired more matter-of-fact and empirical and rationalistic orientations.

In fact, some sociologists see the seeds of secularisation in the very development of monotheistic religions, which rationalised and systematised the conceptions of the supernatural. These monotheistic religions like Judaism and Christianity steadily extinguished random magico-religious beliefs and introduced a more universalistic conception of an increasingly transcendental and universal diety. In this process, these monotheistic religions heralded a process of systematisation or rationalisation which is an element of secularisation.

To unravel the complex factors and agencies contributing to the process of secularisation is difficult. In Western history (European history), the dissociation of religion and politics — seen in the separation of the Church and the state implies secularisation. Let us see then, how this separation came about.

16.3.2 The Church and the State

In Europe, from the very early times, the Roman Catholic Church exercised immense power over all aspects of life.

The conversion of Emperor Constantine (306-37 AD) and socially influential classes, gave the Church an immense recognition and opportunity to enter the secular world. Emperor Constantine had established Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire.

Box 1

Constantine ascribed all his successes in war to Christian God. He is said to have had a dream in which God instructed him to paint the first two letters for Christ in Greek on the shields of his soldiers. Constantine did so and consequently won the battle. It is said that he converted to Christianity

after this and made Christianity the state religion. His troops then on had the Christian monogram painted on their shield.

There was also the idea that the Church was not only meant for the salvation of souls for eternity, but also had a mission for this world — to establish a kingdom of God on earth. The clergy were not only involved in other-wordly aspects of life, but were also involved in the secular life.

Later, the theology of St. Augustine and the establishment of the Benedictine order, which recommended 'useful work' sought to establish the Church in its relation with the secular world. As Weber noted, labour became an essential component of the Christian way of life.

The organisation of the Church became increasingly formalised and systematised through the development of canon law and administrative agencies. This development became particularly crucial in the background of a centralised, segmented nature of emerging feudal society. In the face of these tendencies, the Church maintained a fundamental unity.

The organisational unity combined with its involvement with secular aspects of life enabled the Church to have immense influence over the social and political life. In a highly stratified society like medieval Europe where the society was divided into aristocratic haves and the poor, the Church played little role in comdemining this highly stratified order. In fact, the Church was so interwoven with the feudal system that it became a property holder. The clergy became lords of the land with political jurisdiction.

These circumstances gave rise to the question of where and with whom did the authority lie? With the Church or the secular state?

The kings and commoners who were equally tired of the oppressive nature of the church struggled to get rid of the control of the Church and religion from political affairs, as well as affaris of everyday world.

The forces that set themselves in opposition to the Church and its power came to be known as secular. While the struggle against the Church and the process which eventually led to the decline of religious authoritarianism replaced it with a rational and scientific outlook. This has been termed secularisation.

The secularisation of society is not just an outcome of this struggle between the Church and the state, but is related to all other facets of social change.

In our next section, let us look into the social context in which secularisation took place.

Check Your Progress 1

i)   What is the literal meaning of the term secular? Use three lines for your answer.

....

....

....

....

....

ii) Write five lines on the political philosophy after the French Revolution.

....

....

....

iii) Who was the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity? Use four lines for
your answer.

....

....

....

....

16.4 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SECULARISATION PROCESS

In this section, we will be discussing the various facets of social change. At the
time of secularisation in Europe, the society was waking up from the medieval
slumber to whole new areas of change. There was growing rational-empirical
inquiry. There was Reformation in the Church and Renaissance in the arts and
learnin.

16.4.1 Renaissance

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, many people in Europe who could read and
write began to take less notice of what their rulers and priests told them and to
work out new ideas for themselves. They also became interested in the arts, and
learning of the ancient Greeks and Romans. This new way of thinking and rediscovery
of earlier knowledge, led to an exciting period in history known as the Renaissance,
a French word meaning rebirth.

Rational enquiry was the essence of this movement and this was evident in art,
architecture, music, literature etc. Renaissance period emphasised on classics as
contributing to thought and learning. Renaissance was a time when people became
curious about the world they lived in. Rich men built libraries and universities and
with the invention of the printing machine, books became more easily available not
only to priests and scholars but also ordinary people.

By the end of the 16th century, Renaissance which started in Italy, with its awakening
in learning and art spread to other parts of Europe. This was also the period which
saw the growth of science.

16.4.2 Growth of Science

As we mentioned earlier, the medieval European society was characterised by the
overriding influence of the church. Even learning was mostly of the religious variety.
The Renaissance period saw the beginning of rational enquiry. It marked an area
of description and criticism in the area of learning.

This development of detachment in observation and experimentation introduced
new assumptions about the nature of the world. The rational and systematic, empirical
knowledge questioned the supernatural conceptions of the world and gave an
awareness to man's capacity to harness nature.

This was the period which saw the Copernican Revolution. It was generally believed
that the Earth was stationary and the Sun and other heavenly bodies moved around

it. Copernicus, with the help of detailed explanation demonstrated that the earth moved around a fixed sun. This finding of Copernicus shattered the very foundations on which the old world rested. The divine origins to heaven, earth and life were now being questioned.

This period also saw the growth of various disciplines of science. William Harvey discovered the circulation of blood. This led to the rethinking about the human body. In Physics, Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, and subsequently Issac Newton shattered the earlier metaphysical thoughts of the universe. In short, the growth of science and the application of science reduced man's dependence on religion and the divine interpretation of the universe.

16.4.3 Expansion of Trade and Commerce

The 15th century AD also signalled a shift from the subsistent and stagnant economy to a dynamic and worldwide system. This expansion in trade was due to some extent, because of the initiative taken by the European states to develop and consolidate their economic and political power. The monarchy of Portugal, Spain, Holland, and England sponsored overseas discoveries, trade and conquest

---

Box 2

Trade with the Orient so far was carried on land and Italian cities had a monopoly in this. In a bid to destroy this monopoly and to seek new ways of reaching the East, the Portuguese and other pioneers in navigation took to sea voyage. You must have heard of the historic voyage of Vasco da Gama, who landed on the Indian west coast in 1498. Christopher Columbus made a similar voyage in the hope of finding a sea route to India and instead reached the shores of North America.

Britain, Holland followed Spain and Portugal and soon India, South East Asia, Africa and West Indies and South America came under the economic enterprise of these countries.

European markets were flooded with new commodities, spices, textiles, tobacco, cocoa, quinine, ivory, gold, silver, and above all human slaves from Africa. One of the most important results of this expansion of trade and commerce was the growth of middle class. This class, which included merchants, bankers, shipowners, became an influential and politically powerful group.

Besides these radical changes which were taking place, there emerged a break in thought and ecclesiastical organisation, which is called 'the reformation'.

16.4.4 Reformation

In the 16th century, there was a movement within Christianity to purge the medieval abuses and to restore the doctrine and the practices that the reformers believed confirmed with the Bible. This led to a breach between the Roman Catholic Church, and the reformers whose belief and practices came to be called as Protestantism.

One of the principle initiators of this movement, Martin Luther King, questioned the practices of the Roman Catholic Church and called for a debate. The Papacy took this as a gesture of rebellion and proceeded to take steps against Luther as a heretic. Martin Luther refused to repent unless proven by Bible or clear reason. He believed that slavation was a free gift to persons through the forgiveness of sins by God's grace alone and received by them through faith in Christ. Luther was protected by kings and princes partly out of religious conviction. But mainly because they were interested to seize the Church property and to assert the imperial independence.

The obvious result of Reformation was the division of Christiandom into Catholic and Protestant donominations or sects. These strenghtened the growth of modern national states. Reformation introduced radical changes in thought and organisation of the Church and, thus began the trend of secularisation. The Protestant conception of the divine made God personal. God thus receded to the personal realm. Wordly personal activity was encouraged as a sign of faith in God. (See unit 10, Religion and Economic Order, for a discussion on this).

As we already mentioned, there was a complex web of factors which contributed to the emergence of secularisation process. In our above discussion, we have given a few trends or happenings in a context in which secularisation occurred.

Now that we have discovered the history behind the concept and phenomenon of secularisation, let us see what it means in the contemporary world.

16.5 SECULARISATION IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

It is true that religion has ceased to have a kind of hold that it had in the medieval society. We no longer define our world in mystical religious terms. It seems that religious institutions ceased to be central in society. But this secularisation has not occurred uniformally all over the world. We must remember that the events we described and discussed are specific to Europe and those changes had some effect on other countries. At the same time this process of secularisation does preclude the endurance of certain religiosity and emergence of new expressions of religion. The patterns of religiosity vary, and despite indicators of secularisation, spiritual survivals and new religious initiatives do occur.

Numerous new religious movements have emerged in recent decades and these may seem to be even responses to general secularisation: since they provide meaning, purpose, association, and support for a particular section of the people. Secularisation, as we said, is conspicuously a long-term historical occurrence in Western society.

Activity 1

To what extent is secularisation and secularism prevalent in India? Read newspapers and magazines, talk with other students and knowledgeable individuals before putting down your answer in your notebook.

Other religious systems did organise and systematise mystical and pagan beliefs, but they did so in different ways. Hinduism and Buddhism unlike Christianity, according to Bryan Wilson have tolerated more primitive supernaturalism than eradicating them. Besides, the long-term historical process of secularisation and the extension of rational principles to all areas of social life were less intense in non-Western countries like in Asia or the Middle East. Industrialisation and technological application to some extent rationalises and routinises framework of social life. Yet, so many religious and magical practices persist alongside, leading to paradox of magical practice alongside sophisticated industrial techniques.

The course of industrialisation has followed different paths and occurs in different forms than one which is available in the West. In our next section we will discuss the Indian experience of secularisation and secularism.

Check Your Progress 2

i)   ....questioned the practices of Roman Catholic Church.

ii) Match the following :

A	B
Vasco-de-Gama	revolutionised physics
William Harvey	sea-route to India
Copernicus	protestantism
Martin Luther	blood circulation

16.6 SECULARISM IN INDIA

In this section we will discuss how secularism is viewed in India and its practice. We are aware by now, that the historical process of secularisation has not occurred in India quite the way it did in Europe. But Indian situation generated its own conditions which made our national leaders feel a need for a secular ideology. Let us see how! But first let us try and understand what secularism means in India.

16.6.1 India and Secularism

India, as we all know is a home of many religions and is a multi-religious society. Religion plays an important role in the lives of Indians. Passions and hatred are whipped in the name of religion. Religious conflict and communal violence has become a part of our social scenario owing to the multi-religiosity of Indian society.

This situation puts into focus the fact that when a society has many religions the task of governance is that much more difficult.

Our leaders have responded to the situation by strengthening the values of secularism. The secular ideas are enshrined in our Constitution as well.

16.6.2 The Meaning of Secularism in India

In our preceeding discussions, we have seen how secularisation in the West was a result of the secularisation process whereby the pervasive influence of religion in everyday life has lost its influence.

In India, however, secularisation and secular has been used in the context of nature of the state. It has been conceived in this way keeping in view multi-religiosity of the society and the religious conflicts thereof. In India, the term secularism implies that the state will not identify with any one religion but is tolerant of all religious practices. As Nehru declared in 1950, "the Government of a country like India with many religions that have secured great and devoted following for generations, can never function satisfactorily in the modern age except on a secular basis".

The secular idea was adopted during the freedom struggle to unite the various communities against the colonial power. The maturing of secular concept is closely linked up with the development of nationalism during the long course of the freedom struggle. Later, the secular concepts was incorporated in the constitution. And, for Nehru, the imperative of secularism was not only for detachement of religion in public life but progressive and modern outlook. It also meant that all the citizens enjoyed equal rights and statuses.

"Secularism, nationalism, and democracy are therefore, mutually reinforcing ideals that were sought to be emphasised by the post-colonial state in India" (Bhattacharya, 190 : 178). K.M. Panikkar in explaining the content of the secular state in India stresses on this point :

"It (the secular state) eliminates from the body politics all ideas of division between individuals on the basis of its policy what Aristotle terms "distribution justice" that all communities must share as they must share the duties and responsibilities of being a citizen".

One of the consequences of such a state policy is that holding of public office and government service should not be dependent on religious affiliation.

Yet at the same time the citizens enjoy the right to freedom of religion and worship, as a fundamental right. Although the Indian constitution speaks against any principle of religious discrimination, it cannot prevent the state to legislate in favour of any oppressed community which includes the minority community. Thus minorities enjoy a right to cultural and educational rights.

The secular ideal enshrined in our constitution has a peculiar mix of ethnic identities and common citizenship. It tries to ensure pluralities within a democratic nation-state.

This inbuilt contradiction in our polity makes it very difficult for the secular ideal to be practiced in reality. Let us go back into history and see how the secular ideal has been adopted and the problems which besetted this concept.

Activity 2

Do you think religious parties in political arena should be banned? Give reasons for your answer. You can discuss this with others in your study centre and your councillor.

16.6.3 Secular Concept and Ideology

Prior to the British intervention in Indian politics there existed no conflict between religion and politics. In fact, as Dumont observed : 'Religion here is constitutive of society. Politics and Economics are neither autonomous domain nor are they contradictory of religion, they are simply encompassed by religion'. Recalling Dumont, T N Madan feels that "religion and secular cannot be separated, in other words, religion cannot be in any meaningful sense privatised" (Madan, 1981 : 12).

However, the coming of the British made some change. The British state maintained an attitude of neutrality. Further, the British introduced the concept of equality before law, irrespective of caste and creed. Alongwith this break in tradition, modern education became an important factor of change.

An important element in the political awakening in India was the growing liberalism which came with modern education. The Indian middle-class was the major beneficiary of British education and one of the first to initiate a nationalist struggle against the British.

The nationalist feeling was carried down to the masses by the extraordinary growth of the vernacular cultures. This vernacular growth at the same time was not allowed to be chauvinistic because the nation as a goal was kept in mind. "Much of the power of the Indian nationalism came from its use of forces, idioms and symbolism of religion, especially Hinduism" (Kaviraj, 190 : 195).

The secular ideology of the national leaders by keeping religion at a distance was challenged by the likes of B.G. Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Lajpat Rai. The Congress faced a dilemma whether to allow the mobilisation of the masses using religious symbols etc. or not, for it could alienate the Muslim community.

By 1920 the leadership of the Congress passed into the hands of Mahatma Gandhi. He openly declared the necessity of religion in politics. Although deeply rooted in Hindu popular ethos, Gandhi believed in pluralism and equal respect for all religions. Inspite of Gandhi's efforts to unite Hindus and Muslims, the excessive usage of Hindu symbols alienated the Muslims. There grew extremist tendencies both among Hindus and Muslims. Nationalism became polarised with the setting up of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha and the militant socio-religious organisation called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Instead of nationalism based on territories, these communities now struggled for nation on the basis of religious identity. Sudipto Kaviraj writes : "pricisely because of long familiarity with other communities identities and the relative newness of identity of nation" there was a need for creating a feeling of nationalism through various means (in this case through religion, mainly) to face the British Colonialism.

India was partitioned in 1947 into India and Pakistan amidst communal riots. In 1948 there was the tragic assassination of Gandhi. This gruesome tragedy impressed upon the Indian leaders the need for a secular ideology to keep politics and religion separate.

Check Your Progress 3

i)   Write a few lines on the meaning of secularism in India.

....

....

....

....

....

ii)   .... openly declared the necessity of religion in politics.

16.7   SECULARISM IN INDIA

After Independence, Nehru took upon himself the task of modernising the country through the spread and application of science and technology for the removal of ignorance, ill health and poverty. Nehru was not against religion but he was aware of how harmful religion could be to India. Hence he lost no time in enshrining the secular ideal in the Constitution. Religion was not debarred from public life but was distanced from the State. Undoubtedly, constitutionally and legally we are a secular nation. But the question we must ask outselves is — is this secularism constitutive and an integral part of our country? We find that secular nationalism is a concept that we adopted from the West in the face of British Colonialism. The dire necessity of that time was to fight the British on a united front. Secular ideal was adopted to unite the various pluralities in the nation. Modern education and the English language helped propagate this ideal and through the vernacular it was carried to the masses. And a semblance of nationalism was forged and the British were ousted.

Pointed out to this kind of nationalism, Sudipta Kaviraj feels that "as long as the national movement faced the British, this urgency in political discourse in constantly spelling, naming, repeating the making of the nation was evident. After independence was achieved, this ... urgency was allowed to lapse" (Kaviraj, 1990 : 198). He further adds that our leaders who inherited this nation failed to see a situation where later generations may not take this nation for granted.

The State with its elitist leaders failed to form a dialogue with various vernacular cultures (which was the case during the freedom struggle) to achieve this ideal of secularism. It remained aloof from the masses. However, it needs to be pointed out that the masses are steeped in religion with its myths legends and folklore. As such secularism would take time to fully influence social process in India, where there is a plurality of religions.

Apart from this neglect, we are faced with contradictions present in a liberal democratic systems like ours, where there is a great deal of uneven economic development. With this arose a feeling of injustice and deprivation which finds expression in various ways. Mobilising one's own community on religious and ethnic lines is very often the practice. The State/political parties on the other hand address communities to gain support. This only reinforces the primordial identities of community and religion. And they know that the only way to bring about pressure on the authorities is to mobilise on criteria like language, ethnicity and religion. So, as we can see in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic country, secularism even with best intentions is difficult to achieve.

16.8 LET US SUM UP

Unit 16 had the basic objective of understanding the origin and the process of secularisation. The term secularism emerged out of this process of secularisation. Secularism as a state ideology has been adopted by, practically all modern states.

India, too, has adopted secularism as its state ideology. This was done keeping in view the pluralistic nature of Indian society and the consequent conflict which are there among communities. The section on secularism in India, has attempted to analyse the nature and practice of secularism. We have discussed the historical background which saw the emergence of the concept of secularism in Indian polity. In our final section, we have discussed the dynamics involved in the practice of secularism. Secularism as an ideology is indeed, difficult to practice, in a country like India were religion is deeply embedded in our society. And our democratic polity makes concessions to this religious need of the communities.

16.9 KEY WORDS

Empirical : Knowledge which is based on observation and experimentation.

Orthodoxy : A doctrine which is accepted and considered true, especially in religion it is what is authoritatively prescribed.

Rational : Thinking based on senses and not on faith. Rejecting what cannot be tested.

Salvation : Saving the soul from sins and getting admission to heaven as a consequence of this.

16.10 FURTHER READINGS

Mircea Eliade, 1987. *International Encyclopedia of Religion,* New York : Macmillan.

Davind E. Sills, 1968. *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences,* New York : Macmillan.

Conklin, J.E., 1984. *Introduction to Sociology.* Macmillan : New York.

16.11   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i) The term secular is derived from the Latin word 'secular' which means the present age or generation. The word secular came to be associated with social process of secularisation later.

ii) The new political philosophy which came about after the French Revolution questioned the religious basis of political and social organisation. It recommended rational basis for political and social organisation. Secularism was adopted as a political goal. Holyoake hoped and believed that secularism as a state ideology promotes human welfare by material means and makes the service of others its duty.

iii) Emperor Constantine (307-37 A.D.) was the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity. He declared Christianity as a state religion.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Martin Luther

ii)

A	B
Vasco-da-Gama	sea-route to India
William Harvey	blood circulation
Copernicus	revolutionized physics
Martin Luther	protestantism

Check Your Progress 3

i) India did not witness the secularisation process as did Europe. As a reason secularisation did not occur naturally in India, secularism as a political goal was adopted. Specially since India is a pluralistic country with variety of religions, languages and ethnic background.

In India, the term secularism implies that the state will not identify with any one religion but is tolerant of all religious practices.

ii) Mahatma Gandhi.

References

Babb, Lawrence, 1986. *Redemptive Encounters : Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition*. Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Bahm, A.J., 1958. *Philosophy of Buddhism*. Rider & co. : London.

Bapat, P.V. 1856. *2500 Years of Buddhism in India*. Pub. Div. of Govt. of India : New Delhi.

Bhatt, G.S., 1968. Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and the Church — Sect Typology in *Review of Religious Research*. 10/1 : The Religious Research Association : Kansas (USA).

Capps, Walter, H. 1990. *The New Religious Right*. University of South Carolina Press : Carolina.

Curtis, Michael, 1981. *Religion and Politics in the Middle East*. East-West View Press : Calarado.

Durkheim, E., 1965 (1912). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Free Press : New York.

Elwin Verrier. 1955. *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*. Oxford Univ. Press : Delhi.

Fuller, Christopher J., 1990. *Servants of the Goddess : The Priests of a South Indian Temple*. Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Humphrey, C. 1951. *Buddhism*. Penguin.

Hussain, Asaf. 1985. *Islamic Iran : Revolution and Counter Revolution*. Frances Printer Ltd. : London.

Johnson, H.M. 1968. *Sociology : A Systematic Introduction*. Routledge Kagan Paul : London.

Kaviraj, S., 190. The Discourse of Secularism in Bidyut Chakravarty (ed.) *Secularism in Indian Polity*. Segment : New Delhi.

Madan, T.N. 1981. The Historical Struggle of Secualrism in India in S.C. Dube (ed.) *Secularism in Multi-Religious Societies*. Concept : Delhi.

——, 1991. *Religion in India*. Oxford Univ. Press : Delhi.

Moberg, D.O. 1961. Potential Uses of the Church-Set typology in Comparative, Religious Research in *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*. Vol. II, p. 47-58.

O'Dea Thomas F. 1969. *The Sociology of Religion*. Prentice Hall : New Delhi.

Panikkar, K.M., *A Survey of Indian History*. Asia : Bombay.

Wilson, Bryan, R. 1987. Secularisation in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* edited by Mircea Eliade, Macmillan : New York.