

Block 2
Religion in India



UNIT 5 PLURALISM, EQUALITY AND FRATERNITY: THE CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS*

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 What does it mean to be ‘Secular’ and ‘Plural’?
- 5.3 Equality and Fraternity
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5.0 OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the concepts of Pluralism, Equality and Fraternity from a sociological and historical perspective;
2. To examine in a sociological perspective, why and how these principles were incorporated within the Constitution; and
3. To examine the civic society, Community and the Constitution.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the Jewish Museum in New York, there is a map which shows the historical persecution of the Jews across the globe, indicating the routes of their migrations, time and the place of such persecutions. This map identifies India as the only place in the world, where the Jews were not only not persecuted but also allowed to carry on their faith exactly as they pleased, with no interference from any source. The first and only time the Jews faced any threat was during the Mumbai terror attack and then also the entire Indian nation stood in their support. In England, it may be surprising to many that Good Friday is not an official holiday and in USA people greet each other by saying Happy Holidays rather than Merry Christmas. These examples express how the different regions of the world interpret the political meaning of secularism. Secularism as a concept was introduced into the Indian Constitution to take care of the goals of Pluralism, Equality and Fraternity that characterize Democracy and a Liberal Nation.

When India became independent in 1947, it was the goal of establishing a democratic nation, committed to the notion of social justice that was embodied in the concepts of equality and fraternity that would allow the peaceful co-existence of different communities, religions and ethnic groups. The goal was not to erase all differences and to create a monolithic and uniform society but to respect diversity and to have what is famously known as unity in diversity.

*This Unit is written by Prof. Subhadra Channa.

The necessity for having some kind of a mechanism for dealing with plurality is what drove many nations to opt for secularism as a key component of their constitutions. This was especially necessary for large and diverse nations like India, United Kingdom and U.S.A. A newly formed nation like India was struggling to keep its different fragments together and deal with a hugely multicultural and multilingual ground reality. Even to identify a common national language was a problem and continues to be one.

Inclusiveness seemed the only way out and this path had been taken by countries like UK and USA by incorporating in their Constitution the concept of secularism with respect to religion. India also opted for a secular Constitution, one that would then take care of pluralism of faith and diversity of ways of life based on them. Although officially in the western countries, there is freedom for everyone to follow their faith, there are restrictions in the public sphere; especially if they contradict the dominant moral and value system of that country. For example, in France there has been a ban on women wearing head-scarves in public and there is also a general ban on people displaying too prominently other symbols of their religion.

Thus, in the UK and the USA and other parts of the world, there is a lot of control on how religion is to be kept away from the public space, like schools and government offices. Even Christmas in the USA is referred to as 'Holidays' so as not to offend the sensibilities of non-Christians. There is no teaching of any religion in schools and public places other than those of specific religious nature, do not carry any religious symbols. France for example has banned the wearing of any religious symbol on one's person. In India, the path has been taken towards inclusiveness of all faiths in a way that every religion is given its due, in the form of public holidays and celebration. There are also no curbs on the use of any overt religious symbols. This has been made possible also by the tradition of tolerance by which in India people have rarely been persecuted because of their beliefs or convictions. Therefore, it becomes clear that concepts such as secularism, pluralism and equality are understood not in absolute terms but in context. Let us take a brief look at the contextual understanding of these terms specifically the western and non-western understandings.

5.2 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE 'SECULAR' AND 'PLURAL'?

The word secularism just like the word religion, has a western root. Most other cultures of the world do not have a concept such as religion that is set apart from other aspects of life. For example, the Sanskrit word 'Dharma', does not mean religion in the same way as a Christian would refer to his/her religion. It largely means a code of conduct or the way of life that is appropriate to a person, human or non-human. For example, while describing Japan, Eller (2007:264) writes that the Japanese have no word for religion and do not conceptualize religion as a creed, doctrine or 'organized religion'. The Japanese like the Hindus have innumerable deities and Hindu deities and symbols are prominently displayed in a Japanese temple along with images of Buddha. The followers of Shintoism believe that some beings have sacred powers and they may be anywhere and come from anywhere. In countries such as India, religion or rituals have a key role to play in the public sphere. Most rituals have a social and at times political and economic character like when business houses sponsor public religious events to gain publicity for themselves. In Indian political socializing for example the throwing of Iftar (breaking of fast during Ramzan) parties is seen as a critical political event. In the

USA large Christmas trees or shop window displays may be sponsored by different corporate agencies but political figures avoid any religious associations. In India on the other hand, it is imperative for all political parties and political agents as well as most persons who are in the public eye, to send out greeting messages for all prominent festivals and occasions, irrespective of which religion they belong to. In a country like USA, while overt messages related to Christmas or other religious occasions are shunned; semi religious or semi-secular social events like Thanksgiving is celebrated as a big and prominent public event, including the President of the country playing a symbolic role. It is therefore evident that a concept like secularism would have cultural roots and meanings and is likely to mean different things to different people.

In the western mode of thinking secularism has largely been regarded as a point of view that is not religious in nature, meaning thereby that it depends more on rationality, pragmatism and what in the seventeenth century of Europe emerged as the Renaissance Philosophy. It was equated with what was recognized as the Scientific Epistemology, that is looking for answers in demonstrable causal and natural relationships as well as the methodology based on empiricism or factual knowledge that can be assessed by the senses. Nature rather than the supernatural began to dominate western intellectuals as there was a turn away from the stranglehold of the Church on society and polity. The source of the scientific methodology as understood by the western mind can be traced to the intellectual influence of Francis Bacon and Renee Decartes, and foregrounds the principles of empiricism, inductive reasoning, skepticism or a questioning attitude, experimentation and naturalism. The scientists believe that nature works on its own by its own principles and has its internal logic. Hence by empirical observation, experimentation and logical reasoning supported by factual (demonstrable or provable) data scholars can get to the real cause of phenomenon, that shows them to be not controlled by any supernatural agency but by the laws of nature.

However, the disjunction between natural or scientific explanations and religion was particularly severe for Christianity and the Judeo Christian religions as they had a well formed story of Genesis and also an explanation for creation and the place of humans in the natural world. There was direct confrontation between the Church and the scientists who opposed the Christian world view such as Copernicus and Galileo, so that when the scientific method appeared to be rational and logical to many persons, there was no alternative but to put it forward as something that was non-religious or secular in nature.

The Renaissance intellectuals were not overtly non-religious, and there were attempts to reconcile religion with science. Yet the hypothesis or tenets of science were largely seen as incompatible with religious doctrines. Conservative Christianity and the Catholic Church, remain till the present in a troubled relationship with science. The so-called Bible belt in the USA, even today has its advocates against the study of science in school.

Historically, the breaking away of Henry the Eighth from the Vatican and the setting up of the Church of England as a separate body stimulated the rise of a secular society in England and finally led to the possibility of formulation of a theory of evolution by a English scientist and also to its wide spread acceptance by the general public.

Eller (2007:262) mentions that the English language acquired a whole range of new words that could describe the new social attitudes and the transformations of the world view of the general public. Like other cultures, there was no special word for religion

as everything was believed to be God's creation. But with the separation of the sacred and the profane, 'religion' became a word, a concept. So did Christianity, for it acquired an identity away from being just a way of life or a given truth. Concepts arose to describe newly emerging points of view like skeptic, rationalist and atheist. Thus even in the west, as pointed out by Barzun (2000:24), "The point is that in earlier times people rarely thought of themselves as 'having' or 'belonging' to a religion". This was because most people were carrying on their way of life in relative isolation, comforted by the acceptance of their world view as an ontological truth. The possibility of different perspectives on religion only came when religion was understood not as a given truth but as a *perspective* to which an alternative was possible.

Again, not all religions have a clear cut doctrine that is negated by science. The pre-Christian era in Europe, led by Greek philosophers had seen flourishing non-religious philosophies. In fact as pointed out by Eller (2007:253) doubt and skepticism, were modes of thinking that go way back before the emergence of any doctrinal religion. Xenophanes reflected upon the nature of good and evil and many scholars like Aristotle questioned established religion and beliefs. In fact, the Philosophical schools were established to reflect and question and not go by blind obedience to the given. During the Hellenistic Period that can be located roughly between the time of Alexander (323 BCE) to the rise of Rome (31 BCE) there was the emergence of four new schools of thought to answer questions about human life and fulfill human needs to reassure themselves about life and creation. These were Cynicism, Stoicism, Epicureanism and Skepticism. Let us examine them one by one and see what they mean.

Cynicism involves an attitude towards life that rejects all social conventions and a cynic does not care how he lives, what he wears and they wish to be as natural as possible like animals. The word cynic comes from the Latin word for a dog. Stoicism derives its name from a porch (*stoa*) from which teachers delivered their teachings. In the common English contemporary usage of this term it means a capacity to bear hardship lightly or be resigned to one's condition even if it means to suffer silently. But in terms of the original philosophy of Socrates and others from which it derives, to be stoic meant to take life rationally and to live ethically. The stoics did not reject happiness and oppose it to virtue, rather they believed that to be happy was in itself a rational behavior and one could be happy as well as good. Epicureanism is a philosophy named after Epicurus which resembles an existential philosophy that does not give much importance to otherworldly concerns and concentrates on being happy in this world. According to them, death is the end and one need not be too concerned about what happens afterwards. At the same time one should be ethical and good and try to look for happiness while alive. It is also not too sure about the existence of God as God does not seem too concerned about evil. In common English usage it is sometimes used for a hedonistic lifestyle but that is not how the propagator of this philosophy meant it to be.

Skepticism is a school of thought that was founded by Pyrrho and Carneades. This school of Philosophy believes in taking a more casual attitude towards life. It believes that taking things too seriously is not advisable as one is never sure about the truth status of anything. By having too strong convictions, values and judgments, one loses any hope of being happy in this world, as none of these stands up to long term scrutiny and there is nothing one can be sure of. It is better to suspend judgment and live in the moment as it comes. It is usually associated with those having a questioning and critical state of mind. Not accepting anything at face values is often seen as a character of being a skeptic.

Thus in the western world there were many schools of thought that precluded blind faith and suspension of judgment as often associated with religion. Most of these were critical of the existence of evil and lack of justice in the world and questioned as to how a good and just God could allow such things to happen. People often lost their faith in the face of suffering and what they felt as injustice and evil.

But the ancient Greeks were not alone in indulging in such thought processes. Ways of life like Hinduism and Buddhism often fostered this kind of a questioning attitude and invited a critical mind set. Many non-western philosophies actively invited criticism and a doubting mind. But many of these questioning theories were part of recognized schools of thought and not simply taken as non-conformance or being against religion. Hinduism and Shintoism, non-doctrinal ways of life did not have a circumscribed notion of religion and one religion as opposed to another. There was a sense of the divine, which, as in the case of Hindu concept of Brahman, may be very diffuse. In several versions especially the Vedantic and Neo-Hinduism, as professed by Swami Vivekananda, there is no essential difference between various modes of thought, as all paths (religions) lead essentially to the same goal; Brahman being a state or a being with undefined qualities; infinite and ever present, a pure consciousness that is beyond description.

The numerous gods that Hindus worship are simply manifestations that enable worshippers to focus on whatever qualities they wish to see in their object of worship; therefore, no god or no form of worship is unacceptable. Different ones may simply mean that someone has a different way but true nevertheless.

Thus, while concept of exclusionary religions necessitates that a functionally plural society should define secular as 'no religion' at all; religions that are not exclusionary and cultures that do not perceive that religion is a bounded entity, are able to accommodate plurality by allowing all religions to flourish.

5.3 EQUALITY AND FRATERNITY

The framers of the Indian Constitution were men educated in the west and drawing their image of being civilized from the Renaissance ideas about universal humanism. This philosophy developed with science and art in around 16th Century CE and with the conviction that all humans are alike. There was a strong sense of compassion for all humans and even for other living creatures. Looking upon all humanity as equal it advocates for personal liberty, and participatory democracy and a universal faith in human dignity, human rights and social justice.

This humanism arose against the philosophy of social evolution and theories like that of Herbert Spencer that took a harsh view of those who were unable to make good in life and stand up to competition.

Humanism derives its tenets from a rational and scientific rather than a religious or theological source. This is not to say that religious organizations, sects and functionaries do not or cannot have a humanist perspective, in fact they often do in the modern world. But there are many kinds of discriminations and hierarchies practiced by religious institutions and ideologies that would be rejected by the humanists. For example, the framer of the Indian Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, was a Dalit, who had faced caste based discriminations sanctioned by Hindu religion popularly practiced in India. According to scholars of the caste system such as Louis Dumont, the caste hierarchy

draws its primary legitimacy from religion and the concepts of purity and pollution directly derived from Hindu world view.

It was Ambedkar's vision, inspired by western humanism and sense of social justice that the Indian Constitution should be based on the principles of equality, fraternity and secularism in order to sustain a plural society with justice and harmony. Ambedkar was a product of both a discriminatory indigenous society and a liberal humanist education from America. He was steeped in the principles of democracy and dignity for all individuals as individuals and not as members of community and social groups. Thus the Indian constitution does not discriminate against any one on the basis of religion, faith, way of life or any cultural trait such as language, food and ritual practices. As far as possible, persons are at liberty to practice their ways of life, as long as it does not violate the laws of the land. By declaring all persons as equal before the law and by denying all forms of inequality, based on caste, gender and ethnicity; the Constitution does not support the popular views of Hinduism and perhaps some other religions. However, in principle, Hinduism in its most philosophical and textual version does not support any discrimination either.

The contestation between, universal humanism, equality and fraternity as enshrined in the Constitution of India and the religious values of the people of India, are not based on religion as much as they are based on social discriminations, passed off as religious discriminations. To debate this one needs to look into the variations within a religion, the relationship between civil society and the state and the part that religion plays in state organization, even if it is done covertly. One needs also to consider how plurality is actually interpreted in society and how the concepts of equality are recast into the existing moulds of discrimination and historical perceptions about personhood and identity.

The concept of an individual is in itself a construct of the scientific rationality generated in the West. The incorporation of the 'individual' as the basic unit in the Constitution is a derivative of this philosophy. It is because the individual has become a unit, there is possibility of equality and the equivalence of all humans irrespective of other social criteria like gender, caste, race and class. In customary law, people are not viewed as standalone individuals but as embedded in social relationships. In the pre-colonial state, a person coming to court would be viewed in terms of gender, caste, class and other social characters and dealt with accordingly.

At this point it is relevant to discuss, what is understood by Humanism, as it is an integral part of our Constitution. The American Humanist Association has a specific definition for humanism. It is "A rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion" (Eller 2007:267). It visualizes each individual as equal and reaffirms human dignity. One must remember how Mahatma Gandhi had always emphasized on human dignity. He devoted much of his life to restore dignity to the marginal and especially untouchable communities of India. In this way he was being more western in his attitude than a Hindu, where the caste position of a person is seen as a result of his/her Karma. The rationalization of human inequality within the philosophy of the Jati/Varna is quite contrary to structural Hinduism. But Hinduism not being a doctrinal religion, professes many different paths. The Bhakti Marg, denounces all inequalities and is more akin to humanism. Bhakti tells that all are equal before the supreme power and each person as an individual can reach God through pure devotion. The followers of the Bhakti cults therefore decried the priests and Brahmanical form of Hinduism. Similarly, the Tantric path, followed by the Saint Ramakrishna Paramhansa,

the guru of Swami Vivekananda also derecognize human inequality and reject the jati/Varna system. Swami Vivekananda was himself of the Kayastha jati considered to be of the Shudra Varna. Earlier a person of his jati could not have been initiated as a swami, but all such rules were broken by his guru Ramakrishna.

Therefore, it will not be correct to say that liberal and humanist ideas came only from the west. There were many philosophies and roots of such thinking in the indigenous cults, including the Sufi and other rebels from organized religion.

5.4 INTERSECTION OF RELIGION AND SOCIETY

It is also true that majority of upper caste and class Hindus and also Muslims and people such as Christians converted from upper castes still believe in caste hierarchy and inequality as a divinely ordained condition.

In this respect the civil codes do interfere with certain practices that were sanctioned by culture and also to a large extent by popular Hinduism although not by textual or philosophical Hinduism. For example, pious Hindus of higher castes were often committed to marry off their minor daughters as a religious sanction, but the Hindu Marriage Act put the age of consent at 18 years for girls. Another objection raised by many Hindus, even scholars, was the acceptance of monogamy as a part of the Hindu Marriage Act. Hindus widely practiced polygyny, that is the marrying of more than one wife, and even practiced polyandry, the marriage of one woman to several husbands. Both these practices find mention in classical Hindu texts. Hindu men were not confined by religion to marry only four wives, like the Muslims, but could actually marry any number as they chose to, or were able to. Yet the largely upper caste and Hindu political luminaries who influenced the making of the Constitution, advocated monogamy, to mark themselves and other Hindus as 'civilized', not by the norms of religion but by the norms of the western culture that had colonized the country. It is well known that the rise of the political elite that fought for the freedom of India, was composed of high status men, mostly educated in the West, in the country that colonized them. The British effort (introduced by Macauley) to produce brown skinned British subjects, misfired, as many became proud and individualistic persons, aware of their rights to freedom and equality, as a result of this very education. This political elite had as its prime objective, not only to gain freedom, but to prove to the colonizers that they were equal in civilization to them. This was to counter the colonizing rhetoric that colonization was meant to 'civilize' the so-called savage natives.

Steeped in western values, these leaders, had before them the western model of civilization. Even while they espoused Indianness, in dress and speech, they were westernized from within. Therefore, it was logical that they advocated for monogamy, a caste free society and equality; none of which values were directly derived from Hindu religion although Islam and Buddhism along with tribal religions, did have equality as a prominent value. Hinduism is not a doctrinal religion and has many interpretations. Gandhi, for example, a devout Hindu, was against caste discrimination and strongly condemned untouchability, yet, he was not against caste as such. Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the great Indian sage who had inspired many and was the teacher of Swami Vivekananda, did not believe in the caste system, not because he was influenced by the west, quite contrary, he had no exposure to western culture at all, but as a realization from within. Hinduism advocates many paths, a prominent among them being Bhakti, or the way of pure devotion. From many centuries the followers on this

path have decried the caste system and also advocated for universal humanity and equality. Therefore, although the leaders were definitely influenced by their western education, they could draw upon a long tradition of equality and universal humanism from within Hinduism itself.

However, for the sake of cultural and religious plurality, the Islamic laws such as the provision of having four wives, and also the possibility of giving divorce to one's wife by just pronouncing the word Talaq three times, were continued. It was much later that these laws were challenged not from outside, but from within (The Shah Bano case). Recently, the present right wing regime has discontinued and made illegal the practice of triple talaq. It has been widely criticized by Muslim men as an attack on their identity, but silently supported by many women.

The tribal communities were also allowed to continue with their customary laws for all social and civil purposes. Yet here also many women, especially from highly patriarchal communities such as the Nagas, express their dissatisfaction at being governed by their customary laws and not by the Indian civil law that gives equal inheritance to women.

Right wing nationalism has been pressing for a uniform civil code for entire India. However, here what becomes contentious is what this Civil Code is going to be like? On one hand the Constitution grants equal rights to all religions and also ways of life supported by such religions. At the same time there is the contending question of one country and one law. The Indian Constitution was drafted keeping in mind the unique diversity of the country and its multiple traditions and ways of life. The theme had been Unity in Diversity, something that is celebrated in our National anthem as well.

As of now the discourse is alive. There are proponents of both views. There are pros and cons of both views. Having a Uniform Civil Code certainly paves the way for the emergence of a unified national identity. But the problem arises when it comes to which laws to implement. Since India had proclaimed itself a nation where all religions are to be given equal status, it poses a problem as to which is to be given prominence. In reality most of the civil laws were moulded on the western model, such as monogamy, higher age at marriage, permission for divorce and so on.

Over the years many new elements have been introduced into the Constitution, sometimes in accordance with changing times, and more recently in recognition of the indigenous value systems. A major transformation was the introduction of a Third gender in enumerations and official forms. India was the last among the South Asian countries to do this, following Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This was a symbolic denouncement of western values by a region that had always recognized more than two genders. Other major transformations had been in the Hindu succession act, where daughters are now given full inheritance rights even in ancestral property. There were changes in rape laws, where instead of the woman having to prove that she has been raped, the onus is on the man to prove himself innocent.

The Constitution Amendment Act (CAA), introduced at the end of the year 2019, has however created all round protests and disclaimers. The main argument against it is that it takes into account a person's religion as a criterion for the grant of citizenship. Although it is overtly directed at immigrants and refugees, its covert agenda is seen as insidiously targeting all Muslims, especially the marginal ones. This issue is also taken the form of a contentious discourse. But what it brings to light is the introduction of a moral universe that refers to religion as a referent.

The most fundamental premise of secularism lies in its drawing legitimacy from a moral universe that is based on universal humanism rather than on religion. The present amendment to the Constitution directly brings in religion as a referent and hence goes against secular nature of the Constitution.

5.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, the concept secularism has been discussed in its historical and political context. While western in origin overtly, one can find roots of many humanist traditions in India, even though they may still be rooted in religious ethos. A secularism based on science and rationality where the moral universe is situated away from all religious discourse however seems to be a largely western world view originating from western philosophy. This is also because it was only after the European Renaissance that religion became external to the factual world. To most other regions of the world, what is described in religion is not a belief but an ontological reality. The separation of fact from belief can be attributed to the dominance of the Protestant Church and rise of Positivist philosophy. In a region like India, it is still problematic to follow this western originated body of ideas as there is no historical background to it. The struggle of the Indian Constitution to present itself as secular in this western sense illustrates this contradiction very well. The idea of a citizen as opposed to a person embedded in social relationships is difficult to conceptualize and hence the contradictions inherent in having a secular Indian Constitution. While it is grand in principle given the social realities of India, and it is largely community based rather than individualistic life style, the secular, standalone individual as the legal person is difficult to operationalize. As of now it is only women who are fighting to be recognized as individuals with “inalienable rights” (Hasan 2000:297).

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UNIT 6 HINDUISM*

Structure

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall deal with Hinduism in the context of religious pluralism in India. After reading this unit you should be able to—

- explain the theological and metaphysical basis of Hinduism;
- describe the basic cults and deities of Hinduism;
- discuss the Hindu social institutions;
- analyse Hinduism in its historical settings ; and
- examine the emerging facets of Hinduism in the contemporary period.

*The Unit is adapted from ESO-15, Unit 19 with necessary edition.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit begins with a discussion on the theological and the metaphysical basis of Hinduism. It is recognized that it is very difficult to define Hinduism. However, there are a set of central belief systems of Hinduism. The belief systems are centred around the notion of *Brahman*, *Atman*, *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Moksha* and the ideas of purity and pollution. At the outset we discuss these belief systems. There are numerous cults and deities in Hinduism. We discuss some of the basic cults and deities in Hinduism in this unit. The Hindu way of life is reflected through the social institutions of this religion. We also discuss here the social institutions of marriage, family and inheritance in Hinduism at length. Hinduism is the oldest of all great religions of the world. In its historical setting there have been various movements in Hinduism and it has also encountered various exogenous (external) and endogenous (internal) forces. In this unit we discuss the Bhakti movement in Hinduism and the encounter of Hinduism with Islam and the West. In the last section of this unit we discuss the contemporary facets of Hinduism. Here we cover the aspects related to the efforts made towards internationalisation of Hinduism, emergence of individualized cults in Hinduism and politicization of Hinduism.

6.2 HINDUISM: THE THEOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL BASIS

Hinduism is followed by a vast majority of Indian population (more than 80%). However, Hinduism is not confined to India only. The followers of Hinduism, the Hindus, spread over to Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, Indonesia, East and South Africa, the Caribbean Islands, Guyana, Fiji, U.K., U.S.A. and Canada and in many other countries of the globe to a lesser extent.

Hinduism is an embodiment of a vast body of literature. M.N. Srinivas and A.M. Shah (1972) point out that the doctrines of Hinduism are not embodied in one sacred book, nor does Hinduism have a single historical founder. There is a vast body of sacred literature of Hinduism. These are the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Vedangas, Dharmasastras, Niboudhas, Puranas, Itihasas, Darsanas, Aganas, Mahabharata, etc. There are, not one, but innumerable gods, and it is not essential to believe in the essence of god in order to be a Hindu (358). This facet of Hinduism keeps it tolerant and open to dissent from within or without. Hence there are diverse interactions between the theological or metaphysical and the local levels of Hinduism in practice.

We should recognise that it is very difficult to define Hinduism. Hinduism unites a diverse element of beliefs and practices into a continuous whole. It covers the whole of life. It has religious, social, economic, literary and artistic aspects. Hinduism, thus, resists a precise definition, but a common code of characteristics that most Hindus share can be identified (The New Encyclopaedia of Britannica, 1985: 935).

Hinduism is the oldest of all great religions of the world. In the process of social evolution and change various sects have developed in Hinduism. Each of the sects has distinctive sets of literatures, Gods and Goddesses. However, fundamental to all Hindu sects is a set of eternal belief systems centered around the Hindu concepts of *Brahman* (universal soul) and *Atman* (individual soul), *Dharma*, *Karma*, *Artha*, *Moksha* and the ideas of purity and pollution. Let us discuss these concepts putting them in a broad societal context of Hinduism.

6.2.1 Brahman and Atman

Hindus believe in an eternal, infinite and all-embracing ultimate force called Brahman. The *Brahman* is present in all forms of life. The relationship between the *Brahman* (the universal soul) and *Atman* (the individual soul) has been the main concern in Hinduism. However, there are diverse views on this relationship. One view is that there is no existence of God and the *Brahman* is absolute and attributeless. However, most other views recognise the existence of God; and consider the issue of his relations with *Brahman* on the one hand, and the *Atman* on the other. “The *Atman*, considered to be indestructible and passes through an endless migration, or series of incarnations—human, animal or super human, is influenced by the net balance of good and bad *karma* (deeds) in previous births. The goodness or badness is defined by reference to *Dharma* (Srinivas and Shah 1972: 359). Hence let us know the meanings of *Dharma* and *Karma*.

6.2.2 Dharma

Dharma has plural meanings. It “includes cosmological, ethical, social and legal principles that provide the basis for the motion of an ordered universe. In the social context, it stands for the imperative or righteousness in the definition of good life. More specifically, *dharma* refers to the rules of social intercourse laid down traditionally for every category of actor (or moral agent) in terms of social status (*Varna*), the stage of life (*ashrama*) and the qualities of inborn nature (*guna*). (We shall discuss the relationships between these three in the following sub-sections). Put simply, for every person there is a mode of conduct that is most appropriate: it is his or her *svadharma*, which may be translated as ‘vocation’. Indeed the foundation of good life is laid down by *Dharma*. Thus *Dharma* consists of the “rational pursuit of economic and political goals (*Artha*) as well as pleasure (*Karma*)”. The goals of life (*purushartha*) also incorporate the goals of *moksha* or “freedom through transcendence from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, *Dharma*, inclusive of *artha* and *karma*, is a grand design of life, and *moksha* is the alternative” (Madan, 1989: 118-119). To be more clear let us have a brief discussion on notions of *Purusartha* (goals of a man). *Rins* (obligations) and *Varnaashram* (divisions of the society) and the interdependence among them.

a) Purusartha

There has been a constant quest towards achieving a fruitful life in Hinduism. The pursuit of certain goals has been considered inhabitable, for the achievement of such life. The integrated life of a Hindu involves the pursuit of four goals: *Dharma*, *Artha*, (material pursuits) *Kama* (love desire) and *Moksha* (salvation). The pursuit of these four fold goals is known as *purusartha*. These goals are to be pursued in a righteous way in this *samara* (the arena where the cycle of birth and rebirth continues to operate until one attains salvation). Hinduism is a holistic way of living and thinking. The full validity of Hindu life lies in the integration of the above four goals. This process puts every moment of life of a Hindu under self-examination and binds him with enormous social and spiritual obligations. Thus Hinduism calls for the voluntary and submission to the four defined obligations (*Rins*).

b) Rins

There are four important obligations (*Rins*) for a Hindu. These are obligations to the sages, to the ancestors, to god and to human beings. These obligations are fulfilled through the performance of duties in various stages of life (*ashrama*).

There are four stages of life of a Hindu. These are: Brahmacharya, Grihasta, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. In the first stage of life a young Hindu should devote to study. He leads a celibate life, and involves himself in the pursuit of knowledge. The second stage of life is that of a householder beginning with marriage. The third stage begins when the householder accepts the life of a wanderer maintaining some linkages with the household. In the last stage of life the old Hindu breaks away all ties with the household and goes to the forest and accept the life of a sage.

Vidya Nivas Misra in his book *Hindudharm: Jivan me Santan ke Khoj* (Hindi) points out that by studying scriptures, accumulating knowledge, and following a rigorous way of life a Hindu may fulfil his obligation to the sages. There are the activities of the *Brahmacharya ashram*. The obligation to the ancestors can be fulfilled by leading the life of a householder –the *Grihasth ashram*. As a householder his responsibilities are to procreate, to maintain the tradition of his ancestor, to take care of the young who are at the stage of learning, to take care of those who are at the foresters and wanderers stages of life. In the third stage of life i.e. *vanaprastha* openings are made to be one with the gods- leaving home behind the lives, the life of homelessness. “So be one with gods means to be one with all manifest powers reflected in all elements, all living beings and all nature”. This stage of life prepares him for such a manifestation. In the fourth and the final stage he fulfills his obligations to all beings. He becomes nameless, homeless wanderer and a renouncer.

c) Varna ashrama

The goals of Hindu life are achieved within the context of Hindu social organisation. There is a four-fold division of Hindu society in terms of four *varnas*: the brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and sudra. A Hindu is born into a *varna* and follows his *varnadharma* in this birth for *moksha* –the ultimate goal of life. According to Rig Veda the four varna orders emerged from the limbs of the primeval man who is a victim of the divine sacrifice that produced the cosmos. The Brahmana emerged from his mouth and are supposed to be involved in the pursuits of knowledge. The Kshatriya emerged from his arm to be the warriors and rulers; the Vaishya emerged from his thigh to be in the pursuit of trade and commerce and lastly the Sudras emerged from his feet to be in the pursuit of service of other three varnas.

It is significant that untouchables are not mentioned in the Vedic hymn (Srinivas and Shah, 1972: 358). There are innumerable number of castes within the broad fold of these varnas with ascribed occupation, social status and localised concepts of purity and pollution. Traditionally, each caste (jati) performs its *jatidharma* to achieve the goals of life.

All Hindus recognise this system and can place their identity in terms of the *varnaashram*. Most of the basic ideas on *varna* system and its links to the concepts of *Karma* and *Dharma* are universally present in the world view of Hindus.

6.2.3 Karma

The notions of *Dharma* and *Karma* are closely interlinked to each other and on many occasions they are indistinguishable and inseparable. “If *Dharma* is a social consciousness about the good life, *Karma* is the individual actor’s effort to live according to it”. The literary meaning of the notion of *Karma* is action. According to the message of *Bhagavad Gita* the direction of the *Karma* is value neutral and one must perform *Karma* without expecting the rewards which may be desirable or undesirable. It also

accords highest emphasis on the accomplishment of *Karma*. Popularly the notion of *Karma* is also related to the perceptions of birth, rebirth and salvation. It is popularly believed that an individual is born to a higher or lower caste and suffers the pains and enjoys pleasures in the present life in terms of the *Karma* he/she undertook in the past life. Again his or her future life, rebirth or salvation will be determined in terms of the *Karma* he/she undertakes in the present life. In all Indian cultural tradition all human actions have inescapable consequences. The fruits of action bring joy or sorrow depending on whether certain actions have been good or evil. Whatever cannot be enjoyed or suffered in the present life must be experienced hereafter in another birth, which may not be human birth. To be born a human being is a rare privilege because it is only through such a birth that a soul may be freed from reincarnation (Madan, 1989: 123). It is significant that there are three pragmatic aspects of the concept of *Karma* as practiced in popular Hinduism.

- i) Orthodox Hindu will explain *Karma* in terms of certain rituals in the form of worship or prayer of favourite Gods and Goddesses which are popularly known as *puja*. Though, the origin of *puja* goes back to *Vedic* period, sacrificial rituals became associated with the concept of *Karma* in the later part of the evolution of Hinduism. It is popularly believed that the direction of life (present or future) can also be determined through the performance of such *Karma*.
- ii) *Karma* has also become identified with life cycle rituals of the Hindus. It is significant that every Hindu is to follow distinctive life cycle rituals (*samskara*) at birth, marriage and death. These rituals are performed for the moral refinement of the individual to make them complete and perfect, and ultimately after death, “transform into an ancestor”. Thus the rituals give social identity to the new-born. Through the rituals of marriage the ocean of life is filled with love. “The so called rites of passage are in fact rituals of transformation and continuity in one great chain of being”.
- iii) Besides offerings of *puja* (both at home and in the temple) and performing of the life cycle rituals, offerings of prayers at the sacred places (Tirthas) are also important aspects of Hindu way of life and the *Karma*. Going on pilgrimages particularly on auspicious occasions are also scripturally recommended *Karma* (you will be able to know more about these aspects in Unit No. 29 of this course).

We may also point out that the various sects and cults in India have a very rigorous definition of *Karma* dividing them into various types and linking them to *Samsara* and *Moksha*.

It is significant to mention here that a typical Hindu wants liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. To him the *Karmic* store of accumulated merit may appear to be a trap and hereby abandon all worldly *Karma*. However, Bhagavad Gita gives a proper direction towards this dilemma. Gita emphasises on the accomplishment of *Karma* rather than the abandonment of *Karma*. It “teaches the ethics of altruism. If one performs one’s duty in a spirit of sacrifice, eliminating one’s ego and self interest, one is liberated from the fruits of action even before death. One of the most crucial statements in the Bhagavad Gita bears on this point: “Your entitlement is to *Karma* alone, never to its fruits. The hope of such fruit should not therefore be the motive for action, you should not therefore become inactive (cf. Madan, 1989: 127).

6.2.4 Moksha

The concept of *Moksha* (liberation from the chain of rebirth) is closely related to the notion of *Karma* and in turn with *Dharma*. It is the reward of the persistent good

deeds, *Karma*, that liberalise the individual from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth; and ultimately brings him in contact with the *Brahman* (the universal soul). Hindu theology is largely preoccupied with the issue of achievement of *Moksha*. Sound knowledge, good deeds and love and devotion towards God are the ways through which *Moksha* can be achieved. For acquiring knowledge an individual is required to renounce the world and lead the life of an ascetic. However, this method of achieving *Moksha* was followed only by a few. The most popular form of devotion, however, is the worship of one's chosen God according to tradition. It is significant to mention here that Bhagavad gita has given a new direction for achieving *Moksha*. The Bhagavad Gita has emphasised on the way of works and devotion to bring liberation with the reach of "man-in-the-World", including women and the lower castes. In the last hundred years the Bhagavad Gita reinterpreted by Indian political leaders, including Gandhi and Tilak, to provide the basis for live devoted to altruistic action (Srinivas & Shah 1872: 359).

6.3 BASIC CULTS AND DEITIES IN HINDUISM

It is significant that, although various sects of Hinduism follow their own sets of literature, most of the Hindus recognise the sacredness of Vedas –the oldest text of Hinduism. Vedism was almost entirely concerned with the cult of fire sacrifice (Yajna) and the continual regeneration of the universe that resulted from it. By means of the correspondences that linked the ritual to both the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, the sacrifice simultaneously contributed to the welfare of the transcendental order and furthered his own interest. These correspondences were explored in the philosophical Vedic texts, the *Upanisads* in which a search for the knowledge that would liberate man from repeated death led to the earliest formulations of Hinduism. The chief Vedic Gods are *Brahma* the creator, *Vishnu* the protector God of extension and pervasiveness and *Siva* the preserver and destroyer. It is significant that the major deities of Hinduism have many forms based on distinctive mythology. For example, *Vishnu* has a number of incarnations, the chief of which are *Rama* (man), *Krishna* (man). The idea behind the many forms is that God periodically allows himself to be reborn on earth to overcome evil and restore righteousness.

Hindu mythology has depicted numerous deities –major and minor. A significant number of these deities are the God nature viz., *Indra* (the God of Sky), *Agni* (the God of fire), *Varuna* (the God of water). The *Vahana* (vehicles) in the form of birds or animals on which Gods/Goddesses sit, the sun, moon, stars, rivers, mountains, lakes, animals, snakes are also worshipped in Hinduism. Besides, there are important localised deities in Hinduism in various parts of the country viz., goddess *Kali* and *Manasa* are popular in Bengal. Some localised deities also become universally accepted in Hinduism over a period of time viz. *Mata Santoshi* and Goddess *Vaishnadevi* of northern India, *Srivenkatesh* of Tirupati, South India.

The trends of localised manifestation of some deities and universalisation of some local deities are of great sociological significance. There are enormous ties of localised culture in the great tradition of Hinduism. These ties are often reflected in the popularity of localised deities and in the patterns of their universalisation.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Tick mark the correct answer.

Hinduism is

- 1) the youngest of all great religions
- 2) the second oldest of all great religions
- 3) emerged in the fourth century B.C.
- 4) the oldest of all great religions.

ii) Dharma provides the basis for the notion of an ordered universe based on the principles of

- 1) Cosmologies
- 2) Ethics
- 3) Social and legal
- 4) All of the above.

6.4 HINDU SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Hindu social institutions are distinctive in nature both in terms of their form and function. These social institutions ideally operate according to prescribed norms and religious sanction. Let us examine some of these institutions.

6.4.1 Caste

Caste is a hereditary social institution based on the principle of endogamy, hierarchy, occupational specialisation and purity and pollution. Complete commensality prevails only within it. There are various kinds of restrictions imposed on inter caste relationships. These restrictions are explicit in the acceptance of food and drink by the upper castes from a lower ones, their inter caste marriage, sex relation, ongoing or touching the upper castes by a lower ones etc. The implicit and explicit meanings are that the lower caste people are impure and by their simple touch they will pollute the upper caste members. Hence there are various prescribed rites for the repurification of the upper caste members. Indeed, traditional Hindu life is arranged in terms of the hierarchical orders to the caste system. It is sociologically an ascribed status group.

6.4.2 Marriage

Among the Hindus marriage is an obligatory sacrament. It is in the context that for obtaining salvation a Hindu is required to perform certain rituals towards the gods and the ancestors as prescribed in the religious texts. The rituals are performed by the male descendants. Hence every Hindu must marry to have a male descendent for salvation.

According to the ancient Hindu texts there are three main objectives of marriage. These are *dharma* (honest and upright conduct), *praja* (progeny) and *rati* (sensual pleasure). Thus according to scripture a Hindu is incomplete without a wife and male children. Some of the salient features of Hindu marriage are as follows:

- i) **Monogamy:** It is significant that monogamy (marriage of one man and one woman at a time) is the usual form of marriage in Hinduism. Polygamy was also found among some Hindus based on local customs. However, various social reform movements led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Dayanand Saraswati etc. took place in India against such practices; and the Hindu Marriage Act 1955 permits only monogamous form of marriage.
- ii) **Endogamy:** The Hindus maintain the religious and caste endogamy. The legally permitted inter-caste and inter religious marriages are very few and confined mostly among the literate sections and in the urban areas.
- iii) **Hypergamy:** According to the rule of hypergamy the status of the husband is always higher than the wife. The hypergamy emerged based on the marriage among different sub-sections of a caste or sub-caste rather than between the castes. The ancient Hindu literature permits hypergamy in the form of *anuloma* whereby a girl is married to upper sub-caste. However, it does not permit *pratiloma* whereby a girl marries a boy from lower sub-caste.
- iv) **Gotra Exogamy:** Hindus maintain the gotra exogamy. Gotra indicates the common ancestor of a clan or a family. People with common ancestor are not allowed to intermarry. In recent years gotra exogamy is defined in terms of prohibition of marriage within five generations on the mother's side and seven generations on the father's side. However, there are significant variations with regard to the practice of gotra exogamy between the Hindus in the North and the South India. In South India cross- cousin marriages are allowed, while it is strictly forbidden in North India.

6.4.3 Family

Grihastha Ashrama is the stage of family life of a Hindu. The main objective of the marriage is reflected in the Grihastha ashram. Here a Hindu performs his *Dharma* and *Karma* for the continuity of the family and his salvation. Thus, the ideal typical family of the Hindu is joint in nature where people of three generations usually live together. Hindu joint family is mostly patrilineal, virilocal, co-residential and common property ownership and a commercial unit. This family is usually composed of a man and his wife, their adult sons and their wives and children. Sometimes some other close (even distant in many cases) relatives become members of the Hindu joint family. The oldest male member of the family is the head of the family. Here sex and age are the guiding principles of the familial hierarchy.

In recent years in the wake of rapid urbanisation, industrialization, spread of commercial values, education and mass-communication, and implementation of progressive land reforms laws of the joint family system has been under severe threat in India. Indeed, nuclearisation has been the major trend. However, the sentiments of the joint family still continues among most of the Hindus which are expressed on the occasion of family ritual, patterns of ownership of property and in the exigencies of these families.

6.4.4 Inheritance

Traditionally the *Mitakshara* system of inheritance was practiced in most parts of India (except in Bengal and Assam). According to this system a son has a birth right on father's ancestral property and the father cannot dispose this property in a way which can be detrimental to the interest of the son. However, according to the *Dayabaga*

(applicable to Bengal and Assam) system of inheritance the father is the absolute owner of this property and he has the right to dispose it according to his will.

Traditionally females are not coparcenary. The customary practices only provide maintenance rights to females. Women in the patrilineal society get some movable property as *stridhana* at the time of marriage.

The Hindu Succession Act and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956 (Applicable to Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs) has established a uniform system of inheritance. According to this act a husband is legally responsible for the maintenance of his wife and children. The individual property of male Hindu, dying interstate (having made no will), passes on equal share among his son, daughter, widow and mother. Male and female heirs have come to be treated as equal in matters of inheritance and succession. This act has also given a woman the right to inherit from the father and the husband. However, women have no right to coparcenary ancestral property by birth.

6.4.5 Hindu Social Institutions

Max Weber located the stimuli of economic development within the ethics of religious belief system. To him economic development fostered in the Western World because of the rationalisation of religious ethics of Protestantism (especially of the Puritan sects) of Christianity. To him, however, such a process of rationalisation has not taken place in Hinduism. Rather he pointed out that the Hindu belief system, which centered around the doctrines of *Dharma*, *Karma* and Moksha, and the social institution of Hinduism produced an irrational and 'otherworldly' social atmosphere. This phenomenon hindered the economic development and the growth of industrial capitalism. However, the validity of the thesis of Max Weber was challenged by many scholars. For example Milton Singer (1968) pointed out that Hinduism has not hindered the growth of the same. The traditional business families in India have generated the required capital from family sources and their traditional expertise are also used for economic development. Scholars also pointed out that Hindu social institutions and belief systems have enormous elements of rationalisation and this-worldly attitudes required for economic modernisation. However, these elements of rationalisation and these worldly attitudes are to be understood in the context of the changing need of Hinduism in particular and the society in India in general.

6.5 HINDUISM IN THE HISTORICAL SETTINGS

Hinduism has undergone a process of transformation over thousands of years. The Vedic ritualism and Upanishadic philosophies played significant roles in Hinduism. Indeed transformation started in Hinduism with the message of Bhagvad Gita, which added the notion of Bhakti (devotion) in Hinduism. Hinduism acquired new dimensions in Bhakti cult. Besides the Bhakti cult, Hinduism has also to encounter with forces of Islam and the West. Let us examine Hinduism in the context of these broad social and historical processes.

6.5.1 Bhakti

There are various important facets of the Bhakti movement. Let us begin with the important facets that the message of Gita initiated.

i) Bhagavad Gita

Bhagavad Gita recognized the Vedic rituals and Upanishadic philosophy of knowledge as the legitimate ways to attain self-realisation which is the goal of life of an ideal Hindu. Hence to the paths of Karma (action) and Jnana (knowledge) the Gita added the path of Bhakti (devotion). This revived the elements of theistic elements in Hinduism. “After describing the ways of action, knowledge and devotion, the Bhagavad Gita enjoins the seekers to abandon all three ways to seek refuge in God so as to be free of the burden of all moral imperfection. This call to total surrender is as much intellectual as it is devotional” (Madan, 1989: 127).

ii) Alvars

The devotional movement for the first time flourished in South India towards the end of eighth century A.D. among the non-Brahmin groups which expressed the strong desire for theism after Jainism and Buddhism had spread all over India. The followers of this movement were known as the *Alvars* (that is those with an intuitive knowledge of God who were engaged in complete immersion in Him). They questioned the *dharmas* of caste and gender. They tried to exceed such relationships through personal devotion to deities like Siva and Vishnu. The *Alvars* emphasised on the constant companionship of God. However, they expressed their preoccupation with *Viraha* (separation from God). *Nammalvar* was prominent among the Alvars who put forward the notion of devotion as assumption of femininity by the devotee in relation to God *Vishnu* (ibid, 128). Hence love of women for Vishnu symbolises the love of the devotees for supreme soul, the God.

iii) Jayadeva, Srichaitanya and Mira

The love stories of unmarried Krishna (reincarnation of Vishnu) and Radha have got the central place in the Bhakti movement. It emphasised on total devotion to God as a means to self-realisation. In this movement Krishna is symbolised as the supreme soul and Radha as the individual soul. Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*, written on the eternal love of Radha and Krishna in the later part of 12th century, has spread all over the country. The origin of many of the Vaishnava sects is located in this movement. In the 16th century Srichaitanya in Bengal, Vallabha in Gujarat, Mira in Rajasthan were possessed with the love of Krishna. Bhakti movement got momentum in the given path of total devotion to Krishna as followed by them.

iv) Sura Das, Tulsidas and Kabir

It is significant that intense religious devotion was also expressed the luminaries of medieval Bhakti Movement in the songs of Sura Das on Krishna (in Brijbhasha), Tulsi Das on Rama (in Avadhi) and in Kabir's devotionism. “Tulsi's bhakti was that of servant (dasa) devoted to the service of his divine master. The love of God for the devotee, who dwells on his own imperfection and therefore on divine grace, is a central theme of Tulsi's sublime poetry... Kabir's devotionism was centered on a personalised god in human form, however, but on an abstract and formless conception of the divine (Madan, 1989: 131).

6.5.2 Encounter with Islam

Hinduism has been responding to the external religious influences since the classical period. It was responded to distinctive Islamic and the Western influences for almost

ten and five centuries respectively. Let us mention here some of the impact of the encounter of Hinduism with Islam.

It is very difficult to assess the impact of Islam on Hinduism since it has various dimensions. Hinduism dealt with the periodic outbreaks of violence since the time of the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni into North-west India (977-1030). These invasions led to the development of Hindu ideal of territorial kingdom “as the mode for the protection of Hindu values”. Hence the defence of Hindu traditions against Islam came first from the Rajputs of Rajasthan, then the rulers and successors of Vijayanagar Kingdom of South India (133-18th century) and the Marathas in Maharashtra from late sixteenth century to the close of 18th century. As an immediate impact of the dominance of the Muslim rule “conservative and puritanical tendencies gained momentum in orthodox Hinduism” particularly with regard to the strictness of the caste and purity of women. However, there are many evidences to show that over years various Muslim themes and features have been incorporated into popular Hindu myths and rituals. Significantly while the orthodox, popular and the domestic form of Hinduism thus drew in on themselves, Hindu sectarian traditions multiplied under the influence of Islam. Notable of these were those of the *Bhakti* cult of Chaitanya in Bengal and Sant tradition of North India by Kabir (1440-1518) from Banaras and Nanak (1469-1539) from Punjab. Kabir and Nanak propagated devotion to one God “that combined aspects of Islamic *Sufism* and Hindu *Bhakti*. They brought in Hinduism an exclusivist monotheism like that found in the tradition of Islam. Their teachings rejected both the caste system and idol worship. Guru Nanak laid the foundation of Sikhism that synthesised philosophies of Islam and Hinduism.

Emperor Akbar in his *Din-Elahi* synthesised Islam and Hinduism. He propagated religious tolerance. However, his successors abandoned his path and followed *expansionist* policies. These policies of expansion aroused resistance from the heirs of the Vijaynagar and the Rajpur Kingdoms, and also from the Sikhs and the Marathas. ‘The seeds of a nationalist vision of Hinduism may be traced through these movements (Hiltebeitel 1987: 358).

6.5.3 Encounter with the West

Hinduism has been widely influenced by West and the beliefs and practices of Christianity. Various reform movements started in Hinduism in the 19th century as the direct impact of Christianity. The *Brahmo Samaj* was founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828 which advocated monotheism and rejected the caste order, idolatry and animal sacrifice.

The *Arya Samaj* was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. This movement rejected the Puranic Hinduism and attempted the return of Vedic Hinduism. According to them image worship has no sanction of Veda. They also advocated monotheism. They denied the religious base of caste and the varna.

Rama Krishna Mission was founded in 1897. Swami Vivekananda carried forward the activities of this mission on the line of traditional Hindu values. The followers of this mission uphold strong tradition of Bhakti and tantric strains along with Vedanta philosophy and Ramakrishna’s experiences of the oneness of all religions through visions not only of Hindu deities but of Jesus and Allah. Rama Krishna Mission aims the propagation of a modern and activist version of Hinduism. It is engaged in a variety of cultural, educational and social welfare activities and has branches in cities throughout the world. The Rama Krishna Mission, modeled after the European Christian missions

of the nineteenth century in India, has itself provided a model for numerous other Hindu organisations (Srinivas, 1992: 130).

To eradicate some evil customs and practices as traditionally followed in Hinduism several religious organisations came into being during the British rule. These organisations also took up the task of the promotion of education and social reform. As a result of prolonged contact with West various significant changes have taken place in Hinduism. Some of these changes can be listed here:

- a) Activist streak in Hinduism has received significant attention and the Bhagavad Gita has become the single most important book of the Hindus.
- b) Leaders of various Hindu religious institutions are now undertaking various social reform and welfare activities viz. running of schools, colleges, hospitals etc.
- c) The idea of purity and pollution, which permeated daily life, life cycle rituals, and the inter-caste relations, particularly by the higher castes, are rapidly weakening, especially in the urban areas. A caste-free Hinduism is supported by the cult of the new godmen (e.g. Sri Saibaba etc.) in Hinduism.
- d) Another change has been that of the “emergence of militant forms of Hinduism, partly in response to the evangelical activities of the missionaries among the Harijans and tribals, and to the appearance of separationist tendencies among certain religious and ethnic minorities in India (Srinivas 1992: 1).

It is significant to note here that Hinduism has also influenced other religions in India. Many of the important traits of Hinduism are found among other religious groups- Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and the Jains. Indeed, conversion to any other religions does not necessarily dissolve the caste order. Occupational specialisation, caste endogamy, social distance etc. are practised even after conversion.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Explain how Bhagavad Gita revived the theistic elements in Hinduism?

6.6 HINDUISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

In recent years Hinduism has acquired various new dimensions most important of which have been the efforts towards internationalisation of Hinduism, emergence of various personalized cults in Hinduism and politicisation of Hinduism. In the following sub-sections, we shall be dealing with these aspects with the help of some case studies.

6.6.1 Internationalisation of Hinduism

There have been numerous efforts for internationalisation of Hinduism. The Rama Krishna Mission and International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) have made important efforts in this matter.

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

The devotional Hinduism with its missionary aspiration was spread over the U.K., U.S.A., Canada and other Western Nations by the followers of ISKCON, popularly known as Hare Krishna cult. It has become an international movement with numerous centres all over the world, especially in the English speaking world. The founder of this

society was A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, a Bengali by birth. He was initiated by his guru Bhaktivedanta Saraswati to the path of Bhakti in 1922 in the devotional line of Chaitanya. He gave up the householder's life in 1954 and became an ascetic by 1959. Bhaktivedanta Swami went to USA in 1965 to spread the message of Srimad Bhagavatam there in the USA. Slowly his followers grew in New York, Los Angeles, Berkeley, Boston and Montreal. Bhaktivedanta Swami established various centres of ISKCON in those places with its headquarters in Los Angeles. There he printed more than fifty volumes of translations and original works of his guru.

Recitation of the name of Lord Sri Krishna was considered instrumental for salvation by the followers of ISKCON movement. Hence they performed public chanting of the Hare Krishna Mantra. Thus over the years the Krishna Consciousness movement has been visible in the English speaking world.

Bhaktivedanta has introduced several practices for the ISKCON followers viz., wearing of traditional Indian saffron dress and shaving of heads by the male devotees and wearing of saris by the female devotees, early rising and timely devotional services etc. ISKCON has spread over to every continent of the globe. Bhaktivedanta expired in Vrindavan in 1977. Just before his death he appointed eleven disciples as initiating guru to keep the Chaitanya chain disciples unbroken and missionise the rest of the world. By early 1980s ISKCON branches grew rapidly in many overseas areas, where they found more tolerant environments (Shiva, 1987: 267).

It is necessary to point out that ISKCON is only one example and that Hinduism based cults have spread all over the world.

6.6.2 Individualised Cults

Hinduism has been a breeding ground for the emergence of personalised religious cults in recent years. Some of these cults have received wide attention from their followers. Satya Sai Baba, Acharya Rajness, Muktananda etc. are prominent among them. Here for your specific understanding of this phenomenon we shall be discussing the cult of Satya Sai Baba as a case study.

Satya Sai Baba

In contemporary India Satya Sai Baba is the most famous deity saint in Hinduism. He is worshipped by his followers as the Avatar. His followers have increased tremendously in recent years.

Satya Sai Baba was born in a village called Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh. He belonged to the Raju Caste and was named Satyanarayana by his parents. He was fond of bhajan (devotional songs) and performing of Hindu mythological dramas during his young and school days.

As claimed by Satya Sai Baba and accepted and propagated by his followers Satya Sai Baba is the reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi in Maharashtra. He is the embodiment of Lord Shiva and is consort Shakti in one soul. Lawrence Babb writes that Sathya Sai Baba's assertion of divine status is expressed in first person; he states it boldly and repeatedly. He has come in the present age of wickedness and misery; he says, not merely to alleviate individual misfortunes (though he does this for his devotees), but to set the whole world right, to usher in a "Sai Age". In the form of Shirdi Sai Baba his mission was to establish Hindu-Muslim unity; in the present incarnation he will re-establish Vedic and Shastric religion. On his rebirth as Prem Sai, he will be born in

Karnataka and bring all his work to completion (Babb 1991: 284). The followers of Sai Baba are not only the Hindus. There are Muslims, Christians, and others among his prominent followers.

Though he is the manifestation of all gods and goddesses, his dominant identity is that of Shiva. He is portrayed in association with Shiva. Mahashivratri is the most important festival of this cult. In this festival Satya Sai Baba materialises vast quantities of vibhuti (Sacred Ash) from his hand and Shivalingam (which symbolizes God Shiva) from his mouth.

This cult has rapidly attracted a large number following not only in India but also abroad. Majority of his devotees are from urban middle classes. His devotees recognise him as “Bhagwan”. Baba attracts followers by his personal charisma and the miracles he often performs. He also cures the illness of his devotees. However, Baba often maintains distance from his followers living in his “personal constituency” and giving only occasional darshan.

Some basic features of Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings are as follows: He does not impose strict rules of conduct on his devotees. Moderate and vegetarian diets, avoidance of alcohol and smoking, practice of householder’s life and celibacy after age of fifty, tolerance, gentleness and kindness towards others, non-violence are encouraged by him. He also suggests meditations of the God (who is in fact Baba) for inner peace. A significant aspect of Baba’s teaching is that he considers the influence of Western culture as inimical to India. To him Indian folk traditions should be adhered to. Thus he professes a cultural nationalism.

He recognises inherent inequalities existing in the society. Though he has discontent against the present day state, he does not advocate radical change in the existing economic and social institutions.

Social service is an important aspect of the cult of Satya Sai Baba. Feeding the poor, assisting authorities in the relief work, expansion of education, child development are some of the important areas of social service of the cult.

What is sociologically important here is that Baba attracts a large number of followers through the performance of his charisma repeatedly. He also legitimates his position in term of the Hindu notion and rebirth and karma. He however has incorporated the missionary zeal of social service in his regular activities. The charisma and legitimacy of Sai Baba is accepted not only by the common followers but also by some of the prominent social, political and business elites of the country.

6.6.3 Politicisation of Hinduism

In Hinduism there has always been a tradition of tolerance and hospitality to other religions. These elements of tolerance and hospitality have paved the way to declare India a secular state. It is significant that in the nineteenth century there were the revivalist tendencies and attempts in Hinduism advocating a return to the *Vedas* and occasionally Indian nationalism was expressed itself in the Hindu idiom. However, during the British rule in India there emerged a group of westernised elite which “while rooted in the country and its tradition, was committed to independence, democracy, egalitarianism and secularism. It is this elite that not only declared India a secular state but also attempted whole heartedly to establish the principle of equity of man (Srinivas and Shah 1972: 364).

The constitution has declared India a “Sovereign Secular Socialistic Democratic Republic”. In the process of democratic functioning of the state and the society our religious life has been widely politicised in recent years. Politicisation has emerged as a pervasive process in post-independence India. Religion is not free from this process. In recent years Hinduism has been politicised for certain political ends. In general, protection of the interest of the Hindus, creation of Hindu Rashtra etc. have been the major objectives of such a process of politicisation of Hinduism.

While discussing politicisation of Hinduism, the activities of RSS and its front organisations are generally widely discussed. Let us know briefly the origin and activities of the RSS. The RSS was founded in Maharashtra in 1925-26 by Dr.K.B.Hedgewar. The RSS operates at the political level through its various front organisations viz., Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh, Vidyarthi Parishad etc. In recent years it has been using the wider front organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. In the passage of time the RSS has acquired well-defined ideology of the RSS which is explicitly represented by Hindu nationalism. Creation of a Hindu Rashtra and bringing of all round glory to the Hindu Rashtra are the main objectives of the RSS. Golwalkarji writes:

“The non-Hindu population of Hindustan must adopt the Hindu culture and languages, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of glorification of Hindu race and culture, i.e. they must not give up their attitude of intolerance and ungratefulness towards this land and its age long tradition but also must cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead, in a word, they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation....”. Ideologically the RSS equates Hindus with the Aryans and its characteristic Vedic age as the Golden Age of India.

In recent years India has visualised a considerable increase of the efforts towards politicisation of Hinduism. There has been the growth of fundamentalism as well. M.N. Srinivas has made an important observation on this emerging phenomenon. To him: in the last few decades Hinduism has had to cope with certain momentous changes such as the division of Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan, the latter being theocratic state. That period also saw the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel and Buddhist states in Sri Lanka and Burma. It also witnessed the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in a vast region extending from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific. How can Hinduism remain immune to all these forces and events? To him fundamentalism in Hinduism has grown as a matter of challenge faced by it, because of the growth fundamentalism in other religions and also in the neighbouring countries (Srinivas 1992: 16).

Whatsoever may be the reason for the growth of fundamentalism in Hinduism, the facts remain that there has been deliberate tendency to politicise Hinduism as a means to gain power. However, reaction of the average Hindus towards such development is of great significance. Through democratic process they have upheld the noble tradition of tolerance and hospitality of Hinduism and the secular basis of the nation.

6.7 LET US SUM UP

Hinduism is the oldest of all great religions of the world. It has encountered various forces in various historical settings. However, the central belief system has remained eternal to Hinduism. We discussed in this unit the central belief system of Hinduism as

reflected in the notions of *Brahman*, *Atman*, *Dharma*, *Karma*, *Moksha*, and the notion of purity and pollution. We also discussed the basic cults and deities in Hinduism.

The social institutions of marriage, family and inheritance are also discussed in this unit. The Bhakti Movement in Hinduism and the encounter of Hinduism with Islam and the West are discussed at length. Lastly we discussed the emerging facts of Hinduism. Here we discussed the effort towards internationalisation of Hinduism, emergence of individual cults in Hinduism and politicisation of Hinduism based on some case studies.

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6.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) 4)

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Bhagvad Gita suggests the paths of action (Karma), knowledge and devotion for self-realisation. Bhagavad Gita finally enjoins the seekers to abandon all these paths and to seek refuge in God so as to be free from the burden of all imperfections.

UNIT 7 ISLAM*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 The Advent of Islam
- 7.3 Tenets of Islam
 - 7.3.1 Islamic Concept of God
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 - 7.3.3 The Book of God
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 - 7.3.5 The Day of Judgement or Resurrection
 - 7.3.6 The Duty of a Muslim
- 7.4 Major Schools of Thoughts, Movements and Sects
 - 7.4.1 Major Schools of Islamic Thoughts and Movements
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7.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to—

- explain the pre-Islamic conditions prevailing in Arabia and the advent of Islam;
- discuss the meaning of Islam and its sources and tenets;
- describe major schools of Islamic thought and sects;
- explain the social organization; and
- describe the Islamic society in India.

*This Unit has been adapted from ESO-15, Unit 22.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the plurality of Indian culture and civilisation Islam played a crucial role. The life style of the Islamic society is shaped by the tenets of Islam. As a student of sociology you should be interested to know the belief of that society. You would also be interested to know the movements and the conditions leading to the emergence of various sects in that society. We should also know the organisational arrangements of that society through which the belief system operates in daily life. Towards this effort in this unit, we shall discuss the tenets of Islam, the movement schools of thought and sects in the Islamic society in a socio-historical perspective. We shall also touch upon the social organisations of that society briefly. We shall begin our analysis with an introductory note on the pre-Islamic conditions prevailing in Arab society to know the historical context of emergence of Islam, its sources and tenets. Apart from this, we shall highlight the major schools in Islamic thought and its various sects. Various social institutions like marriage, divorce, institution governing inheritance in communities following Islam will also be discussed in this unit. An attempt will be made in this unit to analyse the influence of Islamic teachings on social structure. Lastly, we will describe briefly the Islamic society in India.

7.2 THE ADVENT OF ISLAM

Before the advent of Islam, the Arab Society was confronted with many social problems. It was a tribal society. It was centred around a tribe or a kindred. It was a patriarchal society in which all rights were available to the male members and female members were not entitled to any right and were treated like a commodity. They were exchanged and even offered to the guest for sexual pleasure. Over all, the Arab society was confronted with many such evils and the society reached to the point of degeneration. Social reformers and people of wisdom started thinking of bringing reform in the Arabian society. Prophet Mohammad was also perturbed by the decadence in the religious life of the Arabs. He sought an opportunity of chastening their morals by placing before them new values of life. He tried to bind people on the bases of faith rather than on the old bond of blood. This new community was the community of Islam which was based on the brotherhood. The word Islam literally means “Absolute submission to God’s will”, but this does not imply any idea of fatalism. In its ethical sense, it signifies striving after the ideal of righteousness. The word Islam is also derived from a root word which means “peace”. Thus the true Muslim submits to God’s will and obeys His Commandments, and lives at peace with his fellow men.

7.3 TENETS OF ISLAM

Islam does not profess to be a new religion formulated by the Prophet Mohammad but is the continuation of all former religious principles decreed by God through His revelations to all prophets including Moses and Jesus. Islam demands faith in:

- God
- The Angels of God
- The Book of God
- The Apostles of God
- The Day of Judgement or Resurrection

7.3.1 Islamic Concept of God

Every Muslim believes in God's oneness, that He is one and has no partner, that He is omnipotent, all-powerful, eternal, and is every-qualified with the attributes of supreme greatness. All are humble unto Him. All should seek exaltation through Him and humility unto Him, for they all are mere subordinate creatures seeking His favour and most favoured by Him are the pious ones who obey His commandments.

7.3.2 The Angels of God

God has created the Angels. All Muslims must have faith in their existence but they are not to be worshipped. They are created and are free from carnal desires.

7.3.3 The Book of God

It is the belief of Muslims that God has sent Books in different ages in which God revealed. Muslims believe in Holy *Quran* which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

7.3.4 The Messengers of God

As Muslims believe in the Books revealed by God, they also believe in the messengers sent by God in different ages to reclaim mankind from infidelity, idolatry and superstition. The Holy Quran makes no distinction between the Prophets sent by God but according to them Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet of God.

7.3.5 The Day of Judgement or Resurrection

The Muslims also have belief in the Day of Judgement. The dead shall rise from their graves, and every individual shall give an account of his or her own actions. Muslims also have belief in Heaven and Hell.

7.3.6 The Duty of a Muslim

Apart from these beliefs, a Muslim should do the following duties.

- i) Recital of the creed
- ii) Prayer to God five times a day –at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, directly after sunset, and an hour-and-a-half later. A special midday congregational prayer with sermon is binding on Fridays.
- iii) Paying to *Zakat* or legal alms which is a form of charitable tax.
- iv) Fasting during the month of “Ramzan”, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar.
- v) Haj i.e. Pilgrimage to the ‘Holy Kaba’ in Mecca once in a life time by those who can afford it.

Through these practices of devotion, a Muslim becomes the master over his passions and desires and attains, through worship and observance of Islamic rules, the apex of dignity, human conduct and elevation of mind. Thus according to Islam, a Muslim must have faith in the above mentioned beliefs and must practise the above mentioned practices in order to surrender before the “Will” of God and hence attain a place in the Heaven after his death.

Activity 1

Prepare a two hundred words note on the duty of a Muslim performed by your Muslim friends/colleagues/persons known to you. Exchange your note with other students in the Study Centre, if possible.

7.4 MAJOR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHTS, MOVEMENTS AND SECTS

No religious beliefs and practices operate in isolation. It has to encounter the world around. In this process it influences others and also get influenced. Let us know how Islam encountered the world. Even though the Quran being a guiding principle for the Muslims to carry out their life according to its teachings but as it migrated to other parts of the world its institutions were affected by conditions in different regions during the centuries of their existence. There is a *principle of movement in Islam*, and Muslim institutions and the Muslim way of life have changed in terms of space and time. Let us try to understand the nature and scope of this principle of movement in Islam.

Box 1

In the absence of a clear and categorical answer from the Holy Book (Quran), the absolute word of God, the prophets' decisions—His percepts, His acts and practices' negative as well as positive—were regarded as decisive. An inherent conservatism canonised the *Sunna*—Custom, usage of the ancients; any stepping aside from it was '*bidda*' innovation and had to win its way by its merits, in the teeth of strong prejudice. Islam did exchange this practice and replaced it by the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. After the death of Prophet Muhammad, *four* schools came into being to interpret and provide guidance in dispensing justice. As a matter of fact the use of judicial opinion was seriously questioned and its scope precisely defined in the ninth century A.D. Under the *Abbasids* the sources of Muslims law were discussed, and the four schools founded in this period defined the scope of legal friction and equity in the development of Muslim law. These four schools are discussed below briefly.

7.4.1 Major Schools of Islamic Thoughts and Movements

i) **Abu Hanifa (AD 699-766)**

He founded a school of Islamic jurisprudence and opined that when *Quran* and *Sunna* are silent about a problem, this school emphasized the role of '*Quran*', reasoning by analogy, to guide the people to carry out the activities.

ii) **Malik Ibn Anas (AD 713-95)**

Another School of Islamic law was founded by Malik Ibn Anas. According to this school *Quran*, *Sunna* and *Ujma* (all religious scriptures) should become the basis of the interpretation of new situation.

iii) **Ash-Shafi (AD 767-820)**

This School was founded with the intention that the traditions of Prophet Mohammad

should become the main source of the interpretation instead of individual opinion, *istihasham*, as well as *istislah*. He fell back on the principle of agreement, *ijma*.

iv) **Ahmad Ibn Hambal (AD 780-855)**

This School minimized the role of *ijma* and *Qiyas* in the interpretation of law and stressed the Quran and Sunna as the primary roots of Islamic law.

v) **Ibn-i-Taimiyya (13 Century)**

After these schools, certain movements were started to interpret and provide solution to the problem arising out of changing situations to the Muslims. Ibn-i-Taimiya in the 13th Century provided the basis of the reorientation of Islamic belief and practices according to Quranic injunctions and the traditions of the Prophet.

7.4.2 Sects in Islamic Society

Followers of Islam are divided into various sub-divisions in terms of sects. Broadly speaking the Muslim world is divided into fairly defined sections of Islam, namely, *Sunni* and *Shiah*, the first being by far the larger and more influential.

i) **The Sunni**

The Sunnis are the ardent followers of the faith in the Sunna or Traditions. But they differ from the Shias in points other than belief in tradition. They made the position of the Khalifa a matter for selection or choice by the selected people of the community. They assert that Muhammad never intended that a Khalifa should succeed him in any other way.

ii) **The Shiah**

This is another sect of Muslims who only differ from the Sunnis in terms of hereditary right of the descendents of Muhammad to be the only legitimate *Khalifa*. They say that the three *Khalifas*—Abu Bakr, Omar and Osman were imposters and usurpers, and only Ali and his heir should have followed the Prophet as leaders or Iman of the faithful. They emphasise the right of Ali from the fact of his nearness of relationship, he being not only the Prophet's cousin, but the husband of Fatima, the only surviving daughter of Prophet Muhammad.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Describe the meaning of Islam in five lines.
- ii) Mention duties expected of a Muslim.
- iii) Indicate the major sects of Islam and points of difference among them in five lines.

7.5 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AS VIEWED BY ISLAM

The belief system of the religious organizations are operated through certain social institutions. As a student of sociology, you should be interested to know the very nature of these institutions. There are three main bases of the Muslim social institutions.

- Family

- Marriage, divorce
- Institutions governing inheritance

In this section we shall try to present a broad view of these institutions within the Islamic religious and social order.

7.5.1 The Family

Family has existed in all societies though it takes different forms in different cultures. The institution of family in Islam should be studied in the light of Islamic way of life and Islamic culture. Islam has given full importance to family and laid down certain rules and regulations to maintain its shape and to stop it from disintegration. About one third of the Quran and many traditions of the Prophet are related to the family and to process how a family can work properly and smoothly and how every member of the family can have equal rights.

In Islam the family is an extended family – taking within it members from three or four generations. Its structure has generally three folds. The first and most close consists of the husband, the wife their children, their parents who live with them and their servants. The second group of the family consists of a number of close relatives with whom marriage is prohibited. It is not necessary for them to live together. They have claims upon each other. This relationship emerges from blood relations, relations by marriage and foster nursing. Relations based on blood include the following categories:

- Father, mother, grand-father, grand-mother and other direct ascendants.
- Direct descendants that is, sons, daughters, grand-sons, grand-daughters etc.
- Relations of the second degree (such as brothers, sisters and their descendants),
- Father's or mother's sister (not their daughter or other descendants),

The relations based on relations by marriage include:

- Mother-in-law, father-in-law, grand-mother-in-law, grand-father-in-law,
- Wife's daughter, husbands' sons or their grand or great grand-daughters or sons respectively,
- Son's wife, son's son's wife, daughter's husband, step mother, step father.

It is significant to mention here that a number of religions decrees asked people to consider their slaves and servants as part of the family and should be give them proper treatment.

The family, with all its contributory and co-existing factors, forms the nucleus of the total Islamic order. Those relations which are not included in these three folds forms the outer layer of the family. As they are included in the second or third lines of the inheritors, they too have their rights and obligations.

a) Objectives and Functions of Family

The main objective of family is the preservation of human society and civilisation. The whole socio-cultural structure is based on it. It is just like a mechanism which is self-sustaining in order to ensure social, ideological and cultural stability over entire society.

The main functions and objectives of the family as described in *Quran* and *Shariah* are as follows:

i) **Preservation and Continuation of Human Race**

The mechanism of preservation and reproduction is based on the survival of human race and culture, and continuity in the functioning. For this purpose, nature has provided differences, both psychological and physiological, between the sexes. Both the sexes are complimentary to each other. This process of procreation and all the facts effecting it, can only function when the whole process will have stable structure. Men, women and child, they all have a definite role to play while living in a society. They all need a stable and lasting institution so that they can perform their roles well. The family is considered as the main institution which can take care of the whole process. The Quran says:

“O Mankind, be conscious of your duty to your Lord, who created you from a single soul, created of life nature, his mate, and from the two created and spread many men and women” (Holy Quran Ayat. – 4:1).

“Your Women are a tillage for you; so come in to your tillage as you wish and take care of what is for you, and be conscious of your duty to God and know that you shall meet him” (Holy Quran Ayat – 2: 223).

Here “take care of what is for you’ means the children expected from this relationship, their education, upbringing, moral training and socialisation.

ii) **Protection of Morals**

Islam forbids non-marital sex in all its forms. But marriage is a substitute which enables men and women to fulfil their urge which is quite natural and procreative.

iii) **Psycho-Emotional Stability – Love and Kindness**

To maintain psychological emotional and spiritual fellowship is the other important objective of family. The relationship between husband and wife is spiritual and not of selfishness. This function of marriage and family is emphasized in the Quran in a number of ways. At one place, the relationship of husband and wife is described as that of body and garment. “They are like garment to you and you are (like) a garment to them” (Holy Quran-Ibid-2-187).

This expresses and emphasises their closeness and oneness much more grand than legal equality. As cloth protects the body in the same way husband protects the wife and they become guardians to each other.

iv) **Socialisation and Value Orientation**

Family is supposed to be the basic organ of socialisation. And this is referred by prophet at various places in *Hadith* when he said that “of all that a father can give to his children; the best is their good education and training”.

Although to take care of one’s children, and younger brother and sister is the primary responsibility, the family covers a number of relatives far or near. Quran and *Shariah* has emphasised at several places on the care of parents and of the relatives who are poor and weak.

v) Social and Economic Security

Social and economic rights of the family members are saved by the institution of family, which is an important part of the Islamic system. The Prophet has said:

“When God endows you with prosperity, spend first on yourself and your family”.

The husband is legally directed to look after his family even if the wife holds the property. Blood relatives should be helped and it is emphasised at a number of places. Any social contribution and *Zakat*, poor relatives have first claim over it.

7.5.2 Marriage and Divorce

For the preservation of family and to make this institution function smoothly, marriage is enjoined and encouraged vigorously. The Prophet emphasised the necessity of marriage saying “To live in marriage is to observe my way. He who turns away from this way is not of me”.

The Islamic view of marriage is that it is a means of reproduction and not the means of satisfying sexual desire. This is made clear by a very short saying of Prophet.

“Marry and generate”

The Arabic word for marriage is “*nikah*” which means uniting. Except for some special reason, every Muslim is supposed to marry.

Box 2

Quran declares marriage as a contract, a contract between husband and wife. The marriage contract is entered into by the agreement from both the parties, that is the parties of husband and wife. This agreement is made in the presence of some witnesses, and this is only essential while making the presence of some witnesses, and this is only essential while making a marriage contract. At the time of marriage, a particular amount is settled for the woman which is called *mehr*; but the marriage is also valid even if the *mehr* is not settled or the amount of the money to be given is not fixed.

a) Prohibited Marital Ties

The Quran makes certain marriage relationship unlawful:

“Forbidden unto you are your mothers, and your daughters, and your sisters, and your father’s sister, and your mother’s sister and your brother’s daughters and your sisters’ daughters, and your foster mother, and your foster sister and your mother-in-law and your step daughters. And that (it is forbidden unto you) that you should not marry two sisters at a time.”

A woman should not marry a man who is already married to her paternal aunt.

b) Types of Marriage

i) Polygamy

Before Mohammad, the number of wives depended upon the will of Arabian people and their social and economic conditions. They were free to marry at any time and this marriage was supposed to be valid. The new rules which

came into practice, in the time of Prophet was the check on the number of wives. Quran restricted this number to four but side by side; Quran makes it necessary to treat all the four equally.

ii) Banning of Polyandry

As a rule, Islam does not allow woman, in any case, to marry more than one husband at a time.

iii) Muta marriage

From pre-Islamic times, there exists another type of marriage called *Mutamariage*. The object of this marriage was to provide a man with a wife when he is away from home for any reason. The distinguishing character of this type of marriage is that this contract is purely personal and it is made without any consultation with the relatives of the woman. The children of such marriages are legitimate and they have equal share in the property of the father, but unlike the ordinary wife, the wife in such marriage has no legal right of maintenance over the husband. She does not even inherit the property of her husband, nor does her husband has any share in her property.

In Iran and other Shiate countries, this is a very common practice to take a woman for fixed period. This time varies from a day to a year or several years. However, all the sects of Muslims agree that this type of marriage is unlawful and illegal except *Akharishiahs*.

c) Divorce

In Islam, marriage is just a civil contract. The Prophet framed the laws of marriage and divorce in such a way that it ensures the permanence of marriages without affecting the freedom of the individual. The total body of Islamic law is governed by the principle of flexibility that is why under certain circumstances it allows more than one wife, and favours the dissolution of marriage. Sometimes in married life such situations do arise when it becomes very difficult for both husband and wife to live together. In such situations either the dissatisfied husband or dissatisfied wife was compelled to exercise this right of divorce. But this step is taken as the last resort when all the attempts at reconciliation fail. The Prophet has condemned divorce in most serious terms by pronouncement that:

“Of all the things permissible the most displeasing to Allah is divorce”.

Even when divorce becomes necessary, the parties are enjoined to honour each other's rights. They should separate from each other to kindness and the man in no case allowed to take back any of the gifts or property he has given to the wife.

i) Husband's Right of Pronouncement of Divorce

Although Quran permits husband to pronounce divorce yet a lot of limitations are put upon the exercise of this right. Certain conditions were imposed by the Prophet upon exercising the right of divorce which on one hand put a check on the use of one sided and unwise power, and on the other hand it provided enough time for the husband and wife for an agreement if they so desire. The types of divorce which are recognised by the Islamic law, the one which has got the approval of the Holy Prophet is the *Ahsan* type of Talaq.

This form of divorce involves the following conditions each of which provides a way for reconciliation or prevent from permanent break up.

- The husband, in the first place, must pronounce only *one repudiation*, the object of this limitation being, that he may subsequently, *when better* sense prevails, revoke the repudiation.
- The repudiation must be pronounced when the wife is in a state of purity, and there is no bar to sexual intercourse, it being declared unlawful to pronounce repudiation when the wife is in menses.
- The husband must abstain from connubial intercourse with his wife after pronouncing repudiation for the period of three months.

The purpose of this tradition is to avoid hasty decision on the part of the husband. The time period which is provided to the husband through disinclination arising from the wife's impurity, and by fixing a long period of abstinence, is enough to reconsider his decision of divorce. In the meantime, he can repent and can take back his wife before the expiry of the term fixed. But if the time period fixed passes and reconciliation is not made, the wife becomes unlawful to him.

ii) Wife's Right of Divorce

Like every other institution, women are given an equally balanced position regarding divorce. The wife can ask her husband to give her a divorce but she has to return back *mehr* (the dowry). The technical term for the wife's right to divorce is called *khula*. The wife can take a divorce under these conditions.

- The wife can take divorce if her husband is missing for seven years and cannot be located.
- If the wife fails to return the *mehr* which is necessary in *Khula*, there is yet another way by which a wife can get separation from her husband and that is *Mubarat*. In this type no compensation is necessary and complete separation can be sought just by mutual consent of the husband and wife.
- If husband ill-treats his wife, and is abusive and brutal she should complain against her husband and she can have the formal separation by the decree of court.

If the judge finds her complaints true, he asks the husband to repudiate her. In case the husband refuses to do so, the judge himself will pronounce a repudiation, and it will operate as valid, and the husband will be liable to pay whole of the deferred dowry. This process is known as *Tafriq* or legal reparation in the Mohammadan law, and it is based on the words of Muhammad:

"If a Woman be prejudiced by a marriage, let it be broken off".

A divorce may be granted by the court for:

- Habitual ill-treatment of the wife,
- Non-fulfillment of the terms of marriage contract,
- Insanity,

- Incurable impotency,
- Any other similar causes which in the opinion of the court justify a divorce.

7.5.3 Institutions Governing Inheritance

Inheritance exists in every society in one form or the other where institution of private property is recognised as the basis of social and economic system. Inheritance is the process in which the property of the dead person is given in the possession of the living person. Islam introduces many reforms in the laws of inheritance. Islam defined and determined in clear terms the share of each inheritor. A check was imposed on the right of the property owner. He cannot dispose off his property according to his will. The social and economic rights of women were safeguarded by allotting a definite share in the property. She becomes the co-sharer with males. In this way the dignity of women is restored. The general principle of inheritance is first laid down in the following words:

For man has a share of what the parents and the near relatives leave, and for women a share of what the parents and near relatives leave, whether it be little or much (Holy Quran-Ayat 4, 7).

If a person dies leaving behind a son and a daughter, the property of the deceased will be divided into three parts, out of which two parts will be given to the son and one to the daughter.

i) Shares and Quranic Heirs

There is a very exhaustive description of laws relating to inheritance in Quran. The first group of heirs of those relatives who are very close to the deceased and a specific share is allotted to them by the Quran. The Quranic heirs—

- Heirs by affinity,
- Husband,
- Wife,
- Blood relatives,
- True grand-father,
- Sons' daughter,
- Full sister,
- Consanguine sister,
- Uterine brother,
- Uterine sister,
- Share for Blood relations.
- Share by affinity: The husband's share is one half of the property of the deceased it is one eighth.
- The wife is not entitled to one fourth, if the husband dies childless, otherwise it is one eighth.

Father's share is one sixth when the deceased leaves a son or a son's, but when the

deceased is not survived by a son or grandson, his father will, in addition to this share also get a share being an *Asaba*.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) How has the relationship between husband and wife been described by the Holy Quran?
- ii) Mention the nature of Muslim marriage in four lines.
- iii) Describe shares by affinity in about three lines.

7.6 ISLAM AND INDIAN MUSLIMS

India is a plural society. There has been the coexistence of various religious groups for centuries. In the process of this co-existence the Islamic society has been significantly influenced by the indigenous norms, values, customs and traditions.

Normally, Islamic society is divided into sects i.e., *Sunnis* and *Shias* as they hold divergent views of and interpretation over Islamic texts and traditions. In India, a vast majority of them are *sunnis*. But Indian Muslims are divided into various groups which reflect the influence of Hindu beliefs and practices specially those related to caste system.

7.6.1 Elements of Castes

Indian Muslims, although divided on the caste lines, yet these divisions cannot be said to have the characteristics of a caste in the true sense of the term. These divisions are based on the basis of the occupations followed by each group. Different groups are identified on the basis of the occupations followed by them and the group does not specify the occupation as in the case of the caste system. Apart from this characteristic, other characteristics of the caste are not visible among the Muslims such as endogamy, hierarchy, untouchability, purity and pollution. There is however, a section of Sociology in India who say that the Muslim society is divided on the caste line such as: Syed Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan. They are also of the view that the elements of caste are apparently visible in the Muslim society. Though, there is no caste system among the Muslims, there are caste-like traits apparent in their social groupings.

7.6.2 Asharaf and Arzal

Some sociologists are of the opinion that there is no caste system among the Muslims but they are divided into two categories: Ashraf (honourable) and Arzal (unclean). Ashrafs are those who claim to be descendants of early Muslim immigrants and historically were near to the seat of power. Arzal means new converts and common people.

In spite of difficulties in applying the caste model on Indian Muslims, it cannot be denied that Indian Muslims have developed a sort of caste-like divisions among them owing to the impact of Hindu social organisation.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Describe the elements of caste as found among Muslims in India. Use four lines for your answer.

7.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, an attempt has been made to explain the basic principle of Islam. First of all, the pre Islamic conditions of the Arab society have been described. You must have got an idea, though this unit, about the sources and tenets of Islam. Like other world religions, there are certain sects and schools of thought in Islam also. This unit has thrown light on them. After the advent of Islam, the social institutions were reorganised around the principle of Shariat. This has also been covered by this unit. In the last section of this unit we discussed the Islamic society in India, briefly.

7.8 REFERENCES

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7.9 FURTHER READING

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7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Prophet Muhammad propagated a faith in Arab known as Islam. The literal meaning of Islam is 'Absolute submission to God's Will'. It is derived from a root which means 'peace'. As a religion, it is a continuation of former religious principles decreed by God through his revelations to all prophets including Moses and Jesus.
- ii)
 - a) Recital of Creed,
 - b) Prayer to God five times a day.
 - c) Fasting during the month of Ramzan,
 - d) Paying the Zakat,
 - e) Hai i.e. Pilgrimage to the Holy Kaba
- iii) Broadly speaking, Muslim world is divided into two major sects: *Sunni* and *Shia*. The *sunnis* are the ardent followers of *sunna* or traditions. The major difference between these two sects is on questions of succession and *khalif*. The *Sunnis* believe that Muhammad never intended that a *khalifa* should succeed him and have equal faith in Abu Bakr, Omar, Osman and Ali as *khalifa*, whereas, *Shias* believe that only Ali is legitimate successor and *khalifa*.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Quran declares marriage as a contract between husband and wife – the contracting parties. The contract is made in the presence of witnesses. At the time of marriage, a particular amount is settled for the woman which is called the *mehr*.

- ii) The Islamic view of marriage or *Nikah* is that it is a means of reproduction and not the means of sexual satisfaction. The meaning of *Nikah* is uniting together.
- iii) In the shares of affinity, the husband's share is one half of the property of the deceased wife but if she has children, it is one-fourth.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) There are certain elements of caste among the Indian Muslims. The position of Saiyad, Sheikh and Pathan is determined on the basis of birth. There is a feeling of hierarchy among the superior Muslims (Asharaf) and Muslims considered to be low (Arzal), though believes in the equality of its followers.



UNIT 8 CHRISTIANITY*

Structure

8.0 Objectives

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8.5.1 Adaptation to the World

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8.6 Christianity, Modern Society and Social Evolution

8.7 Christianity in India

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8.7.2 Christian Population

8.7.3 Denominations and Sects

8.7.4 Missionaries and Welfare Activities

8.8 Let Us Sum Up

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8.10 Further Reading

8.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are to acquaint you with the religious belief system and social order of Christianity. After reading this unit you should be able to—

- discuss the chief sources and beliefs in Christianity;

*The Unit has been adapted from ESO-15, Unit 21 with necessary edition.

- examine the teaching of Jesus Christ;
- explain the Christian social order;
- describe Christian view on the Church and the world; and
- discuss various aspects of Christianity in India.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

India is a plural society. One of the significant elements of this plurality is that of the religious belief systems and religious practices. Religion is an important dimension of group formation. The world view and the behavioural patterns of a social group are largely shaped by their religious practices and beliefs. Christianity is an important world religion. A sizeable section of the Indian population follows Christianity. It will be sociologically significant to analyse and know the basic tenets of Christianity and social organisation of its followers.

In this unit we shall introduce you to the basic tenets of Christian religious belief. We also will introduce you briefly to the socio-religious aspects of Christianity in India. After reading this unit, you should be able to know the Christians belief system and about their life on earth and hereafter. The Christian way of life and the ideal Christian society are also discussed in this unit. How the faith of Christians is nourished and how they derive spiritual inspiration about the consequences of the adaptation of the Christian community to the world, and some broad ideas about Christians in India are discussed at length in this unit.

Though the Christians are heavily concentrated in the countries of the European and American continents, the followers of Christianity are found in almost all the countries of the world. They are subdivided into a large number of churches and denominations based on organizational and doctrinal differences. These subdivisions can be subsumed under the three broader categories of (1) the Roman Catholic Church, (2) the Eastern Orthodox Church and (3) the Protestant denominations. The first two categories date from the early period of Christianity and the third category of churches sprung during the last few centuries owing their origin to dissident groups from the parent bodies. The basic elements of Christianity described in this lesson are, however, common to all the above categories of churches. Besides these Christian churches, there are certain cults such as *Christian Science*, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, *Mormonism* or "*Latter-day Saints*", the *Unification Church* or "*Moonies*" and so on, which though akin to Christianity, differ from the Biblical Christianity in important respects.

In describing Christianity from the sociological perspective, in this lesson, some of the functions which a religion is expected to perform will be kept in view. These functions include the assistance which religion provides the individual in gaining added power and satisfaction, the explanation of the problem of evil, the offer of the hope of better life in the future, the formulation of a plan for salvation, the improvement of the quality of the present life and an outline of an ideal society.

8.2 SOURCES AND BELIEFS

Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ, but it has its roots in the Judaic tradition. It is counted among the revealed or divinely inspired religions. The divinely

inspired religious precepts are contained in the holy book of the Christians known as the Bible. The Bible is divided into two books: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Most of the books of the Bible are written mostly by different authors at different points of time starting from the ancient times. The books of the *Old Testament* dealing with the period before the birth of Jesus Christ were originally written in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic, and the books of the *New Testament* dealing with the life and teachings of Jesus and the Acts of his Apostles which depict the formative period of Christianity, were originally written mostly in Greek or partly in Aramaic. The first four New Testament books telling of the life, death and resurrection of Christ are known as the *Gospels*.

8.2.1 The Founder of Christianity

Central to the Christian faith is the identity of its founder, Jesus Christ. Christ was a historical figure born about 2,000 years ago. He lived a short span of 33 years and his public life covered only the last three years during which he healed people, performed miracles, even raising people from the dead, and taught his disciples how to live lives that would be pleasing to God. But the most remarkable feature of Jesus' life, according to Christian belief, is that after he was crucified dead and buried, he rose again on the third day and appeared to his Apostles and disciples before ascending into heaven. Jesus claimed that he was son of God and behaved as such by forgiving sinners on his own authority, which was a sore point with the Jewish religious leaders. But his disciples believed that he was God. Therefore, one of the basic tenets of the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus Christ is true Man and true God.

During his life Jesus made many disciples and followers. They, however, did not form themselves into a separate community or church. It was obvious that until his death and resurrection Jesus did not complete his religious mission. As a matter of fact, the arrest of Jesus by his enemies and his ignominious death on the cross came as an apparent anticlimax to the work of propagating his faith. On the day before his death, when Jesus was arrested, his Apostles who were his constant companions, panicked and deserted him. Even his favorite Apostle, Simon Peter who was following him from a distance, denied having known Jesus when questioned by others on three occasions. The Apostles who believed in Christ as the Son of God were disenchanted when he seemed powerless at the hands of his enemies. At his death they hid themselves for fear of being apprehended.

After the third day Jesus rose from the dead. From then on until the fortieth day when, according to the Bible, Jesus ascended into heaven, he appeared to his Apostles and other disciples several times. It is during that time, having accomplished his mission; Jesus commissioned his Apostles to spread his faith to all nations saying. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28: 18-20).

8.2.2 The Biblical Concept of God

In this context it may be pointed out that the Biblical concept of God is rather complex. God is one but has revealed himself in the Bible as three persons – *the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit*. Such a conception of God is described as the mystery of the *Unity in Trinity* and *Trinity in Unity*. According to the Bible Jesus is God, the Son,

born of the Virgin Mary who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The incarnation of Jesus as man, according to the Bible, is a part of the divine plan for the atonement of the sins of mankind.

In order to understand why it was necessary for God to become man so as to save mankind, one needs to know that the Bible teaches about the origin of *sin* and *evil* in this world. According to the Bible, God created heaven and earth and he made Adam and Eve the first ancestors of mankind in his own image. But Adam and Eve were disobedient to their creator thereby bringing sin and evil into this world. As a result all mankind became heir to the original sin and lost the privilege to be regarded as children of God. It was only the suffering and death of sinless man, Jesus, which could atone for the sins of mankind. And God so loved mankind that he sent his only beloved son to save mankind from eternal damnation. Jesus is therefore called the Saviour of mankind. The Bible states that whoever believes in him will be saved (John 3:16).

8.2.3 The Biblical Concept of Body, Soul and Salvation

The Bible teaches that man has body and soul; whereas the body perishes with death, the soul survives eternally. Salvation in Christianity means the survival of the soul or the individual personality in a happy existence in heaven after death. Contrary to the belief in the transmigration of souls, Christianity teaches that human beings live only once on the earth and so have only one chance to make sure of a happy after-life. Although the original sin-condemned man to eternal damnation, Christ's suffering has redeemed mankind. But any individual can attain salvation only if, he or she were to accept Jesus as Saviour. The Bible is clear on this point in quoting Christ's own words: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). This and other references in this lesson are in the Books of the New Testament in the Bible.

Box 1

The unfolding of the scheme of salvation in Christianity also establishes the link between the Old and the New Testament of the Bible. The Old Testament is an essential part of the Jewish tradition. Jesus Christ was a Jew who followed the Jewish tradition which provides the point of reference for his teaching. The basic link between the Old and the New Testament lies in the fact that the Old Testament is always looking forward to the one who was to come about, whom there are several promises, prophecies which are fulfilled in Jesus. So from the point of view of Christians, the New Testament bears witness to the unique event foreseen in the Old Testament. Moreover, the Old Testament is a constant reminder that God punishes the evil and rewards the good and that he never forsakes those who believe in Him. Together, the Old and the new Testaments constitute the progressive self-revelation of God.

8.2.4 Organisation and Communion

The organisation of the early churches was based on the belief in Jesus as the 'Risen Lord'. In the beginning the Christians gathered daily for their worship, but in due course, one day in a week called the 'Lord's day' (Sunday) was set aside for the worship service. This practice is generally followed in the Christian churches even today. The core of the worship service consists of religious instruction preaching, prayer and the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread or the 'Lord's Supper' has a special

significance in Christian worship. This practice follows from what Jesus did at his last supper with his Apostles on the night before his death. He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his Apostles saying, “This is my body given for you; this is for remembrance of me”. In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22: 19,20). This incident symbolises Christ’s suffering and death on the cross which is the central act of salvation, freeing mankind from sin.

The replication of the ‘Lord’s Supper’ at the worship is believed to realise once again, Christ’s presence (called the living presence). In the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine a direct and intimate union with Christ is achieved. This part of the worship service is also known as Communion or Eucharistic rite.

In general, the religious services of Christians are mainly aimed at Worshipping God in spirit and truth (John 4:24), that is, worshipping the Father through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Indicate the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible in about eight lines.
- ii) Narrate the concept of body and soul as depicted in Christianity in about five lines.
- iii) Jesus rose from the dead after the
 - a) fifth day
 - b) fourth day
 - c) third day
 - d) second day

8.3 TEACHINGS OF CHRISTIANITY

Although Jesus did not reduplicate the Judaic tradition, he abrogated some of the Jewish conventions, gave a radical twist to the old ethical principles and spelt out the fundamental principles of the ideal social order.

8.3.1 Purity of a Person and the Moral Deeds

Among the archaic Jewish practices which Jesus brushed aside, reference may be made to the rituals to ward off pollution. When the Jews complained that his disciples did not adhere to their traditional custom of ritual “cleaning” of hands before meals, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ (Mark 7: 14,15). Jesus thus teaches the important truth that it is not outside rituals or ceremonies or eating of special foods that make a person clean before God. It is purity of a person’s heart and mind that makes one clean in God’s sight.

According to his instructions the norms of proper conduct are not to be anchored on the morality of this world but rather on the other-worldly criteria of fulfilling the will of

God and of pleasing Him. ‘Therefore, a Christian is not supposed to expect reciprocity or popularity from his good deeds; his rewards come from what pleases God to bestow upon him both in this and the outer world. In doing moral deeds or giving charity, a person should not draw attention to oneself so as to be honoured by others; God rewards such deeds done in secret’ (Matthew 6 : 1-4).

8.3.2 Forgiving Sins and Evils

Jesus impresses upon his followers that let alone murder, even the expression of anger against others amounts to sin and that God does not accept prayers and gifts unless we first reconcile ourselves with each other (Matthew 5: 21-23). So also God forgives the sins of persons who forgive others who sin against them (Matthew 6: 14,15).

It is the way of the world to pay back the aggressor in his own coin. But Jesus tells his followers, “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5: 38,39). So also, consider what Jesus has to say, “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5: 43-15).

These precepts of Jesus seem to be so unreasonable and impractical. But his own conduct during the most trying time of his life is a telling demonstration of his preaching. When Jesus was falsely charged and sentenced to death he neither resisted his captors nor defended himself before the court. What is more, when he was crucified during his dying moments, he uttered from the cross these stunning words of mercy to his enemies: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23: 24). Thus Jesus not only taught his followers a new way of life but also in his exemplary life showed how it could be accomplished.

8.3.3 Evangelisation and Baptism

Christ’s mandate to his disciples to spread his message of love and forgiveness throughout the world is considered to be an obligation on the part of all Christians to do likewise. The act of spreading the gospel of Christ is termed evangelisation. However, the decision of accepting the message or of becoming a convert to Christianity, should be left to the persons who receive the message, which is regarded as the work of the Holy Spirit.

The acceptance of the Christian faith by renouncing their old religious beliefs and practices meant for the converts a rupture from their old communities as well. So the new Christians formed themselves into communities or churches of their own. The churches drew people from different religious and ethnic groups, who were welded into a new Christian identity. The new recruits to the faith were admitted with a simple ceremony called Baptism.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) According to Christian thought the norms of proper conduct are to be anchored
 - a) on the morality of this world
 - b) on the other worldly criteria without fulfilling the will of God
 - c) on the other worldly criteria of fulfilling the will of God
 - d) on self-interest.

- 2) The act of spreading the gospel of Christ is termed
 - a) Universalisation
 - b) Christianisation
 - c) Evangelisation
 - d) Spiritualisation
- 3) What is the significance of Lord's Supper in Christianity? Answer in about five lines.

8.4 CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ORDER

Social order of every religious group is organised based on certain principles. These principles provide the base of togetherness and commonness of ideas and coexistence. It would be interesting to see how the Christian social order is organised. From the teachings of Jesus it is possible to identify some of the basic principles of the Christian social order.

8.4.1 Universal Brotherhood

The fundamental principle of the ideal society according to Jesus is the idea of universal brotherhood. But just as the justification and motive for the ideal conduct stem from the desire to please and fulfill the will of God, the basis of universal brotherhood is also the love of God. The idea that the love of man is flown from the love of God was made clear by Jesus when he was answering a question by a Jewish jurist. In replying to the question, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind". This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like it. 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments' (Matthew 22: 35-40). The term neighbour used in this context, as Jesus explained (Luke 10: 28-37) transcends the traditional connotation of spatial proximity, but embraces the broader meaning of fellowmen/women irrespective of the spatial or social connections; the distinction of love between 'we' and 'they'. It is the love of God which makes the Christian ideal of loving one's fellowmen/women, attainable.

8.4.2 Egalitarian Outlook

A second important principle of the Christian social order is the egalitarian outlook. The Christian church brought together people from different races, cultures and classes and forged a new spirit of coherence, unity and equality among them. Paul, the most prominent among the organisers of the early church emphasised, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). The early Christians who were liberated from the fetters of their former communities, addressed one another brothers and sisters, shared their provisions or contributed their income generously for common use and formed themselves into an egalitarian community.

The egalitarian ideal is further supported in the new kind of leadership and authority enjoined upon his followers by Jesus. Ordinarily, a leader tries to wield his power and

authority to command compliance by persons whom he leads, and people seek the office of leadership for the privileges which accrue from it. But Jesus taught that all power and authority comes from God and the function of the leader is to serve the people under his charge.

8.4.3 Service of Underprivileged

Yet another major principle of the ideal society according to Christ's teaching is the concern and commitment for the service of the underprivileged. During his lifetime as man, Jesus showed great compassion for people in distress. Exhorting his followers to do likewise, he pointed out that the heavenly king namely God, would reward those who took care of the poor, the strangers and the oppressed. Acts of kindness done to such people were equivalent to showing kindness to God Himself.

The ideal society in Christianity, which stands for universal fellowship, equality of members a service oriented leadership and a special solidarity with the disadvantaged sections, is ultimately based on the belief in and love of God. Such a society is termed the reign of God or the kingdom of heaven.

Activity 1

Based on your observation and experience of the Christian society write a note of about two pages on the "Christian Social Order in our Society". Exchange your note, if possible with your co-learners at the Study Centre.

8.5 THE CHURCH AND THE WIDER WORLD

The church plays a key role in the Christian society. It determines largely the Christian world view. It is of great sociological significance to see how the church encounters itself with the wider society and the world. The church is the actualisation of the ideal society according to the teachings of Jesus. At the same time, it has to function within the wider society whose values and patterns of social relations are inconsistent with the Christian social order. Right from the beginning, the Christians were painfully aware of this contradiction and had to suffer on account of it. While regarding the ideal Christian society as the heavenly kingdom, they referred to the existing social order as the worldly society or the 'world'.

The disjunction between the church and the 'world' (wider society) raises several questions; how does the church adapt itself to the world? What impact has the church made upon the world? Indeed, these are the sociological issues of adaptation and assimilation.

8.5.1 Adaptation to the world

In its adaptation to the 'world', there is no question of the church's accepting the world totally in spirit and in fact, for that would amount to a negation of the Christian ideal. It was also not possible to reject the world totally as that would involve in a head-on collision with the powerful political and religious authorities leading to a bloody revolution which is against the spirit of Christianity. The early church actually took course in between the two extremes. It rejected the world in spirit but accepted it in fact. In a sense this approach agreed with what Jesus did; he did not try to destroy the old order

but attempted to transform it. It was, however, implied that the Christian way of life was superior to the worldly life and should there be serious conflict between God's commandments and the civil law, a Christian is obliged to obey God rather than man (Acts 5 : 2).

8.5.2 Civil Authority

In the compromise that was struck between the church and the 'world', it was recognized that the political powers and civil authorities were ordained of God and hence merited obedience (Romans 13:1), and the Christians carried out their civil obligations including the payment of taxes faithfully. Similarly, although everyone is considered equal in Jesus Christ, as a seeming accommodation to the prevailing patriarchal and feudal practices, the wife was enjoined to obey the husband and the slave to obey master, although the persons in authority, were also required to treat their subordinates with love and consideration (Ephesians 5:2-25, 6:5-9).

With the spread and gaining influence of the Church, Christian values and ideals began to percolate into the larger society. The humanitarian ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity which gained acceptance in the Western civilisation, owe their origin to the teachings of Jesus.

8.5.3 Society's Impact on Church

If the Church has influenced the wider society, sometimes the latter also has had its impact upon the former. This happened in Europe especially during the Middle Ages when the entire European society became Christian and the Church acquired considerable political and economic power. In that process the church became infected with worldly values.

8.5.4 Sects and Sub-divisions

The complex form in which the Christian Church finds itself at present with its many subdivisions can be attributed to the rise of pressure groups when the parent bodies deviate too much from the biblical path. Such dissident pressure groups which are called sects are either (1) integrated into the parent body or (2) they secede or are expelled from the main church, when the dissident groups establish churches of their own.

- i) The first type of phenomenon is represented by the monastic movements of the 4th, 5th and the 6th centuries, which were attempts on the part of some of the members to live in line with the teachings of Jesus when the parent bodies (the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches) were more inclined to the worldly life. The monastic movements were ultimately integrated into the parent bodies which underwent a renewal as a result.
- ii) The second type of phenomenon can be illustrated with the 16th century Reformation movement in Europe, when several dissident groups left the Roman Catholic Church and underwent a renewal as a result of that challenge. The Protestant churches recognize the authority of the Bible alone, whereas the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches also recognized their church traditions as authoritative, besides the Bible.

Box 2

Thus the compromise between the church and the 'world' also leads to the ever present processes of dissidence, renewal or secession. However, in all these changes the Bible serves as the steadying force. Besides lending stability to the churches, the Bible is also responsible for bringing about a basic unity in beliefs and values among the different churches. There are however, differences among the churches in the interpretation of the Bible. As a student of sociology, you should be interested to know the dynamics of group formation. This section must have given you some insights on the group formation in Christianity. You may also be interested to know the institutional network through which the Christian society operates. You may also be interested in the aspects of festivals and rituals of that society.

8.6 CHRISTIANITY, MODERN SOCIETY AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

Christian movement delineated a condition for the selection of human beings and also for the creation of a society for peaceful survival of human being based on new values. Christianity has been one of the important factors of modernisation and economic development through the societal values it has legitimised. However, at every stage of the social evolution and modernisation as such, the Christian religious system and its values stood in complex relations of interdependence with other factors viz., economic and political institutions, the social institutions like family and kinship, the system of stratification etc.

i) Institutionalisation

In this context it is essential to have an idea on the forms of Christian institutionalisation. The *first* pattern of the institutionalisation assumed that the existence of the religious association of the Christian is essentially a separate entity without established relations to the rest of the society. The example can be that of the Pietistic sects.

The second type of institutionalisation is that of the Catholic Church. This is interpreted in the sense of an established church, which is the state religion of a politically organised society. The church and the state are the distinct organisations. Hence the church achieved a transcendental orientation and became to be concerned eventually with its particular version of monasticism and to give the orders a kind of primacy, over the secular political authority, since there was no papal monarchy to match the secular.

The third type of institutionalisation is that of the emergence of the Protestant sects. Here the break is fundamentally with the sacramental system, making the "true" Church invisible and salvation dependent, from the human side, on faith above. The shift to the Protestantism essentially meant the *abandonment of this tutelage with its special kind of religious paternalism*. The main branch of Protestantism, i.e. the Calvinists, laid great emphasis on the worldly activism for the creation of the kingdom of God on the earth.

The Protestant reform movement opened the door for modernisation and economic development through its general trend of social and cultural change. The Protestant followed science, trained in law. The reform movement of the Protestant became intimately related to the development of nationalism – vernacular translations of the

Bible multiplied and some protestant areas achieved distinction very rapidly in economic development (Weber 1972: 246).

ii) Protestantism and Economic Development

Max Weber locates a causal link between the Protestant ethic and the development of capitalism in Europe. In his famous treatise on *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber points out that Puritan sects of the Protestantism rationalised their religious beliefs and values towards “this worldly asceticism”. This rationalisation was possible through the concept of calling – (task set by God) which was a product of Reformation movement. To Weber the major callings for the Protestants of Puritan sects are:

- a) There exists an absolute transcendent God who created the world and rules it, but he is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the finite mind of man,
- b) This all powerful and mysterious God had predestined each of us to salvation or damnation, so that we cannot by our works after a divine which was made before we were born,
- c) God created the world for his own glory,
- d) Whether he is saved or damned, a man is obliged to work for the glory of God and to create the kingdom of God on earth,
- e) Earthly things, human nature, and flesh belong to the order of sin and death and salvation can come to man only through divine grace (Aron, 1967: 221-22).

These callings helped the Calvinist Protestant to be self-disciplined, dedicate to work, honest and follow the path of “this worldly asceticism”. For them work is worship and there is no space for idleness or laziness. This specific character of Calvinistic belief accounted for the relation between Calvinist doctrine and the spirit of capitalism which was characterised by a unique devotion to the earning of wealth through legitimate economic activity. This is rooted in a belief in the value of efficient performance in the chosen vocation as a duty and a virtue. The affinity between the two and the emergence of capitalist economic regime as defined by Weber existed only in the West. However, such an affinity is particular only to the Protestant ethics. It is not found in the Catholicism; not in any other religion like Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, Judaism and Buddhism of which Weber made a comparative analysis.

8.7 CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

Christianity was introduced into India almost from its inception by Thomas, one of the Apostles of Christ. According to tradition Thomas landed on the coast of Kerala in 52 A.D. and set up seven churches in different areas. Then he travelled to Madras where he was martyred at *Malapore* in 72 A.D. The descendants of the early Christians of Kerala were known as St. Thomas Christians. They are also called Syrian Christians, not because they came from Syria; but because they follow the Syrian liturgy as distinguished from the Latin liturgy, in their worship. The Syrian Christians formed part of the society in Kerala as a prosperous community and were ranked among the higher castes. They did not seem to have made much effort in spreading their faith in other parts of the country.

8.7.1 Advent of Europeans

The spread of Christianity in India came with the advent of Europeans from the early 16th century. The Portuguese missionaries were followed by the Dutch, the French and the British along with other European and American missionaries. The Indian Christians belong to different churches and denominations after the religious background of the missionaries who converted them. On the other hand since the missionaries from different countries worked in different areas of India where their respective country had political influence, the Indian Christians of different religious denominations were also spread in different parts of the country.

Although the Britishers among the European nations wielded the greatest political influence in India, they were initially circumspect in permitting missionary activity. The missionaries, during their regime worked mainly in the tribal areas and among the former untouchables. The Portuguese missionaries had the biggest success in converting Indians to the Roman Catholic faith especially in the west and east coasts of South India, so much so, at present about two-thirds of the Christians in India are to be found in the southern states and that the Roman Catholics outnumber all the other denominations of Christians put together.

8.7.2 Christian Population

According to the 2011 Census the Christians in India numbered 27.8 million or 2.30 per cent of the total population. They are found in every state and almost in every district of the country, but most of them are concentrated in a few pockets or regions. Their major concentrations are found in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Goa and most of the states of the North Eastern Hill areas comprising Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, etc.

8.7.3 Denominations and Sects

The multiplicity of divisions in the world body of Christians is also reflected among Christians in India. Most of the Protestant denominations are divided into two main churches termed the Church of North India and Church of South India. Other Indian Christians include the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans and Syrian Christians who have maintained separate identities. The Roman Catholics who comprise the largest group are further divided into those who follow the Latin rite and those who adhere to the Syrian rite.

These different churches have their pockets of concentration in different areas which are often mutually exclusive, reflecting the history and circumstances of their conversion.

8.7.4 Missionaries and Welfare Activities

Consistent with the social philosophy of their religion, the Christians in India are well represented in the social welfare activities in the country with particular concern for the service of the underprivileged. Their work in the fields of health and education is well recognized. The fact that Kerala is the most literate state having the best health-care delivery system in the country is no less due to the pioneering efforts of the Christian churches than to the impetus given by the enlightened rulers of the region.

Activity 2

Write a note of about one page on social activities of the Missionaries based on your observations and experience. Exchange your note with other students of the Study Centre, if possible.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Mention the three fundamental principles of ideal society as propagated by Christianity.
- ii) Describe the consequences of the adaptation of the Church to the World in five lines.
- ii) Indicate major denominations of Christianity in India.

8.8 LET US SUM UP

This unit began with a discussion on the life and message of Jesus Christ. Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ who is believed to be the son of God but became man, suffered, died and rose alive, in order to atone for the sin of mankind. The divinely inspired teachings or the Word of God as accepted by Christians, are contained in the Bible, the holy book of the Christians.

We explained in this unit the teachings of Christianity. The life and teachings of Jesus are central to Christianity. Jesus taught and lived a way of life which was contrary to the common practice. The ethical conduct and social life that he preached and practised was founded on the love of God and the love of fellowmen flowing from it. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, a remarkable transformation took place among his disciples, which is attributed to the descent upon them of the Holy Spirit. Ever since, the Holy Spirit is believed to provide spiritual strength and inspiration to Christians who live according to the teachings of Jesus. The religious services of the Christians are mainly aimed at worshipping God, the Father through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christian social order and the role of Church in the Christian society are also discussed in this unit. The community of Christians, the church, is modelled after the teachings of Jesus. However, the fact that the church has to adapt itself to the larger world with its contradictory norms of behaviour, poses peculiar problems to the Christians.

Lastly we discussed some aspects of Christianity in India. Christianity was introduced into India at its inception in the first century A.D., and a Christian community flourished in Kerala. But its spread in different parts of the country took place with the advent of the European missionaries from 16th century onwards. Although the Christians in India form only 2.30 per cent of the population according to the 2011 census, they are found concentrated in a few regions of India in considerable proportions. They have made a mark in the country in social service activities.

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8.10 FURTHER READING

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8.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The unfoldment of the scheme of salvation which is the integral part of the Christian religion stretches over both the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament contains promise, descriptions and prophecies about coming Saviour, which were fulfilled in Jesus whose life and teachings are dealt with in the New Testament. In this sense the New Testament bears witness to the Old Testament. Jesus was a Jew and his teachings which are found in the New Testament, often refer to the teachings in the Old Testament.
- ii) As mentioned in the Bible, man has body and soul. The body perishes with death but the soul survives eternally. Salvation means the survival of the soul in heaven after death. According to Christianity, human beings live only once on the earth and there is no re-birth.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) c.
- ii) c.
- iii) The breaking of bread of 'Lord's Supper' has special significance in Christian Worship. The replication of the 'Lord's Supper' at the Worship service is believed to realise once again his presence (called the living presence) and intimate Union with Christ. This part of the Worship services is known as Communion.

Check Your Progress 3

- i)
 - a) Universal brotherhood,
 - b) Egalitarian outlook,
 - c) Service of the underprivileged.
- ii) In the Christian belief there is neither the total adaptation to the world nor total reflection. There is a balanced approach. The early church reflected the world in spirit but accepted it in fact.
- iii)
 - a) Roman Catholic
 - b) Eastern Orthodox Churches
 - c) Syrian Christians

UNIT 9 SIKHISM*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 The Origin and Growth of Sikhism
 - 9.2.1 Socio-Cultural Context
 - 9.2.2 Guru Nanak's Life and Message
- 9.3 Development of Sikhism
 - 9.3.1 Creation of New Society
 - 9.3.2 Development of Sikhism
- 9.4 Sikh Worship and Rituals
 - 9.4.1 The Worship Pattern
 - 9.4.2 Life Cycle Rituals
 - 9.4.3 Baptism among the Sikhs
- 9.5 Sikh Code of Conduct and Reform Movements
 - 9.5.1 Code of Conduct
 - 9.5.2 Movements of Socio-Religious Reform
 - 9.5.3 Impact on Indian Society
- 9.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.7 References
- 9.8 Further Reading
- 9.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with Sikhism, its religious belief system and development and functioning as a religious society in India. After regarding this unit you should be able to—

- explain the socio-cultural background of the emergence of Sikhism;
- describe the model of Sikh society as shown by Guru Nanak;
- discuss the development of Sikhism over a period of time;
- explain the pattern of worship and ritual life among the Sikhs; and
- analyse the broad features of the religious reform movements as emerged in Sikhism.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

As a student of sociology, you would be interested to know the socio-cultural background on which Sikhism emerged in India, its development and functioning. You

*This Unit is adapted from ESO-15, Unit 23 with necessary edition.

also would be interested to know the reform movements as emerged in Sikhism. All these aspects are discussed in this unit keeping in view the plurality of Indian culture. This unit has been written from the socio-historical perspective.

It begins with a brief discussion on the socio-cultural background from which Sikhism emerged in India. In the initial section (section 9.2) we shall also discuss the philosophical foundation of Sikhism as depicted in the life and message of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak established a model of the Sikh society. We discuss that model in section 9.3. Sikhism has undergone various stages of development. We discuss these developments in the context of the arrival of the Gurus in Sikhism. Sikh society follows a distinct pattern of worship. They follow distinct rituals and baptism. We discuss these aspects in section 9.4. Lastly we discuss Sikh code of conduct and movements of religious reforms in Sikhism. Here we discuss only the Nirankari, Namdhari and the Akali movements briefly as examples for your understanding.

9.2 THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF SIKHISM

9.2.1 Socio-Cultural Context

Sikhism was born at a time when there was a growing conflict amongst the two dominating religious traditions of Hinduism and Islam of India. Guru Nanak the founder of the Sikh faith is generally depicted as a reconciler of the two conflicting traditions. This is how the Guru is still fondly remembered in Punjab:

“Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindu ka guru, Musalman ka Pir”.

(Baba Nanak, the great man of God

The guru of the Hindus and the pir of the Musalmans).

While early chronicles of the Sikhs have generally described this faith as the off-shoot of the Bhakti movement, some modern Western scholars tend to describe this as a part of the Indian Sant tradition. Without denying that Guru Nanak and the movement that he started was greatly influenced by the Bhakti movement in which he was born, a careful study of the Sikh religion and philosophy shows that it had distinct features of its own. That is why it developed into a full-fledged religious movement soon after its birth. This is the reason why a separate unit has been devoted for discussing its teachings and their relevance for the followers of Sikhism in particular and for others in general.

The word Sikh is derived from the Sanskrit word Shishya, meaning disciple or learner. Thus those who followed Guru Nanak, the founder, came to be known as the Sikhs. In the Sikh faith reverence for the Guru (Preceptor) is the cardinal quality and devotion to their teachings a sacred duty. Great emphasis is laid in Sikh way of life upon practicing moral and spiritual values. These values are mainly related to honesty, sharing and doing away with the distinction of high and low/rich and poor.

9.2.2 Guru Nanak's Life and Message

Sikh belief system was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539). A precocious child, Nanak had a deeply meditative cast of mind and hence all attempts to engage him in worldly pursuits failed. Guru Nanak was a contemporary of three Lodhi rulers-Babbar Lodhi (1451-1489), Sikandar Lodhi (1489-1517) and Ibrahim Lodhi (1514-1526). The Guru also saw the foundation of the Mughal Empire being laid by Babar, who was succeeded by his son Humayun during the life span of Guru Nanak. In his hymns Guru

Nanak refers to the times and makes pointed references to the omission and commissions of the Lodhi and Mughal rulers. Guru Nanak refers to the army of invaders whom he calls as “crowd of sins in a bridal procession” demanding the hand of the bride called India. Right from childhood he was engrossed in spiritual pursuits. Prevalent hypocrisy in the name of religion greatly upset him. Nanak delighted in serving the poor and needy. A story is told that his father gave him some money and sent him to neighbouring town to do some profitable business. On the way Nanak met some Sadhus who had not eaten for many days. Nanak purchased eatables with the money his father gave and ate the hungry Sadhus. When Nanak’s father asked him as to what he had done he replied, that he had made a “most profitable bargain”. On noticing that Nanak was not interested in business his father sent him to Sultanpur Lodhi, a town in the Kapurthala District of Punjab. Here Nanak was employed as a storekeeper by the local ruler. This duty was discharged by Nanak with great rectitude.

i) Enlightenment of Nanak

It was during his stay in Sultanpur that Nanak got his enlightenment. According to popular traditions, one morning, when Nanak went for a dip in the river Beas flowing nearby he was absorbed in thoughts of God and, as is narrated by the Biographers, in this state he was ushered into the Divine Presence. Blessed by the Almighty, Nanak came out of the rivulet to preach holy name of God. The first words that Nanak uttered after his enlightenment were, “There is no Hindu; there is no Musalman”. At a time when Hindus and Muslims were engaged in sectarian conflicts these words heralded Nanak’s new mission of reconciliation of the two.

ii) Message of Nanak

Nanak, the Guru was accompanied by a Muslim musician named Mardana on long journeys to preach his gospel of love and truth. He travelled to different parts of India and other countries and visited religious centres of Hindus and Muslims. Through dialogues he convinced people that good actions alone could ensure salvation. While in Mecca he was asked who was superior, a Hindu or a Muslim, to which the Guru replied that without good actions both were of no consequence. “Truth is high but higher still is truthful living”, he said.

The Guru was moved by the sufferings of the population that he could not help taking even the creator to task:

“Though *Khurashan* has been shielded by Thee,
 Though terror has struck at the heart of Hindustan,
 Thou, O Creator of all things,
 Takest of Thyself no blame;
 Thou hath sent *Yama* disguised as the great Moghal, Babar.
 Terrible was the slaughter
 Loud were the cries of the lamenters.
 Did this not awaken pity in Thee, O Lord?
 Thou art part and parcel of all things equally, O Creator,
 Thou must feel for all men and all nations.
 If a strong man attack the another who is equally strong;
 Where is the grief in this, or whose is the grievance?

But when a fierce tiger preys on the helpless cattle,
The Herdsman must answer for it.”

The Guru was particularly moved by the helpless and pitiable condition of the young women who were reduced to slavery by the invading army and thus described the condition in one of his hymns:

“The tresses that adorned these lovely heads,
And were parted with vermillion,
Have been shorn with cruel shears:
Dust has been thrown on their shaven heads.
These beauties lent charm to the couches they reclined on,
Now they are dragged away, with ropes round their necks;
Barbarous soldiers have taken them prisoners and disgraced them”.

The following hymn of Guru Nanak in *Majh-di-var* best described the time of Guru Nanak:

“The *Kalyug* is a dagger, the rulers are butchers;
Dharma has taken wings and flower away.
The dark night of falsehood reigns supreme, and
The moon of truth appears not to have risen anywhere.”

iii) Guru Nanak’s Philosophy

Guru Nanak preached strict monotheism and described the Creator as *Ikk* (one), without a second. Guru Nanak’s philosophy of God is best described in *Japji*, the primal creed. His teachings were strictly monotheistic, without scope for the worship of any deity or human teacher. Contrary to medieval Indian practice of denouncing the world for spiritual elevation, Guru Nanak believed that the world was worth living in. “This world is the abode of God and the Tune One lives therein.” Guru Nanak believed that it was possible to live pure among the impurities of life. “As the lotus like the detached in waters, as the duck floateth care-free on the stream, so both one cross the Sea of Existence, his mind attuned to the Word. One liveth detached, Enshrining the One Lord in the mind, shorn of hope, living in the midst of hope.”

iv) Three Principles of Nanak’s Teaching

Guru Nanak’s teachings can be summed up on three simple Punjabi words, *Naam Japna*, *Kirti Karni* and *Wand Chakna*. Translated into English this means “always remembering God, earning one’s livelihood through honest means and sharing the fruits of one’s labour with others”. To practice his teachings of equality Guru Nanak started the twin institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat*, emphasizing that all sit in a congregation and while partaking food from the community kitchen should sit in one line without distinction of high and low or rich and poor.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Write a note on enlightenment of Nanak in about six lines.
- iii) What are the three principles of Guru Nanak’s teachings?

9.3 DEVELOPMENT OF SIKHISM

In this sub-section we shall deal with the model of the Sikh society by Guru Nanak and development of Sikhism over a period of time.

9.3.1 Creation of New Society

Sociologically you would be interested to know how a new society is developed based on religious faith and how it controls the behavior of its followers. Guru Nanak helped develop a new society. Let us see how he defined the code of conduct and behavior patterns of the member of that society. Towards the last phase of his life Guru Nanak settled at a small village on the banks of river Ravi (now in Pakistan) and called it Kartarpur, i.e., God's abode. There he worked on the field and shared his earning with others. A community of disciples grew up at Kartarpur but it could not be described as monastic order. On the other hand, it was a fellowship of ordinary men and women engaged in normal occupations of life, earning their livelihood through honest means and sharing the fruit of their labour with others. But what was remarkable about Kartarpur was that this provided a model of loving which was to become the basis for the development of Sikh society and Sikh value systems in the days to come. Herein the Guru and his followers got up before dawn and after ablutions performed their prayers. The spiritual routine being over, the Guru and his followers partook the sacred food from the community kitchen and then attended to the day's work. In the evening they again assembled at a common place and performed their evening prayer and shared food. Before going to bed they all recited *Kirtan Sohila*, songs of acclaim.

Box 1

The Sikh Gurus laid great emphasis on early rising and remembering God. This new philosophy of life with its emphasis on early rising, working hard and always remembering God created a new society in which there could neither be any exploiters nor exploitation and exploited. The emphasis on honest living and sharing one's earnings with others laid the foundations of an egalitarian order. The Sikh Guru brought about a happy union between the spiritual and temporal domains.

9.3.2 Development of Sikhism

As you saw in the case of other religions that over a period of time various developments took place in the religious philosophies enriching the content of the same. Similarly various developments have taken place in Sikhism over a period of time.

In the processes of these developments various institutions had evolved in Sikhism. Guru Nanak was followed by nine successive Gurus who not only continued his precepts and ideals but made significant contributions in evolving different institutions for the Sikh community.

The *second Guru*, Guru Angad Dev, evolved a distinct script called *Gurumukhi* (coming from the mouth of the Guru) which became the sole medium for sacred writings of the Sikhs. It is in this script that the *Guru Granth*, the holy book of the Sikhs, is written.

The *Third Guru*, Guru Amar Dass, strengthened the Sikh movement by starting the institutions of *Manjis* and *Pirts*. There are positions which important male and female Sikh missionaries occupied in their respective areas. For obliterating the caste

distinctions, which then plagued the Indian society, the Guru made it obligatory for all the visitors to eat in the community kitchen before they could see him. There is a strong Sikh saying that the contemporary Mughal Emperor Akbar who went to see the Guru at Goindwal had to eat in Langar while sitting in one line on the floor with his nobles and servants. The Emperor was so much impressed by the Guru's strict practice of equality that he donated a village on which the modern city of Amritsar came up later during the time of the fourth and fifth Sikh Gurus. The Guru also got many *baolis* (small tanks) constructed to help his followers take morning bath which is considered important for purification of body and mind. The Guru evolved simple and meaningful rituals for the Sikh community.

The Fourth Guru, Guru Ram Dass, laid the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar, which later developed as the spiritual capital of the Sikh faith. By inviting artisans and traders and by encouraging them to settle there the Guru also laid the foundation of a big trade industrial centre which developed around the newly founded city.

The fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev, son and successor of Guru Ram Das, built the Harmandir, which is popularly known as the Golden Temple and compiled and installed the Holy Book the *Guru Granth*, therein.

The Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind built Akal Takhat, the Throne of the Immortal, and declared it as the centre of Sikh temporal authority.

The Seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai continued the mission of his predecessors and appointed the Bhai families of Bagrian and Kaithal to look after the missionary work.

The Eighth Guru, Guru Har Kishan cured the victims of small-pox in Delhi and is remembered in the daily Sikh prayer as the one whose very sight dispels all miseries.

The Ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur set a unique example of religious freedom by sacrificing his life for the protection of Tilak, Janju the sacred marks of the Hindu religion. This is described by the *tenth Guru* "as a unique event in this age of Kaliyug". Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom proved to be a turning point in Sikh history.

In order to defend dharma, Guru Govind Singh, the *tenth* and *last* of the Sikh Gurus, created the order of Khalsa. On the Baisakhi day of the year 1699, the Guru called an assembly of the Sikhs at Anandpur, in the Shivalik hills. While addressing a packed audience the Guru demanded the heads of five Sikhs. The five who offered themselves and were subsequently initiated into Sikh faith are popularly remembered in the Sikh prayer as the Panj Piare or the five beloved ones. These five beloved ones came from different directions and belonged to different traditional Indian castes, three of them belonged to the so called low castes. After being renamed and each getting the surname of Singh, meaning Lion, they were enjoined to support the five symbols of the new order – unshorn hair, a comb, short breeches, a steel bracelet and a sword.

A significant development in the history of the Sikh faith was Guru Gobind Singh declaring the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book, as the Guru eternal for the Sikhs. Compiled by Guru Arjun Dev, the Sikh Holy Book is a unique example of ecumenical spirit of the Sikh faith. The Guru Granth contains 5,894 hymns, the largest number of them (2,216) having been contributed by the fifth Guru himself. Apart from the hymns of the Sikh Gurus, the Guru Granth also contains the composition of the Muslim and Hindu saints

some of them belonging to the so called lower caste of the Hindu society. Equal respect to all religions is best demonstrated when the devout bow before the Holy Book which contains the hymns of saints from different religious denominations.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Who among the following Gurus laid the foundation of Holy City of Amritsar?
 - a) Guru Har Rai
 - b) Guru Ram Dass
 - c) Guru Teg Bahadur
 - d) Guru Govind Singh
- ii) Who compiled Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy book of the Sikh?
 - a) Guru Ram Dass
 - b) Guru Teg Bahadur
 - c) Guru Govind Singh
 - d) Guru Arjun Dev

9.4 SIKH WORSHIP AND RITUALS

The Sikhs, follow a distinct pattern of worship. The Sikh Community is centered around various rituals. In this section we shall discuss the distinct pattern of worship followed by the Sikhs and few of their life cycle rituals.

9.4.1 The Worship Pattern

Against the prevalent Hindu practice of worshipping the idols, the Sikh Guru advocated worship of *Akal* (Timeless God). The Sikh temple, called *Gurudwara*, is not a mere place of worship but also serves as a shelter for the shelterless, iron-fort for the destitute and refuge for the helpless where all the visitors irrespective of their religious affiliations are served free food and given shelter and protection. In the centre of the Gurudwara, Guru Granth, the Holy Book, is installed on a high pedestal; the idea being that the holy book occupies a place higher than the followers who sit on the floor. Since complete equality is preached and practised, there is no special place marked for important persons in the Gurudwara.

There are Gurudwaras in different parts of India, which are historic because of their association with the Gurus. There are other Gurudwaras throughout the world wherever there are Sikhs. These are not historic but are built by the followers to serve as centres for their religious worship attended by large gatherings. The Nishan Sahib, huge yellow triangular flag, with Sikh symbol of *Khanda*, marks the Sikh religious place.

Visitors from all sections of society can enter the Gurudwara after removing their shoes and cleaning their feet and covering their head. Doors of the Gurudwara are open to all communities. It is significant to point out that the famous Golden Temple at Amritsar has four doors indicating that it is open to all people from all the four directions and its foundation-stone was laid by a Muslim divine named *Mia Mir*.

9.4.2 Life Cycle Rituals

There are several rituals in the Sikh social life. Let us discuss some of these rituals briefly.

i) Child Birth

Soon after a child is born a set of five verses from the *Adi Granth* is recited. Unlike Hindu society where women during post-natal period are considered impure to enter the kitchen for nearly six weeks, in Sikh society a woman can resume her normal work as soon as she feels physically fit. Significantly, Sikhism rejects the orthodox Hindu Concept of pollution in this regard. It is considered undesirable to treat the mother as polluted. Pre and post-natal Hindu practices are simply discarded in Sikh way of life.

ii) Ceremony of Child Naming

Following the birth of a child in the family there is a naming ceremony generally performed on the first of *Baisakh* (traditional Indian New Year and the day of birth of the Khalsa). This is arranged in the presence of the Holy Book and congregation either at home or in the *Gurudwara*. The priest opens the Holy Book at random and the very first letter of the page is picked up for naming the child. All males have Singh (lion) and all females *Kaur* (princess) after their names. It rejects the caste name that signifies hierarchy as found in Hinduism.

iii) Marriage Rituals

In the Sikh society marriages are generally arranged by the parents. In some cases boys or girls find their own partners. But in all cases Sikh marriages are solemnised strictly according to prescribed norms wherein the bridegroom and his party called *Barat* go to the house of the bride. To begin with there is *Milni*, a ceremony where parents and relatives from both sides meet and embrace each other and token gifts are offered. Later all other friends and relatives are feasted and then all enter specially arranged Pandal or *Gurudwara* where *Anand Karaj* (the marriage ceremony) is performed by the priest with Sikh musicians singing relevant hymns from the *Guru Granth* and the couple circumambulating the Holy Book four times in a clock wise direction. The *Lavan*, hymns of marriage, conveys highest moral and spiritual ideals to the couple. The ceremony being over, all join in lunch and then the bridegroom and the party return home along with the bride. Back home the bride is received with some ceremonies. There is a great emphasis on simplicity and dowry is not a precondition in Sikh marriages. Extra-marital love and sex are not allowed in Sikhism. “Do not cast your eyes on the beauty of another’s wife. Treat other women as thy mothers, sisters and daughters” says Guru Nanak.

9.4.3 Baptism among the Sikhs

From Guru Nanak to the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur there was a system of initiating the followers by giving them *Charan-amrit* (water touched by the Guru’s toe) to drink. Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth and the last Guru, changed this to *Kande-da-Pahul* (water stirred with double edged sword) which he used when he baptised the five beloved ones (Panj Piare) on the Baisakhi of 1699 at Anandpur Sahib. When boys and girls attain puberty and are old enough to understand the obligations of their religion they are baptised. The ritual connected with this ceremony is the same as performed by Guru Gobind Singh while creating the Khalsa. While baptismal ritual can be

performed any time of the year, Baisakhi, the day of the birth of the Khalsa, is considered most appropriate. It is performed before an assembled congregation. Five baptised Sikhs are chosen to initiate the new converts. *Amrit* (nectar) is prepared by mixing sugar in water and by stirring it with a *Khanda* (double-edged sword) to the recitation of selected passages of the scriptures including Guru Gobind Singh's composition. The initiates then take the vows of the Khalsa faith. Each vow is read out loudly before the Guru Granth Sahib. Palms full with amrit are splashed in the face of the newly initiated Khalsas with the Sikh salutation of *Bole soNihal* and *Siri Wahe Guru Ji ka Khalsa siriWahe Guru Ji ki Fateh*. Baptised Sikhs, both male and female, have to strictly adhere to the following symbols:

- a) Keshas (Unshaven hair): Sikhs are not supposed to trim, shave or cut any hair on any part of their body.
- b) Kara (wrist-band or iron bangle): All baptised Sikhs are strictly to wear Kara. Worn on the right wrist this is taken as a constant reminder that as a Sikh one has to follow the Sikh code of conduct and perform pious deeds.
- c) Kirpan (sword): This literally means "please protect me with thy sword". This was used as a ready weapon for self defence and for the protection of the meek and helpless.
- d) Kangha (comb): To keep the long hair neat and tidy. Sikhs are enjoined to keep Kangha always in their hair-knot.
- e) Kachha (drawer-underwear) was intended to keep the Khalsa always ready in the fighting dress and also, means a sign of chastity and strict morals.

Activity 1

You may be interacting with a number of your Sikh friends or neighbours. Based on your observation or experience write a one-page note on the rituals the Sikhs practised in your area. If possible, exchange your note with other students at the Study Centre.

9.5 SIKH CODE OF CONDUCT AND REFORM MOVEMENTS

There are significant codes of conduct for the Sikhs. Sikh society has also borne witness to several reform movements. In this section we shall deal with these aspects briefly.

9.5.1 Code of Conduct

The behaviour patterns of the members of a society are broadly guided by the code of conduct regulating the behaviour of its followers. The Sikhs are supposed to follow the code of conduct called *Rehat Maryada* which has evolved over years. Among the few don'ts are eating Halal meat prepared in the Muslim way, removing hair from the body, smoking, use of alcohol and adultery.

As mentioned earlier Sikh Gurus condemned the traditional caste system and laid the foundations of an egalitarian society. Through the institution of *Sangat* and *Pangat* they tried to obliterate the distinctions between the so-called low-caste as well as the rich and poor. By placing the hymns of the so-called low-caste weaver Kabir at par with

the so-called high-caste Brahman Ramanand and the Sikh Gurus set a unique example of equality and true spirit of ecumenism. However, because of the deep-rooted caste prejudices caste system has not fully disappeared from the Sikh society. 'While it is true that while sitting in the congregation or while partaking food from the community kitchen, (Guru ka Langar), caste factors are not taken into consideration, caste still plays a domineering role in deciding matrimonial alliances and other social relationship. Apart from the broad caste divisions such as Jats, Khatri, Aroras and Ramgarhias, the converts from the so-called low-castes have not yet been fully assimilated in Sikh faith which does not recognise any caste system. The 'low-castes' remain 'low-castes' and have been given the separate label of Mahzabi Sikhs. When the Golden Temple and other Sikh shrines came under the control of the Udasi Mahants they fixed separate visiting hours for the Mahzabi Sikhs to offer their prayers in the sanctum sanctorum. They had to hire high-caste attendants to carry their Prasad to be offered in the temple. It was only during the Akali movements for Gurudwara reform that such restrictions were removed and control of the Gurudwaras passed on to democratically elected bodies. In spite of modernisation of the Sikh society inter-caste marriages are rare and rarer still are the examples of so-called high-caste Khatri marrying into the so-called Mahzabi Sikh family. Similarly there are divisions at religious and ideological levels. Some movements of religious reform among the Sikhs such as Nirankari, Namdhari and Akali, were started to purge Sikhism of unSikh-life practices.

9.5.2 Movements of Socio-Religious Reform

There have been several religious reform movements among the Sikhs to eradicate the above mentioned evils. These movements led to the development of various sects in Sikhism. In this section we shall be discussing only two to three socio-religious movements.

i) The Nirankari Movement

The first traces of differentiation of the Sikh faith were noticed during the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule in the Punjab. Baba Dayal, Founder of the Nirankari Movement, was the first among the Sikh religious reformers to have preached against the evils that had slowly crept into the Sikh social and religious life. He preached against idolatry, worship of graves, tombs and trees and belief in other complicated Brahmanical rites and ceremonies and exhorted his followers to worship one *Nirankar* (God). Though Baba Dayal was able to attract a number of followers known as, "*Nirankaris*" because of their belief in one Nirankar and who followed Sikh ceremonies in birth, death, marriage and other social usage, yet his movement could not make a very wide impact on the Sikh masses who still lacked educational awakening. Sikhism developed in the Nirankari movement with one of the followers Baba Avtar Singh starting a parallel movement of his own known as Sant Nirankaris.

ii) The Namdhari Movement

The Namdhari Movement is popularly known as *Kuka* movement. Started by Bhagat Jawaharmal and Baba Balak Singh, the movement became a powerful force of religio-political revival among the Sikhs under one of the latter's disciples, Baba Ram Singh. Baba Ram Singh particularly enjoined upon his followers the worship of one God through prayer and meditation. The Rehatnamas (moral codes) prepared and enforced by him exhorted all his followers to be engaged at all time in the worship of God. He also preached against social evils such as the caste system, infanticide, early marriage

and barter of daughters in marriage and popularised simple and inexpensive Anand Marriage. The teachings of Baba Ram Singh seem to have had a wide appeal to the Sikh masses. Contemporary European officials viewed the growing popularity of Baba Ram Singh's mission with serious concern.

Box 2

Baba Ram Singh's mission was specially marked by teachings of righteousness, tolerance and mercy, yet some of his followers got out of control and in a fit of religious frenzy committed certain excesses which resulted in a clash with the Government. Some of his more orthodox followers who were excited over the killing of the cows murdered the butchers at Amritsar, Raikot and Malerkotla and were, as a punishment, blown off from the cannon's mouth. Though there is a difference of opinion among scholars as to whether the movement was religious, the *Kukas* created great hatred for the British rulers in the minds of the people in Punjab which helped prepare the ground for the subsequent religio-political struggle for the Akalis in the early twentieth century.

iii) Akali Movement

Historically Akalis are the members of the suicide squads of the Sikh armies which first appeared about 1690 AD when the execution of two predecessors and continued persecution by the Mughals forced the 10th Guru of the Sikh (Guru Gobind Singh) to resort to armed struggle against the rulers. The Akalis are also known as Nihangs who traditionally wear blue dresses. In 1920s the Akali movement was again revived as a semi para military volunteers raised to oppose the British government. The Akalis represented the Sikh community to regain their control over the Gurudwaras, in the agitation for an independent Punjabi speaking, Sikh majority state. Thus the state of Punjab was formed in 1966. The Shiromani Akali Dal is a major political party in Punjab (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1985: 185).

9.5.3 Impact on Indian Society

With its emphasis on unity of God and brotherhood of mankind Sikh's thoughts greatly influenced the Indian Society. Through their condemnation of the caste system the Sikh Gurus were able to make a major dent in the traditional hold of caste. By emphasising equality of all religions and by including hymns from the Hindu Bhaktas and the Muslim saints the Sikh Gurus set an example of true ecumenism. By reconciling two conflicting traditions – Hinduism and Islam the Sikh Gurus gave a positive direction by emphasising transcendental humanism and spiritual values. The Sikh Gurus perceived that there was a real lack of love among people and therefore they laid great emphasis upon spiritual practices and preached philosophy of God, the supreme reality. At a time when debate about superiority of one religion against another has again started, the following hymns of the third Guru help to resolve the religious conflict:

“Of all the religions the best religion is to repeat God's name and to do pious deeds.”

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Mention few don'ts as observed by the Sikhs as their religious code of conduct.

9.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed various aspects of Sikh religions belief and the development of Sikh society over the years. We started with the socio-cultural and the philosophical foundation of Sikhism. There we discussed the socio-cultural contexts in which Sikhism was born with life and message of Guru Nanak. We also discussed the model of the Sikh society as established by Guru Nanak in his life time. Development of Sikhism and the appearance of the ten Gurus are discussed briefly in this unit. The worship pattern of the Sikh society, their life cycle rituals etc. were also discussed. Lastly we discussed the Sikh code of conduct and religious reform movements in Sikhism. Here we presented the Nirankari, Namdhari and the Akali movements as examples of the religious reform movements in Sikhism.

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9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Guru Nanak was engrossed in spiritual pursuits since his childhood. One morning when Nanak went for a dip in the river Bein he was absorbed in thoughts of God and in this stage he was into the divine presence. First words that he uttered after his enlightenment were "there is no Hindu, there is no Musalman".
- ii) The three principles are—always remembering God, earning one's livelihood through honest means, and sharing ones fruits of labour with others.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) b.
- ii) d.

Check Your Progress 3

Sikhism

- i) Among the few don'ts are eating Halal meat prepared in the Muslim way, removing hair from body, use of alcohol and adultery.
- ii) d.
- iii) a.



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UNIT 10 BUDDHISM*

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with the religious belief systems and philosophies of Jainism and Buddhism. After reading this unit you should be able to—

- explain the social, political and economic background of the emergence of Buddhism in India;
- describe the basic teachings of Buddhism;
- discuss the relationship between the Buddhist philosophy and the society of that age
- examine growth and development of Buddhism over a period of time; and
- highlight the similarities between Buddhism and Hinduism and the decline of Buddhism in India.

*This Unit is adapted from ESO-15, Unit 20 with necessary edition.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Buddhism developed against the backdrop of certain political systems, political philosophy, economic and social order, and practising of particular religious activities in ancient India. This Unit begins with an in-depth discussion on the background of the emergence of the religion. Gautam Buddha is the founder of Buddhism and he has given a significant direction to the religious ideologies of India. The relationship between Buddhism and society of that age is also discussed in the next section. Buddhism has grown over a period of time and acquired various new dimensions. We discuss all these aspects besides discussing various sects in Buddhism. We shall also discuss the similarity of Buddhism with Hinduism and decline of Buddhism in India.

10.2 THE EMERGENCE OF BUDDHISM AND JAINISM

The sixth century B.C. has left a permanent impression on Indian history mainly because it witnessed an intense preoccupation with philosophical speculation. Among the various thinkers contributing to this unique phase was Buddha, who more than any other historical personages born in India has compelled the attention of the world as the most humane thinkers, the Indian tradition has produced. Buddhism represents the most serious and most comprehensive attempt to analyse the rapidly changing society in which it originated and to provide an enduring social philosophy for mankind. Buddhism created the vision of an alternative society, the possibility of organising society on different principles from the hierarchical and inegalitarian ideology and practices that had begun to gain ground.

The roots of Buddha's social philosophy can be clearly traced back to the society of the sixth century B.C. Politically it was situated in the context of state formation and the emergence of certain institutions.

10.2.1 The Political System

The political system at the time of Buddha was characterised by the existence of two distinct forms of government: monarchical kingdoms and clan oligarchies or *gana-sanghas*. The geographical location of these units is itself interesting with the monarchical kingdoms occupying the Ganga-Yamuna valley and the *gana-sanghas* being located near the foothills of the Himalayas. The *gana-sanghas* were inhabited by either one or more Kshatriya clans such as the Sakyas or Mallas, or the Lichchavis. The *gana-sanghas* were organised on the lineage principle with the entire clan participating in the exercise of power.

There was constant conflict between the various political units and the picture that emerges from the Buddhist literature is that it was a period of expanding horizons and political consolidation which ultimately ended with the establishment of the Mauryan empire.

It is possible to document the process of state formation, especially in the case of Magadha, from the Buddhist literature. Bimbisara, the 5th century B.C. Magadhan ruler, began a systematic and intensive phase of state organisation. The earlier pastoral-cum-agricultural economy with tribal organisation had given way to a more settled agrarian-based economy which became a major factor in state formation. It made

possible the support of a large standing army which was imperative for the expanding frontiers of the kingdoms of the Ganga valley and as an instrument of coercive control within the kingdom. Simultaneously, the agrarian based economy encouraged the formation of an impressive officialdom which is an indispensable aspect of state formation. The standing army, formally divided into various specialised groups, replaced the tribal militia of the earlier society and became an instrument of coercion directly in the control of the king. The growing armies of the aggressive expanding monarchies even attracted the ambitious youth of the *gana-sanghas* who saw in them a possible outlet for their military skills especially since the *gana-sanghas* themselves were collapsing one by one.

10.2.2 Territorial Expansion and Collapse of Gana-Sanghas

The process of territorial expansion and the consolidation of the early Indian State was operating at two levels in the age of the Buddha. The monarchical kingdoms of the Ganga valley, especially Kosala and Magadha, were each expanding at the expense of their immediate and weaker neighbours. But at the same time they were locked in a struggle for supremacy among themselves, in which Magadha ultimately triumphed. The *gana-sanghas* were the first to collapse and the smaller ones like the *Sakyas* and *Mallas* had already caved in during the lifetime of the Buddha. What was at stake in the conflict between the *gana-sanghas* and the monarchies was not just a different political form but also a whole way of life based on communal control of the land by the clan. However, the collapse of the *gana-sanghas* became inevitable in the face of the rapid changes taking place in 6th and 5th centuries B.C.

10.2.3 Political Philosophy

The most notable aspect of political philosophy in the age of the Buddha was the completely pragmatic approach to power. Kingship is marked by the absolute and arbitrary exercise of power with no evidence of effective checks upon the king's ability to impose his will on the dominion. The king had total control over his people and is often depicted as using power in a willful and capricious manner rather than in a legitimate and controlled capacity. Even the law was not applied consistently but in a highly personal and arbitrary way. The literature indicates very clearly that in the process of change old institutions had collapsed but had not yet been replaced by others; the collective power of the people of the earlier society which had been expressed through tribal institutions, were no longer feasible in the expanding territorial units. Power thus became less of an instrumental value viewed from the point of view of the community as a whole, and instead became an end in itself. This had important consequences for Buddhist social philosophy.

10.2.4 New Organisations of Production

Historians differ about the extent to which iron contributed to the emergence of new relations of production in the age of Buddha. However, there is a fair degree of consensus on various elements that marked the new relations of production. There was a noticeable expansion of the economy and within that of agriculture. Rice cultivation based on transplantation led to a virtual demographic revolution. The Buddhist texts mention numerous settlements attesting to an expansion of settlements, the extension of cultivation, and of people, into hitherto unexploited lands. Along with an expansion of agriculture and settlements there was increased craft production; numerous crafts are mentioned in the texts as also coinage signifying a money economy, trade and trade routes, and

corporate commercial activity in the form of *srenis*. The age of the Buddha has also been characterised as the period of the second urbanisation.

From the texts it is also clear that the *gahapatis*, a category of persons mentioned often in the accounts in the context of economic activity played a crucial role in the expansion of agriculture. Some of them were in control of substantial tracts of land. The *gahapatis* were the primary tax payers in the monarchical *janapadas* and in this capacity they were regarded as intrinsic to the sovereignty of the king.

10.2.5 Social Stratification

The growing complexity of the economy was expressed in the emergence of a sharply stratified society. While some sections of society had large concentrations of land, there were others who had no access to the means of production. The period is marked by the appearance of such categories as *vaitanika* (wage earner) and *Karmakaras* (labourers who hired out their labour). *Karmakaras* are mentioned often along with *dasa* (servile labourer) and together they implied elements of servitude and made them unfree in some way. The term *dalidda* (pali for *daridra*) denoting extreme poverty, also appears for the first time while its counterposition with wealth suggests sharp economic contradictions in the new society. Economic contradictions were accompanied by social contradictions — certain families were regarded as of high status; others were regarded as low; the Brahmanas were staking their claims to pre-eminent status based on birth but there is evidence of such claims being vigorously contested.

To sum up, in the sixth century B.C. was one which was in the throes of rapid change. Apart from the emergence of inequality, the transformation and reformulation of political units and social and economic institutions entailed the breakdown of clan and kin organisations and the collective units of the earlier periods. In its place what was visible was individualism and greed. There was unbridled power in the hands of some, while no norms had yet evolved which could mediate between the exploiters and the exploited or between the king and his people. Jainism, Buddhism and other ‘heterodox’ philosophies were the creative response of thinkers to such a society.

10.2.6 Samanas and Brahmanas: The Religious Philosophies

All the major ideas of Indian philosophy can be seen, at least in rudimentary form, in the 6th century B.C. The philosophers articulated their world view through their ideas on the one hand and through the institutional practices within which they created in their organisations on the other. The most significant feature common to the philosophies was the *renunciation tradition*. The period was characterized by the *paribbajakas* or *samanas* who had renounced their household status. They wandered above from place to place with the object of meeting and having discussions with others like them. It is through this ceaseless movement that they propagated their ideals and built up their followings.

What united all the *samanas* together was their opposition to the established tradition of the *Brahmanas* based on the cult of sacrifice, central to the ideology of the latter. They were also opposed to the claims of the *Brahmanas* preeminence in society and for these reasons they had been described as non-conformist sects. The range of ideas indicates the complexity of attempting to understand the rapidly changing society around these philosophers. It has been argued that the breakdown of the earlier simple communal existence had already created a sense of alienation which provided the

common backdrop against which the individual philosophers grappled with the problems of human existence. And against such a backdrop Jainism and Buddhism emerged in Indian society.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The political system at the time of Buddha was characterised by the existence of
 - a) monarchical kingdoms
 - b) clan oligarchies
 - c) Both of the above
 - d) None of the above
- ii) Explain three main features of state formation in age of Mahavira and Buddha.

10.3 BUDDHISM: BASIC TEACHINGS

In this section we shall discuss about the founder of Buddhism and its basic teachings.

10.3.1 Founder of Buddhism

Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. His family name was Gautama and Siddhartha was the name given to him by his parents. He was the prince of the Kingdom of *Sakyas* and *Kshatriya* or warrior by caste. Siddhartha had a spiritual and humanistic outlook since his childhood. He was married at the age of 16 years with Yosadhara. The turning point of his life came at 29, when he realised that men are subject to old age, sickness, and death — that human life is suffering. He himself resolved on the great renunciation, to give up the princely life and become a wandering ascetic. He departed from the palace leaving his wife and infant son behind. He met various teachers in search of truth. Being unsatisfied he practised severe austerity and extreme self *mortification* for nearly six years. He, however, again abandoned this path and selected his own path (middle way — a path between a worldly life and extremes of self denial) to enlightenment. This he accomplished while seated cross-legged under a banyan tree at a place now called Buddha Gaya in Bihar, where Siddhartha Gautam became a supreme *Buddha* (the Enlightened one) in 528 B.C.

10.3.2 The Essence of Buddhism

The essence of the Buddha's early preaching was said to be the *Four Noble Truths*: acceptance of sufferings, knowing the cause of sufferings, bring to an end of sufferings and the eight-fold path as a mechanism for release from sufferings. Let us examine these truths in greater length.

i) Life is fundamentally disappointment and suffering

Many experts have pointed out that the basic propositions of Buddha's philosophy are psychological and not metaphysical. The central proposition upon which all others are contingent is that of *dukkha*, or pain or human misery, which no one can escape from. The first sermon of the Buddha at Sarnath begins with the inevitability of suffering:

“This O monks is the sacred truth of suffering. Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, being united with loved ones is suffering, to be separated is suffering, not to obtain what one desires is suffering, clinging to the earthly is suffering”.

Thus the starting point of Buddhist philosophy is the recognition of what has been termed the “*tyranny of pain*”. But while the origin of pains was specific to the different experience of individuals the Buddha dwelt on the universal aspects of the agony he found everywhere. While the generalised idea of misery could be drawn from the tyrannical acts in the unsettled conditions of his age, they were formulated as psychological universalities afflicting all human beings cutting across all lines. This focus explains the significance of the three signs witnessed by the Buddha, of disease, old age and death, which recurs in all the narratives of the Buddha. It is one of the best attested of the early traditions and most characteristic of Buddha’s understanding of human experience.

ii) **Suffering is a result of one’s desires for power, pleasure and continued existence**

The centrality of pain is linked to the second proposition in the four noble truths where the cause of suffering is located in *tanha* the “thirst for pleasure, thirst for being, the thirst for power”. The universal all consuming thirst itself may well be a product of the insatiable greed for wealth and for territory. Some passages in the Buddhist texts capture the insatiable greed of men most aptly thus: “the rich in this world give nothing of the goods that they acquired to others; they eagerly heap riches together and further and still further go in their pursuit of enjoyment. Although the king may have conquered the kingdoms of the earth and be ruler of the land this side of the sea he would still cover that which is beyond the sea”. Finally, only by cutting off individually and the abandonment of selfhood will there be end to *tanha*.

Dukkha and *tanha* arise out of ignorance about the nature of the universe; both are part of a world which is in perpetual flux (*anicca*), in the process of continuously changing. Buddhist philosophy has thus aptly been characterised as the “metaphysics of perpetual change”. Further in the Buddhist view the world is *anatta*, it is soulless. According to the Buddha there is no stable entity, no soul which transmigrates, although the process of *causation* and *karma* ensures rebirth. However, what transmigrates is individual consciousness; as a person dies his/her consciousness and the desire for fulfilling the unsatisfied cravings propelling it forward enters another life, another body, in the same way as one lamp fades out and kindles another.

iii) **To Stop Disappointment and Suffering One Must Stop Desiring**

The cessation of sorrow is the aim of Buddhist philosophy and is attainable by the code of personal ethics. The criterion of Buddhist ethics is self-control which when it reaches its highest point leads to *nibbana*, the blowing out of the individual. This is the only stable entity, a state of rest, in a world of ceaseless flux. It is a state of bliss reached by the Buddha and other *arhants* (who attained Nirvana) or perfected beings.

There are other features of Buddhism which are unique to it; these include a steering away from issues regarded by the Buddha as irrelevant (*avyaktani*), taking one away from the path to be pursued — the most important being the existence of god. The existence or non-existence of god in no way altered the basic propositions of Buddhism. In keeping with this position was the emphasis on self-reliance in early Buddhism wherein

the Buddha exhorted his followers not to look for support outside of themselves but be “lamps unto themselves”. Equally significant was the centrality of compassion for fellow beings.

iv) **The Way to Stop Desiring and Suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path**

Suggested by Buddha, these paths are right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

10.3.3 Buddhist Social Order

When someone joins the Buddhist order he or she is required to subscribe to no creed. In one part of the ceremony of initiation he says:

I go for refuge to the Buddha

I go for refuge to the Law

I go for refuge to the Order.

Buddha suggested his serious disciples to abandon the ordinary civil life since it was difficult to follow the Eight Fold Path in such a life. Hence two main types of followers are there in Buddhism: members of *monastic communities* and the *lay disciples*.

- i) The member of the monastic community is to forsake family, occupation and society and lead a solitary life either as anchorites or as members of a monastic community. There are rigid rules of this monastic community: simple dwellings, three piece garments (an undergarment, a kind of coat and a cloak), shaved off head and beard. He must beg for his food, must observe prohibition to meat diet. The monastic life must follow the ten Commandments. They *must refrain from* (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) unchastity, (4) lying, (5) intoxicants, (6) solid food after midday, (7) dancing, music and theatrical representation, (8) using garlands, perfumes and salves, (10) using big and broad couches, and (11) accepting gold and silver.

There are further minutest details of the monastic life. *Pratimoksha* (the oldest Buddhist document) contains a list of about 250 contraventions by which a monk has to test his conscience twice every month. *Uparasatha* (day of fast) is used for this heart searching. Any one, without caste restriction, without the sin of parricide etc., without some form of serious disease and without lack of personal liberty can be a member of the monastic order.

Box 1

In the monastic order there are four stages to enter into *Nirvana*. It begins with the entrants, i.e. the novice who has stepped into the stream. In the second stage there are those who will return here on the earth only once more. In the third stage there are those who will not return here on the earth any more. They will be in a higher world ‘heaven’ and thence will enter into ‘Nirvana’. The highest stage is that of the *arahat* (saint) who will pass immediately from his present existence into Nirvana (Hackmann, 1988: 307).

- ii) For the laymen/Women, Buddha also laid down certain instructions. They are advised to lead a moral life “in keeping with the demands of the time, and to fulfil all duties towards parents, teachers, wives, children, servants, subordinates, and

ascetics”. He suggested five commandments for the laymen disciples. They are advised to *refrain from* a) killing, b) stealing, c) unchastity, d) lying and e) intoxicants. Though for a layman, the highest salvation was not possible through these prescribed methods; it would help them to procure a favourable reincarnation here on the earth. So it would be possible for them to become a member of the monastic community and ultimately attain the rank of *arahat* (Hackmann 1988: 307). Such an ideal of reincarnation is associated with the doctrine of *karma* of Hinduism.

A layman is not called to celibacy, but is required to be faithful to his wife. As an aspect of simple life Buddhism does not suggest elaborate ceremonies.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write a short note on the essence of Buddha’s Four Fold Noble Truths in about seven lines.
- 2) Which one of the following is not a commandment for the laymen follower of Buddhism?
 - a) Refraining from killing
 - b) Refraining from lying
 - c) Refraining from intoxicants
 - d) Refraining from dancing and music

10.4 BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIETY OF THAT AGE

How can we relate these ideas to the society in which Buddhist philosophy originated and what impact did it have upon that society? Further how different or shared were these ideas in relation to existing Brahmanical ideas? Let us examine some of these points here.

a) Break with Brahmanism

Most important, while there were a few ideas that Buddhist philosophy shared with the Upanishadic thought and with the sramanic (renouncer) tradition Buddha did not merely rehash ideas; his ideas marked an innovative and radical move in the direction of creating a new social philosophy with an enduring appeal for human kind. There was not only a break with Brahmanism but also an interrogation and rejection of its basic beliefs. A later Buddhist philosopher, Dharmakirti, put this successfully when he characterised ignorance as accepting the authority of the Veda and someone as creator, the desire of gaining merit through the holy dip, the vanity of casteism and torturing the body to redeem sin.

The sharpest dimension of the break that the Buddha made with Brahmanism was in his understanding of social institutions. In the Buddhist view since there was no creator all social institutions were arrangements which men made. Private property, the family, occupational categories and kingship originated in human social arrangements.

b) The Demystification of Kingship and Caste

Both these institutions were considered divinely ordained in Brahmanism. Buddhism opened up immense possibilities for recording social arrangements. The impulse and legitimation for reordering social arrangements could also come from the Buddhist emphasis on change. For example, if everything was permanently in a state of change, varna divisions and despotic kingship could also change. It was in conceptualising the new social arrangements that the bases of Buddhist social philosophy may be discerned. In response to the contradictions that the bases of Buddhist social philosophy may be discerned. In response to the contradictions of society in his age Buddhism also recognised the direction of historical forces. For example, while the breakdown of the *gana-sanghas* and the earlier traditions of clan-based societies could not be reversed, they provided models for the Buddhist *sangha*. In the Buddhist *sangha* all were equal regardless of their origins; there was no individual property and all decisions were taken through consensus or voting. The *sangha*, in the words of D.P. Chattopadhyaya, was the embodiment of the “imaginary sustenance of the tribe, a symbol of people’s memories and of their aspirations”; it was the vision of an alternative society.

However, this egalitarian order applied only to the *bhikkhw*, i.e. to the *samana* who renounced both family and property to pursue salvation goals. In the world outside the *sangha* Buddhism did not envisage radical rearrangements. Buddhism introduced norms which by emphasising charity, self control, and moderation, moderated the excesses of an exploitative economic order. Buddhist ethics required a reciprocal ‘giving’; masters should treat those who worked for them well in return for which their servants would work hard for their masters. These norms would however require no re-ordering of the existing economic order in which some had too much, others too little. Similarly, kingship was to be exercised according to *dhamma* moderating the despotic governance of existing rulers.

c) Arrangements for Redistribution of Surplus through Dana

In keeping with the dual arrangements of Buddhist social philosophy, one for the world of the *sangha* and the other for the world outside, it was the central place given to *dana*, or alms giving. This was the link between the two worlds — pious laymen maintained the *sangha* and others who had renounced the world. *Dana* was also a way of ensuring that society maintained its marginalised groups, renunciators and the indigent. In substituting *dana* for the Brahmanical *yagna* the Buddha was providing a structural inversion; while the *yagna* ensured that no surplus could be built up, *dana* effected its redistribution.

To sum up the social philosophy of Buddhism, it can be seen that while Buddhism did not envisage the complete eradication of inequalities in society, Buddhist social ethics provides a *code for civilised living rather than creating for an equalitarian society*. As the “middle path”, it sought to contain the excesses of an exploitative order. It also interrogated Brahmanical values especially hierarchies based on birth and the sacred legitimation of secular institutions. It thus became the first and in some ways the most lasting critique of Brahmanism. It is not surprising therefore that oppressed groups in India have seen in it the vision of a new society. It has also appealed to rationalist humanists both in age of the Buddha and the present. For these and a number of other reasons Buddhism became popular not merely within India but in south, south-east and east Asia — by far one of India’s most significant contributions to the world.

10.5 THE GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE OF BUDDHISM

Within a few centuries following the age of the Buddha the philosophy that originated with him spread out from its earlier location in eastern India. As it spread, its philosophical content expanded and was transformed through its creative interaction with its new environments and the changed social processes. Kings and other elites provided support for its expansion; by the second century B.C. it had spread into Sri Lanka and South East Asia; by the 4th and the 5th centuries A.D. it was well established in east Asia.

10.5.1 The Hinayana, Mahayana and Vijrayana

Buddhist philosophy *did not remain static* during its long history. In the centuries following the promulgation of the original teaching and the formation of earliest community, India Buddhism underwent a massive process of missionary diffusion throughout the Asian world, assimilating new values and undergoing major changes in doctrinal and institutional principles. Today, under the impact of conflicting ideologies and of science and technology, Buddhism as a religious belief system has undergone several changes. Its original propositions had focussed on each individual working towards salvation through the path formulated by the Buddha. Although these formulations were not really esoteric, they were not so easy to continuously observe so as to reach the goal of becoming the perfected being, or the *arhant*. Fairly early, certain ancillary supports began to be incorporated into Buddhism such as showing reverence to the symbols associated with the Buddha, and other popular cults such as the worship of Tumuli. However, the most striking development took place around the 1st century B.C. or 1st century A.D. As Weber has pointed out, in order to become popular an abstract religion has two courses; it can become 'soteriological, that is, adopt the notion of a saviour or of salvation, or become magical, Buddhism did both — first, it adopted the notion of a saviour and later incorporated Tantrik elements. Finally, the three different strands of Buddhism came to be known as Hinayana, Mahayana and Vyrayana for reasons that will become evident presently.

- i) Hinayana: After the death of Buddha several Buddhist councils were held to decide the questions of faith and religious orders in Buddhism. This finally led to the distinction between those who believed the most ancient traditions (*Theravandins*) and those who claimed their understandings represented the highest and most complete account of Buddha's message (*the Mahayanisi*). The *Theravada* or *Hinayana* (located mainly in the lands of South East Asia, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia) represents the sole survivor of the numerous ancient Indian schools. It has a fixed body of canonical literature, a relatively unified orthodox teaching, a clearly structured institutional distinction between the monastic order and laity. The *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets) consists of *Vinaya Pitaka* (Basket of Discipline), *Sutta Pitaka* (Basket of Discourses) and *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (Basket of Scholasticism) written in Pali language is the *Hinayana* canon of sacred literature. This tradition explicated necessary regulations for the community, meditative techniques and rituals and the stages leading to *arhatship*.
- ii) The Mahayana (located in Nepal, Sikkim, China, Korea and Japan) is a diffused and vastly complex combination of many schools and sects, based on a heterogeneous literature. The main thrust of their principle is that of being against

the principle of Hinayana. However, in China and Japan its literature ‘ranges from the most abstruse philosophy to popular devotional theism and magic. Institutionally it has appeared both in monastic and in radically laicized forms and it has occasionally served well defined church—state configurations.

The ideal of the Mahayana school was that of a *Boddhisattva* (Enlightenment being), whose compassionate vow to save all human beings was contrasted with the aloof self-concern of the Hinayana *arhat* (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1985: 603).

Box 2

The incorporation of the idea of a saviour was facilitated by the belief in *Boddhisattvas*, a series of previous personages of the Buddha before he achieved an *arhant* status in his last life. The *Boddhisattva* was a potential Buddha or a potential *arhant*. The focus on compassion laid by the Buddha resulted in the ideas that accumulated merit of a *Boddhisattva* could be transferred to help those who were struggling to escape from their various states of miseries; that once one became an *arhant* one was of no use to anyone else so that the *arhant* status should be postponed rather than achieved immediately, and finally that a future Buddha would as a saviour, make salvation possible for a large number of ordinary individuals. This form of Buddhism came to be known as Mahayana, or the great vehicle, which would carry many people into salvation in contrast to the earlier form of Buddhism called Hinayana, the lesser vehicle, as it could not carry so many people to salvation.

The following are some of the ways in which Mahayana Buddhism differs from Hinayana. In the Hinayana deity worship had no place and no doctrine of God. The Mahayana introduced the idea of deity into this religion. The popular form of theism of Mahayana was the doctrine of *Boddhisattva* (one whose nature is pervaded by *bodi*). According to this doctrine through the history of human being a large number of noble men tread the path of Buddha and all of them had to follow the stages of *Boddhisattva* before they could attain the status of Buddha. However, a large number of them stopped at the *Boddhisattva* stage (and did not take up the final step to achieve the status Buddha) because they were filled with infinite pity for the suffering of the world. They prefer to wait to help those who are in need. Thus the *Boddhisattva* intervenes and saves from danger and death. He protects the weak and the helpless, frees the captive, fights plague and famine, consoles the sorrowful and comforts those who are ready to despair. Thus with this peculiar creation of *Boddhisattva* by the Mahayana the centre of gravity of Buddhist doctrine was completely shifted.

- iii) The **Tantrayana** or **Vijrayana** (prevalent in Tibet, Mongolia, and some parts of Siberia) dominantly identified with Tibetan Lamaism and its theocracy.

The third stage in Buddhist philosophy was the incorporation of a magical — mystic dimension where the followers of Vajrayana believed that release of salvation could be best achieved by acquiring magical powers which was called *Vajra*, meaning thunderbolt or diamond. This form of Buddhism was focussed on feminine divinities who were the force or potency (Sakti) behind the male divinities. These feminine ‘spouses’ or the Buddhas or *Bodhisattava* of the new sect were the saviouresses (Taras) of their followers. Those who reached a high state of detachment and mental training acquired

supernatural power and were capable of following these magical practices. The *Vajrayana* school flourished in Bengal, Bihar and in Tibet where it has survived. One of the formulae of Tantric Buddhism still chanted is “Om mani padme hum”; such formulae were expected to bestow magical power on the worship and lead to the highest bliss.

10.5.2 Neo-Buddhist Movement in India

Buddhism is against the Brahmanic social order. It is against the caste based social inequality. As it emerged as a response against the Brahmanic cult in the ancient India, in contemporary India. Buddhism has been used as the instrument of eradication of ascribed social inequality. Hence the most significant Buddhist mass revival of the new age was led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in India. He found in Buddhism the message for the uplift of the oppressed in India. He used and interpreted Buddhism as the ideology to bring social equality and justice for the oppressed mass, especially for the Scheduled Castes. After many years of spiritual search, he became convinced that Buddhism was the only ideology that could effect the eventual liberation of India out Castes. On 14 October 1956 he performed a mass ‘consecration’ of the Scheduled Castes to Buddhism in Nagpur, Maharashtra. The new converts were mostly from the Scheduled Mahars Castes (a Scheduled Caste) (Gomez 1987: 381). This mass conversion aimed at the rejection of the untouchability, participation of the oppressed castes towards undertaking more social and political activities for their liberation from the exploitative forces. One aspect of conversion movement was to radically undermine the Hindu dominant culture by rejecting its basic tenets of hierarchy, purity and pollution. This understanding of Hindu culture created a tendency of negation among the Dalits of Maharashtra. This negation was very important in as much as it developed negative consciousness which drove the Dalit of Maharashtra to undertake more creative and organised political action for their emancipation. Ambedkar’s idea behind conversion was to make it a part of the larger political movement based on the material contradictions inherent in Indian Society (Guru, 1989: 419-420).

10.5.3 Decline of Buddhism in India

Before analysing the process of decline of Buddhism in India we should know the similarity between Buddhism and Hinduism and also the influence of Buddhism on Hinduism. It is significant that these aspects have contributed significantly for the decline of Buddhism in India. Originally there are certain similarities in the fundamental doctrine of Hinduism and Buddhism. The idea of transmigration of soul or incarnation is common to both the religions. Both these religions are against taking animal life. It was no doubt, permitted to Hindus by epics and in fact prevailed in Vedic times but was given up under the influence of Buddhism. Buddhism also brought phenomenal change on the mode of worship and rituals of Hinduism. Vedic sacrifices were mostly superseded by other form of worship associated with temples and veneration of images. This is however, to note here that Buddha only suggested sermons and meditation to his followers. However, the ordinary follower of Buddha in the due course of time accepted the worship of relics of Buddha and his chief disciples. The Buddhist tradition of worshipping of great teachers helped the process of deification of Rama and Krishna. Even in Hinduism Lord Buddha has been regarded as the 10th incarnation of Vishnu.

Significantly the *Mathas* of Hinduism owe their origin to Buddhism. For the first time in the history of Hinduism *Mathas* were established by Sankara, the South Indian revivalist,

in the 9th century A.D. modelled on the pattern of Buddhist monasteries. The *mathas* at Saingiri, Puri, Dwaraka and Badrinath which are established by Sankara, helped in the revival of Hinduism by enforcing the disciplinary concepts of Buddhism. These *mathas* still attract thousands of Hindu pilgrims.

Buddhism received a setback in the land of its birth. Many of the noble ideas of Hinduism were incorporated in the broad fold of Hinduism including Buddha himself as the reincarnation of Vishnu. Hinduism struggled with Buddhism from the 4th to 9th century. The greatest danger of Buddhism came from its emphasis on tolerance and obliteration of differences. The very fact that Buddhism and Hinduism came nearer to each other led to the disintegration of the former. Decadence of Buddhism in India was hastened by its alliance with forms of magic and erotic mysticism called *Saktism*. Hindus had, in the meanwhile, absorbed all the good points which Buddhist had to offer. Sankara, led a crusade against Buddhism in 8th and 9th centuries. He took the Buddhist institution as his model and arranged the ascetic orders of Hindus accordingly. His philosophy was also based on Mahayana Buddhism. The final disappearance of Buddhism was, however, mainly due to the destruction of its great monasteries by the Muslim invaders ... it must be understood that the decline of Buddhism from India was not its annihilation or explosion but absorption (Chopra 1980: 48-50).

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) In the new social philosophy of Buddha there was a
 - a) reconciliation with Brahmanism
 - b) improvement upon the Brahmanism
 - c) break with Brahmanism
 - d) a parallel development of Brahmanism
- 2) Write a note on feminine divinities in Buddhism in about six lines.

10.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed Buddhism. We started with the discussion in the background of the emergence of Buddhism. There we discussed the political system and the political philosophy, the economic and the social orders and the then existing religious philosophies, in the context of which Buddhism developed. While discussing Buddhism we highlighted its basic teachings, the relation between its basic philosophy and the society of that age and its growth and development over a period of time. The similarities between Buddhism and Hinduism and the decline of Buddhism in India were also discussed in this unit.

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10.8 FURTHER READING

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10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) c)
- ii) a) Emergence of settled agriculture.
b) large standing army for the expending frontiers of the Kingdom and effective control within the state.
c) formation of an impressive officialdom.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) According to Buddha life is
 - a) fundamentally disappointment and suffering
 - b) suffering is a result of one's desires for pleasure, power and continued existence
 - c) to stop disappointment one must stop desiring
 - d) the way to stop desiring is the noble Eight-fold path — right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.
- 2) d)

Check Your Progress 3

- i) c)
- ii) The followers of Vajrayana believe that salvation could be best achieved by acquiring magical power. This form of Buddhism focuses on the feminine divinities who were the force behind the male divinities. These feminine 'spouses' of the Buddhas of the new sect were the saviouresses of their followers.

UNIT 11 RELIGION AMONG TRIBES*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 What is religion?
- 11.3 Tribes or Indigenous People
- 11.4 Belief in Super-Humans
 - 11.4.1 Supreme God
 - 11.4.2 Different Superhuman Beings
 - 11.4.3 Health and Rituals
 - 11.4.4 Environmental deities and Sacred Landscapes
- 11.5 Tribal Religions on the Wane
- 11.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.7 References
- 11.8 Further Reading

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand religion as a concept in anthropological terms;
- Understand how the term tribe is being used in this context;
- Understand the various aspects included within the concept of religion; and
- Be familiar with examples of each from Indian tribes.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The study of religion from a social science perspective—anthropological, sociological, or psychological— is its study as a social institution and not from a theological perspective as the truth. In his book, *Idea of a Social Science* (1958), philosopher Peter Winch has problematized that we begin our analysis of the worldview of others, from the premise that they are wrong. He takes up the case of Evans-Pritchard's analysis of *Azande Witchcraft* (1937), where Evans-Pritchard shows the function of witch-accusations in Azande society, demonstrating that these accusations take the place of actual violence and serve to maintain the social order. But according to Winch, Evans-Pritchard, while explaining the function of witchcraft assumes that no such phenomenon exists, that it is only a cultural element of the Azande constructed for the function it performs. It is at this point that philosophically it is to be understood that as social scientists we tend to treat the beliefs and world view of others, as functional and even logical, yet deny to them the status of truth value. But as scholars we cannot assume the existence or non-existence of a phenomenon; it is beyond the scope of our

understanding. So, in this lesson the students should learn about tribal religion with an open mind and not have preconceived bias about its true status. This is all the more essential as in the contemporary world. There is a lot of ensuing debate about the efficacy of science and its truth value. More so, as after just three hundred years of the industrial revolution, the world is facing environmental disasters and pandemics of astronomical proportions. So, the real purpose of trying to learn about tribal religion is not that it is exotic but that there is a way of life and systems of belief that have existed for thousands of years and that they contain a wisdom that has made the people who believe in them also survive and allow the earth to survive as well.

11.2 WHAT IS RELIGION?

To most people born and belonging to the industrialized world, religion is a matter of a bounded entity, with definite norms and specific boundaries of beliefs and rituals. But to the people, who we call indigenous and also the forms of religion that have existed over ancient times, with no definite prophet or originator, religion is more of a way of life and a cosmology than a doctrine or a book of rules and ethics. Religion is not seen as a faith or a bounded entity, separating followers of one from the followers of the other, but just as a description of how things are. What goes by as tribal religion is simple, the way the indigenous people describe the world around them. It was what they *know to be true*, not what they just believe to be true. The indigenous people usually inhabit a world full of animate beings. They rarely make a distinction between the human world and the non-human world, and sometimes between the inanimate and the animate. To many indigenous peoples, there is no separation between animals and humans, and between rocks, rivers, trees and humans either. In a form of belief known as Totemism, the humans are seen as connected by ancestry and blood ties to the non-human world of animals, birds and the environment. They are believed to be descendants of these beings, like the eagle, the crow, the tree and the river. Durkheim (1915) had identified Totemism as the original form of religion, but that evolutionary perspective now stands discarded. He also defined religion in terms of the sacred and the collective cognition of the sacred by a community united by this common belief, that he referred to as a 'Church'; a definition that is still widely followed.

The earlier theorists like Frazer (1922) had put tribes on a lower ladder of social evolution and said that they did not have a reflective religion with concepts of higher forms of divinity but only believed in magic, that is, performance of rituals for instrumental ends. But later, theorists like Evans-Pritchard (1956), in their work on religion of the tribes have shown that they too believe in a supreme God and have concepts of divinity like more literate cultures.

Edward B. Tylor had coined the term Animism to describe the forms of belief of non-literate, so-called, 'primitive' communities. By Animism, Tylor had meant a belief in soul or spirit as the non-tangible part of living beings, the non-material body imperceptible to the senses; but which is the life force primarily responsible for animating the gross body. Hence the name Animism. Although no one subscribes to the evolutionary theory any more, yet concepts such as Totemism, Animism and Magic, still have relevance, not in designating entire communities, but as various forms of beliefs that may co-exist with other forms of beliefs, even among the most literate and urbanised communities.

So how can we define religion of the tribes, or for that matter, of any one. Durkheim had called religions as related to the concept of the sacred, where the sacred has

characters like being set apart, being surrounded by taboos, by belonging to the realm of faith and belief and not of rationality. But later social philosophers and anthropologists also have considered this view not quite adequate to describe religion for everyone. All religions involve beings who are not human and who have more powerful than humans. They can influence humans and need to be kept appeased and, in this sense, Spiro's definition of religion as involving superhuman beings is quite adequate to define what we mean by religion. Religion always involves a quest for knowledge about things above and beyond every day experiences, yet in many indigenous communities, superhuman beings are part of the social world and not really set apart. They can be quite interactive and play active role in the social world of the people. There are often different kinds and different levels of superhuman beings and we will discuss them in a while; but let us first try to understand what we mean by a tribe whose religion are we trying to learn about.

11.3 TRIBES OR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Without going into too much details about the definition of tribes that the student can learn from other sources, let us just understand that, tribe, or indigenous is a broad term that encompasses many different kinds of people. However, most of them, irrespective of whether they are urbanised and literate or are still living in the forests as hunter gatherers, or are practising agriculture or are pastoralists, were those communities that till fairly recent times were living on the fringes of major urbanized and literate communities, and who did not follow a major, universal religion of the world, like Christianity, Islam or Judaism. For Indian tribes, we find that most tribes had been exposed to the indigenous religious beliefs of this continent, like Hinduism, Buddhism and even Islam; and in the colonial period, the Christian missionaries had converted a fairly large numbers into Christianity. Yet the indigenous people have managed to retain quite a bit of their distinctive worldviews and cosmology, and their ways of life, irrespective of exposure to and interaction with other communities. Even with the long exposure to Hinduism, tribes did not become fully Hinduised, and instead managed to transfer some of their elements into the more universal religion. Tribes in particular did not accept the caste system of the Hindus and the Brahmanical aspects of the religion.

In a broad sense we can say that the tribes are those that did not become part of the social stratification and structure of the mainstream society, preferring to keep their identity as distinctive peoples and an integral aspect of this identity that has been their own beliefs and practices especially their relationship with the environment and their cosmogenic rather than anthropocentric world view.

The worldview and nature of superhuman beings differ from tribe to tribe and are dependent upon their modes of livelihood and their social environment, especially the proximity to other communities and cultures. Their beliefs and practices are also impinged upon by external circumstances and historical events. Religious rituals and practices are often the means through which tribes respond to crises. Traumatic events such as colonisation have triggered new religious movements among tribes, like the millennium movements in Oceania and the rise of prophets in Central India. Unlike a common stereotype that they are bound by custom and are unchanging, tribes are adaptive and transform according to circumstances. Anthropological ethnographies have indicated that new sects and rituals often arise in changing historical circumstances, like the practice of witchcraft by the Navaho in the reservations, where they were put after the

colonisation of America, and where they suffered great hardships. Not having recourse to any other remedy, the marginalised tribes often look for superhuman remedies.

11.4 BELIEF IN SUPER-HUMANS

11.4.1 Supreme God

The evolutionists and early observers of the indigenous communities, often derided the tribes by saying that they only believe in lesser gods and supernatural beings but have no conception of a higher, abstract divinity. However, tribal ethnographies reveal that most indigenous peoples have conception of a higher reality and are as philosophical in their orientation as anyone else (Radin 1927). As pointed out by Khongreiwo (2014:67) the pre-Christian Naga had a conception of God that was nearly identical with the Christian concept of divinity. This God, known in the local language as *Ameoa*, *Kasa Akhava* or *Varivara*, was distant, kind and inaccessible, located in a remote celestial realm. Most rituals of the Nagas are directed towards more accessible and active spirits and not towards the remote divinity. Likewise, the Jad Bhotiyas, of Uttarakhand (Channa 2013) have a general notion of an overarching divinity, who is regarded as the creator, but benign and not interfering with the people too much. One may recall, E.E. Evans-Pritchard's (1956) description of the Nuer all-pervasive spirit, *Kwoth*, who is likewise, omnipresent and omnipotent but rarely worshipped. The Todas of Nilgiris have a supreme goddess, who is parent to the Toda lineages as well as the Toda sacred cattle. This goddess for whose name different pronunciations have been given by different authors (a Toda author has used the term *Thekershi*) is seen as the creator and supporter of the Toda social and ritual institutions, divided between the Toda clans and the Toda buffaloes (Walker 1986: 120). She too is not directly worshipped. In this way the tribes are not much different from other religious congregations, who even though believe in an all-encompassing God, prefer to worship its many manifestations. The supreme divinity is also often not described as a man or a woman or as an entity with definite characteristics. Humtsoe-Nienu (2012:55-57), a Naga scholar has given very interesting information about the concept of God in Naga cultures. She writes that the Supreme Being, conceptualization about whom was found in most Naga tribes, was usually not assigned to any gender. Even specific names carried both male and female reference, but with the influence of Christianity, the traditional God also has become masculinized. Among the Mizos there were two names for the supreme God, *Pathian* and *Khuanu*; the former was a combination of two terms *Pa* (father) and *Thian* (holy) and the second meant 'mother of the universe'. But today only the former is prevalent. Similarly, among the Tikhir, the traditional name for God was *Tinpaitinpuh*, a combination of three words, *Tin*, meaning creator, *Pai*, a female suffix and *Puh* a male suffix making the term read as, Creator-mother-father. Among the Kyong the name for God, *Potsow*, may be interpreted correctly to mean the 'Great Originator', that also related it to *arche* the 'unoriginate' the one not originated but the originator of everything.

So, we see that most tribes had well developed conceptualization of a supreme creator being, and were well aware of the notion of metaphysical reality, a transcendental realm, just like in the universal religions. Some of them, in close contact with the universal religions may incorporate their supreme gods, but they always do it in a modified and adopted manner. The Jad Bhotiya, in close connect with Tibet, acknowledges Buddha as a deity, but they treat him as one among the other powerful deities. Spiro (1978),

has talked about a village level Buddhism that is different from the more abstract form of textual Buddhism practised in the monasteries. One can say the same thing for all universal religions, for even in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, the people on the ground have their personalized deities, who are more approachable and human than the abstract, all-powerful supreme being, almost always understood as the creator.

11.4.2 Different Superhuman Beings

An abstract all-pervasive divinity is almost always de-structured into a number of lesser beings, who usually have more human like characters and who interact with humans in a way that is negotiable and interactive. It is for this reason that most rituals and religious practices such as keeping of fasts and making sacrifices are directed towards these beings. The abstract all-pervasive divinity is rarely worshipped directly and never for instrumental ends. As Spiro (1978) has described for a Burmese village, the *gnats* are spirit beings who play a key role in the social life of the people, who are otherwise Buddhists, and Buddhism as such has no doctrine that includes the *gnats*.

Ancestor spirits are very common among all tribes, especially among the agricultural tribes and they persist in those cultures where people have made the transition to urban life. The worship of ancestors can be traced to the transition from pre-property and pre-agricultural stages to that of settled agriculture. As Claude Meillasoux (1981) points out, the agricultural communities are dependent on their ancestors for land and seeds and therefore revere them. Sometimes the ancestors are non-humans and then the form of religious beliefs is known as totemism, mostly found in Australia and Melanesia. In India well developed totemistic beliefs and rituals are not found.

More commonly there is the prevalence of clan deities. Among the Jads of Uttarakhand (Channa 2013), they are known as *kuldevta*. They are not ancestors but superhuman beings who are the patrons and protectors of the patrilineage, and are passed down from father to son. These deities have fully human characters. They have their likes and dislikes in food, clothes and other things. They are temperamental and get angry or appeased with actions on part of the family members of the lineage with which they are attached. Their function is to protect the family members, but they are more likely to get angry at times and make them ill. Whenever anything untoward happens among these people, like sickness, accident, bad dreams etc., the first assumption is that the *kuldevta* is angry. Divination rituals are carried out to find out if the *kuldevta* is angry or not, then there are attempts made to find out what caused the anger and lastly the local shaman is supposed to tell how to appease the *devta*. Most rituals among these people are performed to either investigate the cause of *kuldevta*'s ire or to make amends for them. The *devta* can be male, female, mythical animals and in case of the Jads, they are also the Pandavas, of Hindu mythology. Channa (2005) has described the Jad rituals that invite the Pandavas, but they are also adapted to the world view of the tribe, taking on characters very different from that of the Hindu text. Very similar to the *kuldevta* of this region is the *path baosi* of the Girasia of Rajasthan. They belong to a sub-lineage and reside inside the house with the family members. The *path baosi* is represented by three vermilion marks in an inner room of the house. But the *path baosi* is also 'portable' (Unnithan-Kumar 1997: 224). Whenever required, like at the time of life cycle rituals, a space is made sacred and the *path baosi* invited to occupy it. At a marriage celebration, the *path baosi* of the groom and the bride are invited separately and installed side by side. The *path* is made ritual offerings of the first grains of the harvest and is therefore also regarded among them as an ancestral deity. A

second shrine inside the house is for the protective mother deity *phulera mata*, who is depicted as a woman riding a tiger, indicating the strong influence of neighbouring Hindu iconography.

Village deities and place deities are also common among all indigenous people. They mark the boundaries of the settlements and at times, in case of nomadic people, help to create a settlement. The Jads for example, are a transhumant community. Whenever this community set up a new camp, they first set up the deity, who is to preside over the new settlement. The function of the deity is to provide protection and ward off evil spirits and forces and guard the entrances and the peripheries of the settlements. The Jad village deity is *Me Parang* (the fiery grandfather) who guards the village standing at the entrance and is represented by long poles with red flags. Most indigenous communities who have not yet been strongly affected by Hindu beliefs, do not have anthropomorphic icons. Most superhumans are represented by stones or sticks or a ritual object like a drum. In Kinnaur, the tribal Kinnauris have village deities who reside inside homes, and are invisible to ordinary humans. Their homes are built like temples, but are empty and no one is allowed to go inside except the intimate server, who is like a personal attendant of the deity. These village deities are treated as living beings, who rule the village. No work in the village can take place without their permission, that is conveyed through the medium of the interlocutor, known in Kinnaur as Mali. The villagers sow, reap and harvest their fields only after getting permission from the village deity, who can be male or female. Marriages and other functions can likewise be performed only after getting permission. In case, the permission is denied once, the interested parties keep on with their negotiations till the deity turns favourable. Most of the lower order deities, like the household and various village deities, have human like characters, and are part of the active social life. They can be angry, happy or sad just like humans and likewise highly amenable to persuasion and negotiations. If there are deities in common with the Hindus, they are still modified to integrate with the local world-view, like Sitala becoming the sister of the mountain god of the Girasia and the Pandava becoming the *kuldevta* of the Jad. Likewise, in many other tribes, across India, exposure to world religions like Hinduism and Buddhism has led to absorption of higher order deities, into the tribal pantheon but have been always modified to suit the local cognitive maps. All over Kinnaur tribal belt for example, Buddha appears as a village deity, with all characters of a village deity, even though one can find Buddhist paintings and scrolls decorating the village gates.

11.4.3 Health and Rituals

Among indigenous communities, there is no separate sphere of religion. Superhuman beings, deities, spirits and ghosts play an active role in social affairs, and specifically in the sphere of health. Almost every indigenous community globally, as recorded in various anthropological ethnographies, attribute good and bad health to cosmological forces than to anything absolutely mundane. Illness can be attributed to displeasure of spirits of various kinds and to the imbalance between human and nonhuman beings or the overall cosmos. It is also often attributed to the working of evil forces like those of witchcraft and sorcery.

The Girasia (Unnithan-Kumar 1997) have a category of spirits called *veers*, who are the souls of the dead and even of the living. They can be both male and female, helpful or harmful. The Girasia, most often, blame these spirits for illness. A category of dissatisfied spirits called *malri* are often responsible for pain and sickness. Living souls

or *veers* are also responsible for evil actions against others, driven mostly by jealousy or anger, and these souls or witches (*dakans*) are always female. They are highly mobile and very dangerous.

The most prevalent forms of sacred specialists in all indigenous communities are those referred to as shamans in anthropological literature, who act as doctors or medicine specialists, along with being diviners and ritual specialists. They are known by various local names. Among the Girasia and other tribes in the western part of India, they are known as *bhopa* or as *guni*. Bodding (1986; Ray 2019) had written a massive treatise on Santal healing systems where he has elaborated on the role of the *ojha*, or ritual specialist.

Under the influence of neighbouring Hindus, deities like *Sitala Mata* (small pox mother) are worshipped by tribes like Girasia, who keep the deity pleased to ward off illnesses like small pox and chicken pox, a ritual they share with Hindu villagers. But *Sitala Mata* is also absorbed within the sacred world of the Girasia as the sister of the Mountain deity, *Bhakar baosi*, and her shrine is placed next to that of the mountain deity, who is depicted as a man riding a horse and carrying a sword. Votive offerings of clay horses are made to this deity, which are much larger in size than the deity and are arranged in a fashion, all facing in the same direction, as if they are going to war. Together these constitute the village deities of the Girasia, whose main function is to keep the villagers healthy and in a state of well-being.

Rituals and taboos like the *genna* (meaning 'prohibition') of the Naga, are observed to keep the community heal or safe (mind, body etc) from diseases, evils or natural catastrophes. There is so much faith in the efficacy of these beliefs that often, even when the tribes convert to another religion, these rituals are not discarded, but are retained as part of the customary traditions of the tribe.

The indigenous people have an underlying philosophy about health and healing that sees the human body as part of a larger cosmic system, and not as an individual bounded entity as is seen in the western medical system. Health is seen a balanced state of this larger cosmic reality of which the body is a part. So, one needs to live harmoniously with the environment, that includes other sentient beings of all kinds, not just other humans. Therefore, a lot of emphasis is placed on the inner state of a being, human or otherwise; anger, jealousy, displeasure and other such negative emotions disturb the balance and cause suffering, either individually or sometimes even collectively. Thus, while individual misfortunes are traced to individual transgressions, a major disaster like an epidemic or a flood might be traced to collective default on proper behaviour or to the very strong misdemeanour of a single person that can bring supernatural wrath upon the entire community. Some action very strongly sanctioned against, like incest can bring misfortune to the entire community. To be healthy is almost synonymous with being a proper member of society and be integrated and at harmony with the entire social/cosmological world.

11.4.4 Environmental deities and Sacred Landscapes

Indigenous people live in a world that is alive, where every element, stones, trees, water bodies and landscapes like mountains and valleys are sacred, imbued with life and consciousness and capable of agency. In recent years, the Dongriya Kondhs of Orissa won a legal battle to save what they consider as their most sacred god, Niyamgiri (the mountain that gives the laws), from the corporate giant Vedanta's project of mining.

To the industrial and corporate world, Niyamgiri is a repository of large amount of aluminium, but to the 8000 or so tribal living there it is their God. This was an isolated case where the indigenous people were able to save their sacred landscape from corporate market driven greed to extract all resources from the earth. To most indigenous peoples, the earth is a mother; it is a living entity, especially if they are cultivators. The pastoral Jads of Uttarakhand, have no special regard for earth, but they worship the sun, deemed essential for the survival of their animals, as mother sun (*Aama Nyama*).

Forest dwelling tribes likewise worship forest spirits and sometimes, the forest itself is considered as sacred, like the Nayakan (Bird-David 1999) consider the forest as a giving and nurturing agency, their mother and father. The Kondhs of Orissa worship the earth mother by sacrifice and in the past, they were well known for the practice of human sacrifice (Padel 2011). What is interesting to note is that the local Hindu kings also considered the Kondh earth mother sacred, and made donations and extended patronage to the human sacrifice rituals of the Kondhs.

The notion of a sacred landscape is found among many tribes globally and entire stretches of land are imbued with significance and often has myths and narratives interwoven into them. This is not much different from the ancient religions of Greece and India, where too, mountains, rivers and trees are considered sacred and carry symbolic value. Among the Jads, the side of the mountain that faces the sun is considered sacred and any water body located there is regarded as the abode of the snake god. No one should use that sacred water for any unclean purpose like washing dirty vessels, but it can be used for drinking. Entire forest of deodar trees is likewise considered sacred and no nuisance should be done inside the forest, that is, for the Jads it is what a temple or church for others. Visitors to the forest must tread very softly, speak in whispers and never do things like defecating or throwing dirt. Menstruating women must not enter the forest. The deodar trees are considered as alive and each deity, and the red and yellow flowers of the tree is compared to its dress. The rationale is that, because the *deota* (deities) wear red and yellow, humans who visit or live in this region must not wear these colours. This extension of human relationships to the environment and to encompass non-humans as sentient beings within the social and cultural universe of the community has been observed by anthropologists working with indigenous communities across the world. It is this 'life-world' that sets indigenous people away from those who treat all non-human entities of the universe as objects and as resources to be exploited. The empathy with the environment has made indigenous life ways as an asset and something that has value for the future. It is beliefs such as these, like the belief in sacred groves that has led to preservation of some precious biodiversity and ecosystems.

Earlier, during the post-Renaissance period in Europe, such beliefs of the indigenous communities were seen as a mark of their backwardness, and cognitive systems like Animism, were stigmatized as uncivilized and backward. Tribes were encouraged to cut their sacred trees and forests in the name of civilization and later in post-colonial era, in the name of so-called 'development'. But today, in the face of unprecedented global environmental disasters, at least some scientists and scholars are rethinking about the fallacy of looking upon nature as a dead object, a resource to be exploited for human greed only. What was earlier referred to as tribal superstition is now being reframed as 'tribal wisdom' or indigenous knowledge.

The cognition of the sacred among the tribes, is about many things that are of value, even if we look at from the perspective of ecological wisdom. Even children know

about the value of trees, rivers and forests. If it means that they are perceived as 'deota' or deities and worshipped, one can hardly find such a way of thought as irrational or illogical.

11.5 TRIBAL RELIGIONS ON THE WANE

However, much of the precious knowledge and valuable rituals are being lost under severe external pressures. During colonization both external and internal of the tribal territories and resources, the power differential between the outsiders and the tribes had led to the latter developing an attitude of apathy towards their own beliefs. The missionaries and the Hindu preachers had derided and looked down upon tribal beliefs and practices, and when the tribes began to lose their territories and their culture to the outsiders, they also began to believe that their own gods were not able to protect them. They believed that the gods of the outsiders, of the 'white people' of the upper caste Hindus were more powerful, and many converted or began to change their lifestyles to copy those of the powerful.

The beliefs that were sustained by the harmonious relationship with the environment are also destroyed with the destruction of the environment. With the mountains, rivers and forests gone, the sacred beings that resided there or who were themselves sacred, are gone. The Jads for example consider each deodar tree as a deity, but with the cutting of the forests, the gods are gone. The Mundas of Central India, famously celebrated their Sarna festival around the Sarna tree, but today, even in Jharkhand, Sarna trees are becoming rare so that people can no longer celebrate the festival in the traditional way.

Many tribes, especially after getting education and exposure have begun to realize their loss of identity and resources and have begun to revive some of the old religious beliefs and practices. Many young people from the Munda community in Delhi for example have begun to celebrate Sarna festival in Delhi. But where would they get the Sarna tree? So, in such situation, they get a branch and pretend it to be a tree. But the real value of the ritual that centred around the preservation and propagation of the Sarna tree, of great environmental values is gone, for the tree is hardly to be seen anymore. The tribal beliefs and values are tied to a way of life that is vanishing but more than anything else, these ways of life have been denigrated and are still being treated as 'backward' and 'primitive' and most states wish to push the tribes into modernity as is visualized by the power holders. There is a need to understand the tribal way of life, their religion and belief systems with respect. It is from there that human kind can get a lesson for survival that is much needed in the present times.

11.6 LET US SUM UP

The study of religion from a social science perspective- anthropological, sociological, or psychological is the study of religion as a social institution and not from a theological perspective as the truth. This is why, sociologically, the tribal beliefs and world view of others is considered as functional and avoid judgement of the truth value. On the same line, this Unit discusses tribal religion as it exists, not because it is exotic but to enable us to familiarise their way of life and systems of belief that have existed for thousands of years which contain wisdom that has made the people who believe in them survive and allow the earth to survive as well. We have also learnt some concepts beginning with

‘religion’, ‘tribe’ or ‘indigenous people’, ‘god’ among others. It has also discussed the tribal belief in ‘super-humans’ and its different kinds, and the aspects of health and rituals, environmental deities and sacred landscapes. It has also brought to light how tribal religions are vanishing due to various

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