



Sociology

Chapter – 8

Religion and Society

SYLLABUS

- Sociological theories of religion.
- Types of religious practices: animism, monism, pluralism, sects, cults.
- Religion in modern society: religion and science, secularization, religious revivalism, fundamentalism.

Religion

- **Ronald Robertson** - It refers to the existence of **Supernatural** beings which have a governing effect on life.
- But, according to **Malcolm Hamilton** certain belief systems such as Buddhism don't contain a belief in supernatural beings.
- Thus, defining religion is a tough and complex task.

Evolutionists

Tried to explain religion in terms of human needs.

- **August Comte** - animism, polytheism, monotheism.
- **Durkheim** - From totemic practices to present day complex religions.
- **Edward Tylor** - religion is a response to man's intellectual needs.
- **Max Muller** - religion is a response to man's emotional needs.

Functionalist

Yinger - A system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of the life.

(Problems with the definition -

- It includes wide variety of belief systems, Communism.
- Assumes certain roles of the religion which may vary with society and time.
- "Ultimate problem" are subjectively interpreted.
- Many other aspects address problems, like medicine and leisure).

Changes the emphasis from human to **society's needs**.

Society requires a certain degree of social solidarity, value consensus, harmony and integration.

The function of religion is the contribution it makes to meetings such functional prerequisites.

Examples

- **Durkheim** - Sacred and Profane
- **Totemism** - Material representation of non-material force.

- **Sacred** – Produces awe, veneration and respect. Greater power to direct human beings.
- **Profane** – Does not.

Collective worship, integration of society.

Worshipping Ancestors – nothing but propagating Social Values.

But modern life religious objects are often not treated with respect.

Durkheim Criticism

- Generalised on the basis of one aborigine group only.
- Data has doubtful validity.
- Relevant in small, non-literate society. Less in modern, multi-cultural society.
- Overstates religion as keeper of collective conscience. Sometimes religion with loggerheads with societal values.

Malinowski – Trobrian Islands, New Guinea.

- Religion promotes social solidarity by dealing with situations of emotional stress that threaten the stability of society.

Parsons – Religion gives norms, that control human action. Religion helps provide the consensus that he believes is necessary for order and stability in Society.

Criticism

- **Status Quoist-**
 - It ignores the dysfunctions of religion.
 - Many instances where it is seen as a divisive or disruptive force.
 - Little consideration to hostilities between religions.

Marxist

- Religion is an illusion which eases the pain produced by exploitation and oppression (opiate of the masses).
- It makes life bearable and dilutes demand for change.
- Acts as a mechanism of social control and promoting dominating ideologies by maintaining the existing system of exploitation, reinforcing class relationships.
- Ex caste system in India justified by Hindu religious beliefs, divine right theory in medieval Europe.

Criticism

- Religion does not always legitimate power.
- It can sometimes provide an impetus for change.
- Religion did not die out in Communism as Marx predicted.

Engles

- **Social change** – role played by religion in effecting revolutionary social change (early Christian sects that opposed Roman Rule)

Neo-Marxists

- **Otto Maduro** - relative autonomy of religion.
- He believes that members of clergy can develop revolutionary potential where oppressed members have no outlet for grievances and can pressurize the priests to take up their cause.
- These conditions led to the development of **Liberation Theology**.
- **Bryan Turner** has talked about changing roles of religion in modern society, where religion is also promoting consumerism in youth.

Feminist Perspective

Religion is a product of patriarchy. An instrument of domination and oppression.

- **Giddens** - Christian religion is a resolutely male affair. God is the father, a male figure.
- **Karen Armstrong** - All major religions a male affair. Women have been relegated to marginal positions.
- **Jean Holm** - Women do have some role in religion, but it is always subordinate and in private sphere.
- **Mary Daly** - Religious language, images need to be changed. They perpetuate the sexist world.
- **Nawal El Saadawi** - The hidden face of eve - Religion only one aspect of wider patriarchal system, which needs to be overthrown by struggle.
- **Simone De Beauvoir** - Book "The second Sex" - Women do much of the work for religious organizations, introduce children to religious beliefs, yet are exploited by religion. So, there must be a religion for women.
- **Carol Christ** - Thea-logy, replacing theology. Thea means Goddess.

Rational Choice Theories

- Religion is seen in similar terms to a market in which individual consumer choices are important in determining whether a particular religion is successful or not. Consumers of religions have choices to choose a religion. It rejects Secularism.

Stark and Bainbridge - Religion and Compensators Theory

- **Compensator** - a belief that a reward will be obtained in a distant future or in some other context which cannot be verified. Compensator brings in the idea of supernatural.
- **On Secularism** - It is not there. Because religion answers universal questions and its compensators meet universal human needs. There is increasing religious pluralism as people have sought new sources of compensators.

Criticisms

- **Steve Bruce** - That there is decreasing belief in religious values. That secularization is taking place. Religious pluralism is leading to lower numbers of church memberships.
- **Max Weber** linked religion with social change (PE&SC).

Origin of Religion

- Religion being a complex and intriguing phenomenon has been studied by many psychologist and anthropologists They tried to study the origin of religion owing to various forces.

Example

- **De Brosses** - Theory of fetishism - Religion originated as the magical power associated with certain objects.
- **Auguste Comte** - Multiple Fetishism - Magic + Ghosts or Souls.
- **Max Muller** - naturism - Personification of natural phenomenon.
- **Spencer** - Dream theory - supernatural beings appear in dreams.
- **Tyler** - Animism - Notion of soul.
- **RR Marret** - studied mana theory - Animatism - Impersonal force.
- **Crawley** - Main force is the fear or the danger in social relations or other objects.
- **Malinowsky** - Book - "Totem and Taboo" - In a "Fishermen Village" of Trobriand Islands - Religion originated from the fear of the sea and the unknown. Religion protects from death.
- **RH Lowe** - Religion is marked by the presence of mysterious or extra ordinary feelings.
- **Sigmund Freud** - considers religion as protective wall against feeling of guilt.
- **Durkheim** - sacred and profane.
- **Parsons** - religion helps to strengthen value consensus.
- **Weber** - religious system influences economic system in his PE&SC.
- **Merton** - functional, dysfunctional and non-functional aspects of religion based on the type of society.
- **Peter Berger** - **Nomos and Cosmos**.
 - Nomos - Norms of religion,
 - Cosmos - Supernatural.
- **Animism-EB Tylor**
 - From the Latin word- 'anima' means 'soul'.
 - It means belief in spirits.
 - Definition of Tylor- Religion originated from the belief of spiritual beings.
 - Tylor believes this to be earliest form of religion.
 - Experiences of death, disease, visions and dreams lead the primitives to think about the existence of immaterial power, i.e., the soul.

Soul- spirit which leaves body temporarily during dreams and permanently after death. Born to satisfy human being's intellectual need and to make sense of death, dreams and vision.

Monism

- In sociology monism is existence of one faith and one church.
- Simple society & largely medieval societies follow monism.

- Monism strengthens religion and stands opposite to pluralism.
- Argued when single religion has monopoly over truth effectively reinforces social norms.

Pluralism

Peter Berger (on secularization and pluralism)

Book- Social reality of religion.

- Cosmos may not always be considered as sacred thus, attempt to secularize cosmos.
- Modern science has played crucial role in this process of secularization.
- Berger links pluralism to modernization & secularization & establishes link between both.

Pluralism undermined set of beliefs and weakens sacred canopy

- **Bryan Wilson** - Multiplicity of denominations interpreted as evidence of secularization. Number of denominations each with own version of truth religious values no more community values ceases to function traditional role of social solidarity.
- **Berge and Luckmann** - Pluralism weakens influence of religion no longer single universe of meaning.
- **Stark and Bainbridge**- called religious economists and Contradict Berger and Bryan.

Study of American society religion becoming stronger. More options of religions with people competition increases overall religious involvement. Establishment of religious tolerance in free market of religious economy.

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Religion and Science

Historical - Renaissance: Arrival of science to cause departure of religion from public sphere.

Commonalities

- Understanding: Both religion and science are forms of human understanding. Both are COGNITIVE.
- Curiosity- Both attempts to satisfy the curiosity by presenting answers to various questions put forward by people.
- Cooperation: Religion is more collectively oriented than science, but science too emphasises team-spirit and co-operation of the scientific community.
- Personnel: Both religion and science prescribe qualifications for their personnel.
- Coming together- Science got legitimacy with rise of protestant ethics.
- Wars: On many occasions in the past as well as present, in many a war, science and religion have acted against humankind.

Differences

- Experimentation: Science is taken on face value through experimentation whereas religion is taken on faith value.
- Precision and measurement: Science believes in precision and measurement, which is not possible for religion.
- Application: Scientific knowledge has more concrete application in the form of technology, which might help in manipulating nature. Religion cannot establish such concrete and immediate results.
- Universalism: Scientific knowledge and method are valid universally, whereas principles of religious life differ from society to society.
- Pitirim Sorokin- Religion based on unquestionable faith but science based on questionable thesis.
- Religion not only cognitive but also moral. Tells right from wrong. Science makes no such attempt.
- Berger science played a major role in secularization of cosmos.

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Positivists very often tried to contrast religion with science. They argued that under the impact of rapid industrialisation, religion was losing its ground.

August Comte – theological, metaphysical and then positivistic (scientific) stage was the last in the evolution of human.

Intellectualism school tries to build bridges between science and religion by propounding that religion is a reasoned or rational response of the individual to the natural phenomena.

Weber and Marx both predicted an end of religion with time but even if science is growing, we see a resurgence in religion in different forms.

Example - A Day before, when Mars Orbiter Mission was about to enter Mar's orbit, India's ISRO scientists offered a model of the artificial satellite at a temple.

Thus, religion seems to be fulfilling some higher purpose for those scientists who go to temple not in position of ISRO scientist but in position of a human being.

Secularization

- It means influence of religion in all areas of social life is steadily diminishing.
- Bryan Wilson defines secularization as the process whereby religious thinking, process and institutions lose social significance.
- Theological Society
- Secularization
- Secular society.
- In the 19th Century it was widely believed that industrialisation and the growth of scientific knowledge would lead to secularization.
- Early sociologists auguste comte, Durkheim, Karl Marx, Weber all believed that the process of secularization was found to occur as societies modernized and became more reliant on science and technology to control and explain the social world.
- Contemporarily there is debate over the secularization thesis.

Evaluation of secularization

Secularization is a complex sociological concept because there is little consensus on what secularization is and how to measure it -

Secularization can be evaluated according to number of aspects and dimensions-

- **Institutional religion** - participation has decreased according to some.
- **Disengagement of the Church** from the wider Society - David Martin sees this view as concerned with decline in power, wealth, influence and Prestige of the church.
- **Differentiation** - that is church no longer performs or it has been delinked from other social Institutions. Specialised institutions have come up in the political and economic arenas and the religious institutions in contemporary society confines themselves to purely religious matters.
- **Religious Pluralism** - the continuing proliferation of sects and denominations has been interpreted by some researchers as the decline of religion.
- **Secularization of Religious Institutions** - that is religion itself has undergone a process of secularization. Religious Institutions engaged in tasks which may not be strictly speaking religious. Example running hospitals, educational institutions, et cetera.
- **Generalisation**- Parsons argues that as religious Institutions become more specialised religious values become increasingly generalized. Religious beliefs no longer specifically direct particular actions. However, they are incorporated into the society's value system they provide general guidelines for conduct.

- **Individuation** - Robert N Bellah - that is religion is increasingly an individual quest for meaning rather than a collective actor worship.
- **Transformation** - rather than seeing religious beliefs as generalized or "individuated" a number of sociologists argue that these beliefs have now become transformed into secular guides to action into Western society. Example Weber sees the logic of the spirit of capitalism in ascetic Protestantism.
- **Desacralization** - this means that supernatural forces are no longer seen as controlling the world. Action is no longer directed by religious belief. Man's consciousness has become secularized. Max Weber claims that Industrial society is characterized by rationalisation and intellectualization Thus, the term secularization has been used in many different ways.
- **David Martin** states that the concept of secularization includes "a large number of discrete separate elements loosely put together in an intellectual hold all".
- **Bryan Wilson** although is convinced that secularization and its various forms is occurring in western societies, admits that there is "no adequate way of testing the strength of religious commitment".
- Thus, the **problem of research methodology has dogged the secularization debate.**
- Despite the widespread support for the theory of secularization a number of doubts have been raised and the opponents of the concept argue that **religion remains a significant force though in new and unfamiliar forms.**

Religious Revivalism

- The role of religion in different modern societies varies considerably.
- Secularization is a feature of some societies but not of others.
- For example, religion appears to be much more influential in USA the UK.

Postmodernist

- Postmodernist argue that when societies move beyond modernity they will also move beyond the secular.
- Faith and religion will be rediscovered in the world in which the achievements of science and rationality will have less appeal than they once had.

David Martin

- He takes a wider view of secularization. By looking at the changing role of religion in a range of societies.
- Based on this he argues that there is little evidence of a general trend towards secularization in the world as a whole.

Gilles kepel

- He Claims that any trend towards secularization was reversed in around 1970s when various religious revivals sprang up.
- These revivals were aimed at recovering a sacred foundation for the organisation of the society by changing society if necessary.

- He gives the example of Christians in USA and Europe, Jews in Israel and Muslims along the world to support his case.
- Since 1978 in France rechristianisation of society by Catholic charismatic groups.
- In USA - Evangelical new Christian right attracting Americans to reassert Christian values.
- Israel - Lubavitch campaigned against the watering down of traditional Jewish beliefs.
- Islamisation movements have had success in many parts of the world. Example in Algeria, Iran.
- Palestine - Radical Islam groups such as Hamas have been prominent in opposing Israeli occupations of West Bank.
- Gilles Kepel also points to the Salman Rushdie affair.
- The campaign by British Muslims against Rushdie's book The Satanic Verses indicates Islamic values continue to be important even in western Europe.
- To Kepel all these are example of counter secularism and also the emergence of new religions movements countering the secularization thesis.
- These new religious movements can be classified as-
- World Rejecting
- World Accommodating
- World Affirming

Conclusion

- Jose Casanova, thus, believes that in contemporary Societies of world religious beliefs and practices are not dying out but have increasingly re-entered public sphere.
- Therefore, it can be concluded that though religion no longer has a central position in the structure of modern society it has not faded away and religion remains a significant force though in new and unfamiliar forms.

Fundamentalism

- It refers to a movement or a belief calling for a return to the basic texts or fundamentals of revealed religions, which are believed to be pure and contain original values and behaviour.
- It is usually contrasted with modernism and liberalism in religion.
- Without political legitimacy and power, fundamentalism is mere revivalism.
- When religious values are threatened by some common enemy, which is Modernity as seen by Fundamentalists, more and more members are recruited into the fundamentalist fold.
- The term has been applied to protestant trends within Christianity in the 1920s and recently to trends within Islam.
- The forces of social change that is "High Modernity and Globalization", as Anthony Giddens calls it, are responsible 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 of stability.

- The psychological appeal of this is difficult for people to resist.
- To achieve and reconstitute this earlier better age, the Fundamentalist evolves 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, that is Israel or Khalistan or Caliph, justifies the means.
- The two most prominent forms of religious fundamentalism are Islamic fundamentalism and Christian fundamentalism
- Recently we also witnessing and increasing trend of Hindu fundamentalism.
- **Christian fundamentalism** in the US - reaction against secular values and a perceived moral crisis in American society.
- **Islamic** - Khomeini in 1979 and has been spreading ever since.
- Also leading to ISIS and related terrorism across the world.

Conclusion

- The challenges for the modern Muslim nations lie in achieving a balance to return to the fundamental religious values conducive to the Welfare of society rather than those that obstruct it.
- The strength of religious fundamentalism is another indication that secularization has not triumphed in the modern world.

No room for liberal doubt

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/sabarimala-temple-women-entry-protests-bjp-5454465/>

The choice in Sabarimala is clear

- It's ethno-religious political entrepreneur's vs social reform.

Three historical-constitutional variables in order to look at present situation with a clearer perspective

- **Reformers are lonely figures**
 - Reformers have always had to face opposition when they stood against socio-religious traditions.
 - Ex - Rammohan Roy (sati), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (widow remarriage), Mahatma Gandhi(untouchability)
- **liberals who are uncertain about the right attitude**
 - Some **liberals who are uncertain about the right attitude** in the Sabarimala case assume that the people's opposition is spontaneous.
 - But one needs to distinguish between PURE CONSERVATIVES, who believed in Sanaatan Dharma like Madan Mohan Malaviya, from traditionalists who defended ancient practices in terms of identity politics like Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

- **Excerpt**

- Tilak's worldview is well reflected in the controversy around the Age of Consent Bill – a bone of contention similar to the Sabarimala affair. At the end of the 19th century, western India debated the issue of legislating on the age of consent for consummation of marriages.
 - While reformers including Jyotirao Phule were in favour of a law to abolish child marriage, Vishwanath Narayan Mandlik and Tilak were not – for two different reasons. The former, like the Sanatanists, considered that child marriage should continue because the shastras allowed such practices. Tilak offered a different perspective.
 - On one hand, he argued in 1881 that “every son of Aryavarta must toil hard to see this custom eradicated”; on the other, he refused any change to tradition.
 - “We would not like that Government should have anything to do with regulating our social customs or ways of living, even supposing that the Act of Government will be a very beneficial and suitable measure.” (Tilak preferred to mobilise the people against the reforms he approved of, in order to promote his political agenda).
 - Today, it is apparent that the same was being done by various Hindu organisations in Sabarimala affair.
- **Openly opposed a decision of Supreme Court**
 - Besides politicising a religious issue, Hindutva forces have openly opposed a decision of Supreme Court, same thing is happening in Ayodhya case (demand of law to build ram temple).
 - In both the Sabarimala and Ayodhya cases, what is at stake is prestige and authority of the SC vis -a-vis entrepreneurs in identity politics who use traditions in order to mobilise and polarise people.

Hindu Rashtra, de facto

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/hindu-rashtra-de-facto-bjp-rss-gau-rakshak-mob-lynching-5301083/>

- The media often presents cow-related lynching cases as spontaneous reactions of the mob. But this is not that spontaneous. the perpetrators' ideological orientation could be surmised from the fact that they often make their victims raise slogans such as jai shri ram, gau mata ki jai etc.
- Most visible organisation in this domain - Gauraksha Dal (GRD), has its presence in many states.
- Haryana -one of the strongholds of movement, the GRD emblem is a cow's head flanked by two AK47s.
- In Haryana, the GRD and police arrived at a division of labour.
- GRD has a huge network of volunteers and informants and act very fast whenever they receive information, volunteers set up joint makes with help of local police. The GRD thus acts as a COMMUNITY CULTURAL POLICE.
- In Haryana, cow task force has been created within the state police (convergence of two types of policing - official and unofficial).
- The national vice president of the GRD sat on the board of the Gau Seva Ayog, a Haryana Govt.'s institute for cow welfare.
- These developments showing a new dynamics of state formation, as defined by Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, in their study The Unhappy Valley.
- Berman and Lonsdale distinguish the formation of the state as a social institution and state-building as an administrative process.

- Reasoning solely in terms of state-building tends to reduce authority only to official agents and their actions.
- Berman and Lonsdale take into account private actors who work their way into the process of state formation through the “vulgarisation of power”, which involves commandeering public authority to further private ends.
- This approach has obvious heuristic advantages for the analysis of Hindu vigilante groups and their relationship to the state.
- Collusion between police and Hindu nationalist movements is indeed evidence of the start of a transition from a state-building process, in which the administrative and coercive apparatus is supposed to treat all citizens equally, to a state-formation process wherein majoritarian non-state actors impose a social and cultural order.
- What adds a layer of complexity to Berman and Lonsdale’s model is that in India, these non-state actors enjoy state protection.
- Though the authority they exercise is illegal, it is nevertheless seen as legitimate by the state in that it is inspired by the values and interests of the dominant community to which the government is accountable.
- In that sense, the Hindutva forces are more of India’s deep state than a parallel government, all the more so as the ruling BJP is part of the Sangh Parivar.
- This shift from a neutral state to an ideological Hindu Rashtra illustrates a form of violent majoritarianism that can be observed in all countries where vigilantes bring minorities to heel with the more or less tacit agreement of shadow forces that share their biases or ideology (the relationship between white supremacists’ militias and the police in the US could provide other examples).
- If the executive, legislature or judiciary do not effectively oppose lynchings, India may remain a rule-of-law country only on paper and, in practice, a de facto ethno-state.

Coalition Country

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/coalition-country-united-opposition-bjp-2019-lok-sabha-elections-5229461/>

- The late Ravinder Kumar, (director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and library) defined India as a Civilisation-State, rather than a nation-state, because of its capacity to amalgamate into one coherent whole a large number of cultural influences.
- This approach - articulated by an historian in a long duration perspective - has a clear political implication: India is also a coalition-state.
- Unlike some European countries or China, India has never been governed successfully in a centralised manner.
- Sovereign had to build coalitions of regional satraps and maintain them through a constant bargaining process, even the great Akbar spent his half-life in traveling across his empire in managing his empire.
- India after 1947 inherited a centralisation legacy from the British raj, but only after some years, Nehru had to build coalition again (he sent letters to CMs every 15 days).
- Issue of states formation on the lines of language also become prominent in 1950s only.
- Whenever Prime ministers tried to emancipate themselves from coalition, the quality of governance has suffered the most. Example - Indira Gandhi's emergency period.

- Paradoxically, after a difficult transition of 10 years, India experienced more stability under coalition govt., from 1999 onwards.
- More stability as coalition forced Centre to acknowledge the state's autonomy because Centre depends upon regional forces. It limits concentration of power.
- Coalitions apart from political parties also includes social groups.
- One may argue that India cannot afford a coalition govt. because it needs reforms and strength in a complicated international environment, but most difficult reforms were taken by coalition govt.
- Ex- LPG, Nuclear Test, BRICS joining, Reservation of 27 % for OBCs, liberalisation of the FDI policy. Lokpal act, NREGA, RTI act, Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, etc.
- But opponents of coalition politics may reject it in spite of its effectiveness - for IDEOLOGICAL REASONS.
- Hindu nationalist has traditionally considered that India is one and should have a unitary state so how can a sacred land (punya Bhoomi - Savarkar's definition) be divided acc. to cultural lines?
- This approach reflects another idea of India, other than the one presented by Sunil Khilnani and before him, Ravinder Kumar, in terms of a civilisational-state.
- The Hindu nationalist idea of India is more in tune with the European idea of a nation-state rooted in the exclusivist triad:
 - One country
 - One culture
 - One people