## Block 3

# Religion, Community and State

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# UNIT 12 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND SYNCRETIC TRADITIONS*

**Structure**


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## 12.0 OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the concept of religious pluralism;
2. To understand how syncretic traditions and New Religions arise? What are the social and historical conditions associated with these processes; and
3. To study a few historical situations of Syncretism and religious pluralism from ethnographies.

## 12.1 INTRODUCTION

There are very few societies where everyone practices the same faith and have homogenous beliefs. Even in rural areas and smaller places, it is likely that one finds people with differing beliefs, practices as well as those who are sceptics or non-believers. The sociological fact that there are several faiths and belief systems may be accompanied by theological pluralism, where there is a religious sanction for the existence of multiple ways of believing, or a lack of it, where the religions preach that there is possibility of only one way. From a theological perspective, Eliade said that religions show the path to the truth. People with faith believe that religion locates the truth, the reality. There are two ways of looking at the truth, some may believe that there can be multiple ways of arriving at and viewing the truth and others may believe that only one way is possible. Depending upon which path one follows, society may be in a state of constant conflict or may be peaceful. Politically viewed, pluralism should be accompanied by tolerance and peace. There are two ways to do it politically, either to acknowledge the truth of all the faiths or to suppress all faiths in favour of a non-religious state. While India is an example of the former, the United State may be taken as an example of the other.

A sociological approach to religion views it as intrinsically linked to other aspects of society such as political economy, social stratification, gender and globalization among

*The unit has been written by Prof. Subhadra Channa (Retd), Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.

others. Religions change and evolve according to historical factors, economic and political transformations. Several sociological approaches have indicated how religion shapes and influences social life and is in turn informed by existing social conditions. In other words, to the sociologist, religion is a social phenomenon that is like any other social institution as well as tied up with other social institutions. Ethnographies enable us to understand religion from a subjective perspective, as to what it means to the people who believe and practice it.

Let us now discuss the concepts of religious pluralism and of religious syncretisation both from sociological and ethnographic perspectives.

## 12.2 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

In the city of Tokyo in Japan, ina small temple in the middle of city, with a long line of devotees lies 'God from India' as the local Japanese people usually term it for a shrine with various Hindu ritualistic objects.At shrines in temples in Japan, are found Hindu gods and goddesses, Hindu religious imagery, like the lotus and the swastika, jostling for space with various Buddhist and local deities and images. To people who have a truly pluralistic view of religion, like polytheistic Hinduism or Shinto, the sacred power can be distributed into various entities. The name and origin do not matter, as these can be also incorporated to suit different time and space locations and may travel from one place to another.As Eller (2007: 264) explains, the view of religion as organized or a doctrine, with definite boundaries and tenets is not prevalent among all people, least of among the ancient belief systems of the world. This is because for many people, religion is equivalent to science, a form of truth and explanation. There does not exist any separation of the natural and the supernatural, an axiom that led Spiro (1966) to formulate his concept of superhuman beings as against the more prevalent supernatural beings. The belief in sacred beings is an essential aspect of religion, but in some religions, these are confined to a few and essentialised beings. Some others, like Shinto are more inclusive and expansive, open to incorporate new superhuman beings. The sacred here is not constricted but has a universalized character, in that it may appear anywhere in any form. Although Christianity is a monotheistic religion, it expands itself by including and continuing to include sacred beings known as saints. As the geographical scope of the faith has expanded, the origin and nature of the saints too have expanded, incorporating the sacred from many locations.

Another way in which pluralismmay exist from theistic perspective is to have a belief system that emphasizes that although the Truth is one, it can be understood cognitively from many platforms and approached taking different paths. Such a belief system encourages the peaceful co-existence of many faiths leading to a situation of social and political religious pluralism, where not only do different beliefs survive and exist but they also live side by side peacefully.

By and large, India, from ancient times has been such a religiously pluralistic region because of the Rig Vedic verse, *Ekam Sat, Vipra Vaudha Badati* (There is only one Truth, but sages describe it differently). The religious beliefs that sprang on the Indian soil, many centuries ago, were non-doctrinal, with no given or known source, coming from the collective wisdom and mouth of many, who were regarded as sages. The Rig Veda, that is the oldest known text from this part of the world, has no authorship. They also had no rivals as there was no competition from any other organized religion. The

teachings of the Vedas assume a universe into which they can pour the wisdom about an absolute truth, without having to negate any already existing treatise.

Sociologically speaking, indigenously evolved belief systems that grow on their own are inclusive and accepting of diversity. Sometimes, as in the case of Shinto, the diversityhas a natural place within the existing belief system. Hinduism too, has grown incorporating various deities from different sources over time. However, assimilation does not imply pluralism, it means only a technology of incorporation. Pluralism can only come, when, due to historical reasons, a number of faiths exist side by side, either peacefully or in continuous conflict. In the latter case, a dominant, more powerful faith has the potential to erase others and establish itself as the only truth, as happened when Islam fought the indigenous beliefs and established itself over a large region. Christians too engaged in Crusades to spread and establish their religion. However, while these two major religions originating from the same part of the world, were able to eradicate the weaker and lesser local faiths, they remained rivals to each other for all times to come. Pluralism can therefore also be an outcome of a fairly equal power struggle.

In India, although Buddhism originated and developed as an alternate faith to conservative Brahmanical Hinduism and great monarchs like Ashoka converted and spread the new religion, there was a huge Hindu backlash and Buddhism lost ground in the region of its birth.At present it has been pushed to regions outside of India, towards the South and Far East and to Tibet. Hindus solved their problem of religious tolerance by accepting Buddha as one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu, placing him as the ninth incarnation of the deity. Thus, Buddhism was made to look like another version of Hinduism and the Buddhists as another kind of Hindus.

## 12.3 THE OCCURRENCE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

There are several reasons why a region begins to have more than one faith or belief system. As Eller (2007:20) has pointed out, W. Robertson Smith (1894) had shown the link between a people and their religion, to affirm that religion has an 'ethnic' or 'national' source. He also refers to Xenophanes, who had 2,500 years ago, discovered that gods always resemble the people to whom they belong as well as endorse their ways of life. Religions grow and become complex when the societies to which they are attached come in contact with others or change their ways of life. So, conquest, migration and now, globalization are some of the ways in which religions grow. These are also the ways in which a society can become plural. When two cultures come into contact, they can merge, influence, co-exist peacefully or in perpetual conflict. So we see, there are two possibilities, when two societies come into contact; either their belief systems merge and a different or complex entity emerges, or they co-exist; but have a good chance of influencing each other.

When the pastoral people entered India from the Central Asia and Middle East, they had masculine gods, mostly those deifying the natural elements like Varuna and Surya. But when they came in contact with the settled agriculturalists, mother goddesses and more eclectic gods like Shiva entered the pantheon. Contemporary Hinduism has absorbed many influences. Some aspects are highly parochial and magico-religious with many local deities and sacred beings and in another dimension, it is a metaphysical abstract philosophy of great sophistication, unifying and inclusive (Parthasarathy 2000). Similar collage like character are seen in other religions also, for example in Christianity,

festivals like Easter and the presence of St. Nicholas or Christmas Father, have nothing to do with core Christian beliefs but borrowed from local native pre-Christian cultures.

The power equation is important in the merging or co-existence of religions. When one religion is over-powering, it may absorb the weaker religion, by which it is meant that the people practicing that religion are weak as compared to the others. Christianity dispelled many tribal religions of smaller groups, who were overpowered by the colonial rulers in giving up their religion, but it could not replace Hinduism or Islam to a very large extent, in spite of colonization. Religions have co-existed in India, giving rise to a largely plural country, where even constitutionally the rights of all religions are protected.

A kind of religious pluralism arises when a religion bifurcates into different sects that may become so radically opposed as to behave like different religion, to the extent that marriage and social interactions are often restricted between them. The Catholics and the Protestants are a case in point. In Northern Ireland for example, these two factions have been at war for centuries and continue in that way. The Shia and the Sunni sects are similarly hostile to each other. The world's biggest Shia state, Iran, fought a long drawn out war with its Sunni neighbour, Iraq, only in the name of religion. Sects are at conflict only when they are equally powerful or have conflicting interests. Minor sects of Christians, of which, there are many, live quietly and peacefully with others. Hindus too have many sects, but except the long feud between Vaishnavites and Shaivites in the South of India, these other sects are rarely in conflict although they may be in contestation situationally. After Buddhism was subdued in India, it never came in conflict with Hindus, who continue to revere the Buddha.

Peacefully co-existing religions however remain a potential hotbed for the creation of conflict, as can be seen in India, where on and off, the vested political interests of certain groups, create conflicts between different religions, that in normal times exist in harmony. As pointed out by Geertz (1966), the sacred is capable of evoking very powerful emotional responses, so that for centuries, the world has seen religiously motivated conflicts to be the most persisting and powerful. Since religions also almost always act as ethnic and national identities, the religious conflicts often are conflicts of identity as in Bosnia. Religious groups that form minorities in their geo-political locations are liable to be persecuted, for example the Uyghurs in China and the Rohingyas in Myanmar.

New ways of worship and divergent belief systems often arise under situations of stress and oppression and are known as religions of resistance. They may arise under situations of colonization or when a people as a whole face oppression, racially, ethnically or otherwise. One such religious sect that has been studied extensively sociologically and anthropologically is Rastafari. It is a religion as well as a way of life that originated in Jamaica but spread to other parts of the world among the people of African descent, who had been transported away from their land of origin because of the slave trade. The people of African origin in Jamaica, who had originally been natives of Ethiopia faced extreme poverty and discrimination. In 1930, Rastafari was crowned the emperor of Ethiopia taking the name of Halie Salassie. To the downtrodden Ethiopians in Jamaica, this was a beacon of light, and they began to worship him as god, and hoped that they would be able to go back to their own country. As well explained by the novelist V.S. Naipaul (1962:216), the Rastafarian movement was a way in which the people of African origin in Jamaica, found a way to cope with and survive their oppression, through a counter-rejection. Since they felt rejected in Jamaica, they too rejected it as their own country claiming that they belonged to Ethiopia. They also rejected the way

of life there, preferring to smoke ganja, growing their hair into dreadlocks and neglecting the hygiene of their bodies, merging with nature and rejecting all manufactured foods like alcohol and meat. The Rastafarians are vegetarians and prefer to live peacefully. They have been studied by several sociologists (Chevannes 1994, Barett 1977, Owen 1976) among others.

Although breaking away from conventional Christianity, the Rastafarians draw upon the Bible as their major sacred book. Owen (1976) points out that the Bible plays a key role in the life of the Rastafarians, according to their explanation that the Bible was written for and by black people and that God as depicted in it is black. In other words, they appropriated the Bible as their own, overriding some of the discriminations that they faced from white Christians. According to Campbell (1980) the Rastafarians show all the characters of a religion of resistance, rejecting and critiquing the way of life of the dominant people and claiming authenticity for themselves. They protested white supremacy, colonization and imperialism. These ideologies of the Rastafarians made this movement popular among Africans in similar situation, including African Americans. In this way one can see how a new religion may emerge because of historical circumstances.

The end of the twentieth century saw the emergence of new faiths, known as New Age religions. These emerged more among the western middle class, educated people, who were somewhat disillusioned with the conservatism, patriarchy and ecological consequences of mainstream Christianity. Some of them thought Christianity was not compatible with modern scientific knowledge. These New age religions are variously known as Church of Scientology, The Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna Movement and Neo Paganism. They are also highly syncretic traditions and we will discuss them in the next section.

Another movement that began many years ago as an alternate religion, that can be studied as religious pluralism, also became syncretic when it travelled to other places. This is Sufism, or Islamic mysticism that began early almost at the same time as the beginning of orthodox Islam. The word Sufi, derives from the Arabic word Suf, meaning wool and refers to the rough woollen garments worn by Prophet Muhammed. Sufism emphasized on unity with divinity through ecstatic love and devotion, rather than go through any formal rituals. They also emphasized following the path indicated by particular saints. By the twelfth century, the Sufi order had established itself and a number of sects had arisen associated with specific Saints or Walis, in the Middle East. Iraq, and Baghdad were especially rich in the Sufi traditions. They were referred to as ascetic protest as they rejected the royalty and also the paths of wealth and material possessions.

They positioned themselves against the monarchy in countries ruled by monarchs, like in Morocco. The Hamadsha (Crapanzaro 1973) of Morocco were a Sufi brotherhood associated with two major saints of this region, Sidi-Ali, who lived in the eighteenth century and his servant, Sidi Ahmad; both of whom were venerated as holy. These Arab saints were also referred to as Maraboutin, from the Arabic word, Murabit, meaning a man of God. However, there is another version of the Hamdsha, very different from the Sufis who seek union with the Divine (Munson 1993). These are the ones found in shanty towns, among the poor and the migrant labourers, a majority of them being women. They get possessed by Jinns and their form of worship includes shamanistic kind of possession rituals. These Jinns are mostly associated with rivers and water sources and mostly possess women, who presumably also have a closer

contact with water. Exorcism is done by a Quaranic preacher but more importantly involves a symbiotic relationship between the victim and the spirit possessing her. In this way this form of Sufism also becomes a movement of the marginalized just like the Rastafari. It is also a feminized version of the largely masculine Sufi cult, engaging women with lower order spirits like Jinns that occur in the environment mostly associated with women and their daily work.

The defiance of the Sufi saints of those in power is a key character of the cult and as Munson (1993: 27) puts it focuses on the 'they myth of the righteous man of God who dares to defy an unjust sultan'. This indicates that the poor and the powerless invent their own faith that enables them to survive and maintain their inner self-respect and identity.

From a sociological perspective this shows that marginalization, oppression and poverty are generative of new religions or faiths, which, while arising from mainstream traditions, have their variations in a way that they are cathartic and enable the survival of the down-trodden as pointed out by Naipaul, in respect of the Rastafari.

Religious pluralism is therefore indicative also of the deep cleavages within society, not only based on ethnicity but also of class, caste, race and other forms of discrimination. They mostly emphasize equality before the divine and reject the symbols of worldly power.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1. What are the ways in which you can understand and explain religious pluralism?
2. Under what historical and social conditions, new religions or sects arise? Describe with suitable examples.

## 12.4 SYNCRETIC TRADITIONS

Syncretic traditions are possible only when the religions move away from the essentialist doctrines and are willing to absorb beliefs from their environment. Political and historical situations play important role in bringing about syncretic traditions. In India, the 14th to 16th centuries are marked by a surge in anti-establishment and anti-essentialist movements that moved people away from all orthodox and conservative forms of religion. The Hindus, especially the lower castes, the women and other marginalized sections of society, were oppressed by the ruling Brahmins and the patriarchal Brahmanical traditions, that carried out atrocities over many weaker sections of society in the name of traditions and religious norms. The Muslim rulers of those times had also been engaged in oppressing and forcibly converting Hindus as well as destroying and looting temples. From the 14th century onwards in India, there emerged many saints and philosophers who broke through what they believed were the artificial barriers between religions. They were also critical of the social hierarchies and atrocities being practiced in the name of religion, by both Hindu Brahmins and Muslim clerics.

Sufism came to India through the holy person, Khwaja Moinunddin Chisti, who came from Iran in the 12th century and became revered as Khawaja Garib Nawaz and lies buried in Ajmer at the shrine also revered as Ajmer Sharif and visited by thousands of people of all faiths, across the world. This alternate form of Islam had existed from the time of Prophet Muhammed, who had a benevolent attitude towards it, although it

differed somewhat from his teachings. Chisti came to India when Prithvi Raj Chauhan was on the throne of India. Although Chauhan was a Hindu king, Chisti had a strong influence on the ordinary people, by the simple teaching that God can be reached through pure devotion and love. The Sufi saints to follow like Baba Farid and Moin-ud-din Chisti, had great influence on Indian society, especially in the North,where even today there are many prominent Sufi shrines that are regularly visited by people of all communities. The great musician and poet, Amir Khusro, penned many verses professing the love for the divine who is portrayed as a beloved. Exactly parallel to Sufism was the Bhakti movement that also swept through both South and North India, professing very similar beliefs.

The Bhakti movement was particularly anti-establishment, attacking Brahmanical ritualism and caste and gender hierarchies. It sought to erode the boundaries between religions, for example Lalan Fakir, a major saint from Bengal who lived in the nineteenth century was a Muslim, with followers from all religions. The Bhakti movement and sects such as the Bauls of Bengal, gave a space to the social discards such as the low castes, widows and abandoned women, who found shelter and comfort in their institutions. There were also prominent women spiritual leaders like Akka Mahadevi, Bahina Bai and Mira Bai in the Bhakti movement that also sought to liberate women from the shackles of domesticity.

The attraction of the lower castes for the Bhakti and Sufi movements continues even today. Kapadia (1999) has written about the ritual practices of the untouchable Paliyans that emphasize bhakti (devotion) and are critical of the emotion less ritualistic practices of the Brahmins. The lower caste dhobis of Delhi, have important rituals associated with the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya (Channa 1985). They make sacrifices of goats on life cycle rituals like marriage and birth. Till quite recent times, their houses had the small alcoves for lighting the earthen lamps every evening in the tradition of the Sufis.

Sai baba is another saint, who was a Muslim fakir but is viewed as an incarnation of Shiva by Hindus and revered across the classes and castes. He is very popular among the lower castes as his followers too do not believe in caste or religious divisions and his worship is done mostly through singing and offering prayers through bhajans. Sai Baba is also seen as protector of dogs, contradicting the Brahmanical Hindus who consider dog to be an impure animal. The pull of Sai Baba also indicates a rejection of the ways of orthodox Hinduism with its emphasis on caste hierarchy and overt ritualism. It also rejects the religious bigotry of both Hindus and Muslims and indicates that there is only one divine presence irrespective of the name by which it is called. In many ways Sai Baba is also part of the larger Bhakti traditions.

During the colonial period, Christianity came to have a strong influence on Indian society. Unlike in many other colonies, the upper caste and class Hindus did not convert to Christians as they considered them impure (Mleccha). But on the other hand, several Hindu reformist sects were formed that imbibed in a syncretic manner, some of the major tenets of Christianity, while projecting them as part of ancient Hinduism. Or one may also say that they looked for the similarities between Christianity and Hinduism, in a way that they could transcend the criticism of Hindu orthodoxy that was seen as regressive and unfit for a civilized nation (Dirks 2001). The aspects of Hinduism that were seen particularly abhorrent were the caste system and the practice of untouchability, the treatment of women, and idolatry. Brahmo Samaj, as founded in Bengal, by reformists like Keshab Chandra Sen and Debendra Nath Tagore rejected

idol worship, Brahmanical ritualism as well as did not support caste hierarchy. They encouraged women's education and widow remarriage as well as allowing girls to get married at higher ages. Similarly, in Punjab and Northern India, Swami Dayanand Saraswati began the Arya Samaj, largely based on similar ideology. These reformist Hindu sects were also deeply connected with nationalism as they wished to emphasize the superiority of both the Hindu religion and the Hindu nation, as against western colonization. To a large extent they were both identity and self-respect movements, directed at the Western colonizers, while at the same time accepting the western values of equality, liberty and personal emancipation. With decolonization and modernization in general, these movements lost their significance as most of the things they advocated became a part of life in general. But they can be used as examples of syncretism where the values of a dominant culture, in this case western culture are adopted by a dominated culture to create a syncretic system of beliefs that is used to elevate the status of the dominated section of the people.

The very fact of living in close proximity leads to the slow and inadvertent absorption of elements of other religions that take place without any overt effort or dramatic eventuality. These processes occur as a part of daily life and the normal interactions of people. The core institutions of major religions therefore exhibit syncretic traditions. Many old and established temples of India have certain rituals and practices associated with them that involve the Muslims as well as the lower castes. The Shehnai players of Benaras had been playing the instrument as an evocation to the god Shiva, sitting outside on the steps of the temple. The most illustrious of this lineage, Ustad Bismillah Khan, had also carried out the same tradition. The Islamic traditions have also incorporated element from Hindu traditions. The Sufi shrines are known for their genre of specific musical traditions that have taken birth on the Indian soil.

**Check Your Progress 2**

3. What is understood by religious syncretism?
4. Can the Bhakti movement be understood as a syncretic religion? Explain.

## 12.5 MODERN AGE RELIGIONS

By the end of the twentieth century, modern day technology, transportation and communications brought the world closer and created what is today known as a global village. Such a shrinkage of the world, extensive travel and communication and close economic and cultural interactions resulted in the emergence of syncretic religious traditions, that have borrowed not only from each other but also from the ancient times. In the Western countries, emergent forms of religion include what is known as Neo-Paganism, back to the pre-Christian beliefs, borrowing mostly from ancient Celtic, Scandinavian and Germanic roots. These include worship of nature and female goddesses and fertility cults bringing people in closer communion with nature. Many people believe that the environmental and political ills of the present- day world are due to a moving away from nature and disregard of its power. They also believe that the doctrinal religions are too patriarchal and have over the centuries suppressed the power of women.

The modern witches or Wican, are another of the New Age religions that bring back pre-Christian paganism and the worship of goddesses and the feminine powers. Some

of these new religions also reflect on the changing perception of women about themselves and the realization that most world religions are patriarchal in nature. Another impetus by the end of the twentieth century was the increasing disillusionment with technology and the values introduced by Judeo-Christian religions about the centrality of humans in the order of things. Many felt that it is partly responsible for the ecological disasters faced by the world today. A reversion to paganism meant that worship of earth mother, Gaia, and an earth centric rather than an androcentric world-view.

A cult originating in India in the 12th century, namely the Vaishnava movement, started by Sri Chaitanya, from a small village in Bengal, called Nawadeep; has now spread to the entire world in the form of the Hare Krishna Movement. Although it has rustic and simple origins, it swept India during the Bhakti movement and in the twentieth century was taken by Prabhupada, to outside of India where it spread like wild fire to all corners of the world. At present, there is hardly any corner of the world where one does not find adherents of this movement and Hare Rama temples and institutions are likewise spread all over the world. It was also popularised by the Beatle band of New York during the Seventies, when reeling from effects of the Cold War and Vietnam, the people of America were looking for solace and there were strong anti-establishment movements. Involving nothing else but simple chanting and vegetarianism, it has a great appeal to people who wish to get out of the complex tensions of modern life, even if for a few hours. Today the Hare Rama movement utilises all the modern technologies and communication strategies and has a massive network, yet at the core its message is a very simple one that most people can follow easily.

So, we see that syncretic religions are usually products of historical processes and are well suited to deal with the problems and issues of the times in which they are located. The Sufi and Bhakti cults helped people on the margins survive the brutal domination of the priestly classes as well as despotic rulers of various orders. Syncretic religions usually evoke the most attractive elements from several sources and combine them into a compatible whole that people find easy to follow. They are also quite often resistance religions and emerge from among the marginalised and dominated sections, who find no succour in mainstream religions. Some like the Rastafarians are overtly anti-establishment and political in nature while others like the Hare Rama Hare Krishna movement, gently attacks the powerholders weaning people away from domination towards non-ritualistic simple and direct communion with the sacred.

It is also evident that syncretic religions are an outcome of religious pluralism. Syncretism is not possible without multiple forms from which to draw upon. We have examined the case of religions or sects such as Sufism that can in its place of origin be studied as the emergence of religious pluralism and in another historical situation, become a syncretic religion. In the Middle East, Sufism was a protest religion, providing an alternate and mystical path to conservative Islam. By providing for saints, shrines and ecstatic rituals, it catered to the needs of many people, especially the poor and marginalised, for cathartic release. They were treated as heretics by hard core orthodox Muslims, and many of them were also persecuted although many got reverence and recognition, even as direct descendants of the Prophet.

**Check Your Progress 3**

5. What do you understand by New Age Religions? Give some examples.

## 12.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have followed strictly the methodology and theoretical perspectives of sociology, and tried to understand both religious pluralism and religious syncretism in their social and historical context. However, when we analyse the sociological aspects of religion, at some point the theistic subjective character of the religion is also important from the social point of view as its effect or impact upon the social environment. For example, the way religious pluralism functions and syncretism is made possible or not possible, depends a lot upon the core doctrinal principles of a religion. An essentialist and intolerant religions doctrine will lead to its conflictual co-existence, if at all, with other religions and an open and non-doctrinal religion, like Shinto and ancient Hinduism will find peaceful co-existence highly feasible. Syncretic religions too reflect the social possibilities of their existence. Hierarchy and oppression usually provide ideal conditions for the emergence of protest religions, like Rastafari and Bhakti and Sufi cults. Most major religions, including the Judeo-Christian ones have risen as oppositional religions and contain elements of intolerance and essentialism. Very ancient and self- evolved religions are much more likely to be tolerant and accommodating. Outside of their theistic and sacred aspects, almost all religions have some interconnection with power and politics in some form or the other, relationships that affect their status as plural or syncretic or both.

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## 12.8 FURTHER READING

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# UNIT 13 SECULARISM AND SECULARISATION*

**Structure**


13.0 Objectives

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- 13.2.3 Secularisation within Religion
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13.7 Secularism in India

13.8 Let Us Sum Up

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13.10 Further Reading

13.11 Answers to Check Your Progress


## 13.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to—

- understand the meanings of the terms secularisation and secularism;
- discuss the social and historical background in which secularisation emerged as a social phenomenon;
- analyse the peculiar nature of secularism which is adopted in India; and
- understand the problems and difficulties in the practice of secularism in India.

## 13.1 INTRODUCTION

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

*The Unit has been adapted from ESO-15, Unit 16 with necessary edition.

In our first section we will introduce you to the meaning of the term secularisation and secularism. To be able to understand how these terms came to be we would like to take you to the historical and social background of these processes. We will also show the nature of secularisation in contemporary society in our next section. Finally, we will be discussing the nature of secularism in India. For you to understand the peculiarities and the difficulties thereof, we would appraise you with various historical as well as contemporary dynamics in the practice of secularism.

## 13.2 SECULARISATION AND SECULARISM

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

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

### 13.2.1 The Term Secularisation

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

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

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

### 13.2.2 The Sociological Connotation of Secularization

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

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

displaced from all social institutions except those specifically devoted to this — these are increasingly circumscribed religious institutions" (Wilson 1987: 159).

The definition of secularisation is greatly bound by the definition of religion. As long as religion is defined in, not so abstract terms and is defined substantively as beliefs, attitudes, activities, institutions and structures pertaining to the supernatural, it is possible to assess the extent of decline of religious influence. But if we were to define religion in functional terms, as some sociologists have done, as any set of beliefs, ideas and activities that perform indispensable functions to the society it is very difficult to employ the term secularisation, because when we use the term secularisation we are discussing the process that leads to the decline of supernaturally oriented activities and beliefs in all aspects of life, and a distinct separation of various institutions in the society.

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

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

### 13.2.3 Secularisation within Religion

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

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

Secularisation also influences the content of religious belief and in doing so it leads, many times, to the development of a sect.

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

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

### 13.2.4 Secularism as a Value

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

Secularism as a progressive ideology was a necessary qualification for a liberal, democratic state of the post French Revolution. These connotations are applied even

to a modern democratic state now. A modern state by its definition and liberal and democratic policy makes no distinction between groups, classes etc. within society, irrespective of religious affiliation. The political philosophy on the part of the state required that the state shall not impose any religion on people and did not prohibit practice of religion by a section of the people.

Thus, with secularism as an ideological goal, the proponents of this ideology consciously denounce religious orthodoxy as the basis for social organisation and advocate civil values. The development of secularism as an ideology was partly an outcome of the process of secularisation in Europe. And in many modern states it has been adopted as a state policy.

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

## 13.3 THE SECULARISATION PROCESS

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

### 13.3.1 The Struggle between the Sacred and the Secular

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

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

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

### 13.3.2 The Church and the State

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

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

**Box 1**

Constantine ascribed all his successes in war to Christian God. He is said to have had a dream in which God instructed him to paint the first two letters for Christ in Greek on the shields of his soldiers. Constantine did so and consequently won the battle. It is said that he converted to Christianity after this and made Christianity the state religion. His troops then on had the Christian monogram painted on their shield.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The forces that set themselves in opposition to the Church and its power came to be known as secular. While the struggle against the Church and the process which eventually led to the decline of religious authoritarianism replaced it with a rational and scientific outlook. This has been termed secularisation. The secularisation of society is not just an outcome of this struggle between the Church and the state, but is related to all other facets of social change.

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

**Check Your Progress 1**

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

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

## 13.4 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SECULARISATION PROCESS

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

### 13.4.1 Renaissance

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

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

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

### 13.4.2 Growth of Science

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

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

This was the period which saw the Copernican Revolution. It was generally believed that the Earth was stationary and the Sun and other heavenly bodies moved around it. Copernicus, with the help of detailed explanation demonstrated that the earth moved around a fixed sun. This finding of Copernicus shattered the very foundations on which the old world rested. The divine origins to heaven, earth and life were now being questioned.

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

### 13.4.3 Expansion of Trade and Commerce

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

**Box 2**

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

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

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

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

### 13.4.4 Reformation

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

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

The obvious result of Reformation was the division of Christendom into Catholic and Protestant denominations or sects. These strengthened the growth of modern national states. Reformation introduced radical changes in thought and organisation of the Church and, thus began the trend of secularisation. The Protestant conception of the divine made God personal. God thus receded to the personal realm. Worldly personal activity was encouraged as a sign of faith in God.

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

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

## 13.5 SECULARISATION IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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

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

**Activity 1**

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

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

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

**Check Your Progress 2**

i) Match the following:

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

## 13.6 SECULARISM IN INDIA

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

### 13.6.1 India and Secularism

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

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

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

### 13.6.2 Meaning of Secularism in India

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

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

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

Secularism, nationalism, and democracy are therefore, mutually reinforcing ideals that were sought to be emphasised by the post-colonial state in India. K.M. Panikkar in explaining the content of the secular state in India stresses on this point: it (the secular state) eliminates from the body politics all ideas of division between individuals on the basis of its policy what Aristotle terms "distributive justice" that all communities must share as they must share the duties and responsibilities of being a citizen".

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

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

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

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

**Activity 2**

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

### 13.6.3 Secular Concept and Ideology

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

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

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

The nationalist feeling was carried down to the masses by the extraordinary growth of the vernacular cultures. This vernacular growth at the same time was not allowed to be chauvinistic because the nation as a goal was kept in mind. "Much of the power of the Indian nationalism came from its use of forces, idioms and symbolism of religion, especially Hinduism" (Kaviraj, 1990: 195).

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

By 1920 the leadership of the Congress passed into the hands of Mahatma Gandhi. He openly declared the necessity of religion in politics. Although deeply rooted in Hindu popular ethos; Gandhi believed in pluralism and equal respect for all religions. Inspite of Gandhi's efforts to unite Hindus and Muslims, the excessive usage of Hindu symbols alienated the Muslims. There grew extremist tendencies both among Hindus

and Muslims. Nationalism became polarised with the setting up of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha and the militant socio-religious organisation called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Instead of nationalism based on territories, these communities now struggled for nation on the basis of religious identity. Sudipto Kaviraj writes: "precisely because of long familiarity with other community identities and the relative newness of identity of nation" there was a need for creating a feeling of nationalism through various means (in this case through religion, mainly) to face the British Colonialism.

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

**Check Your Progress 3**

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

## 13.7 SECULARISM IN INDIA

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

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

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

Apart from this neglect, we are faced with contradictions present in a liberal democratic system like ours, where there is a great deal\ of uneven economic development. With this arose a feeling of injustice and deprivation which finds expression in various ways. Mobilising one's own community on religious and ethnic lines is very often the practice. The State/political parties on the other hand address communities to gain support. This

only reinforces the primordial identities of community aid religion. And they know that the only way to bring about pressure on the authorities is to mobilise on criteria like language, ethnicity and religion. So, as we can see in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic country, secularism even with best intentions is difficult to achieve.

## 13.8 LET US SUM UP

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

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## 13.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Check Your Progress 1**

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

ii) The new political philosophy which came about after the French Revolution questioned the religious basis of political and social organisation. It recommended rational basis for political and social organisation. Secularism was adopted as a

political goal. Holyoake hoped and believed that secularism as a state ideology promotes human welfare by material means and makes the service of others its duty.

**Check Your Progress 2**

i)

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

**Check Your Progress 3**

i) India did not witness the secularisation process as did Europe. As a reason, secularisation did not occur naturally in India, secularism as a political goal was adopted, especially since India is a pluralistic country with variety of religions, languages and ethnic background. In India, the term secularism implies that the state will not identify with any one religion but is tolerant of all religious practices.

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# UNIT 14 COMMUNALISM AND FUNDAMENTALISM*

**Structure**


14.0 Objectives

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Basic Concepts

- 14.2.1 Communalism
- 14.2.2 Fundamentalism

14.3 The Communalism in India

- 14.3.1 Recent Communal Riots
- 14.3.2 Reasons for Communal Riots
- 14.3.3 Economic and Social Dimensions
- 14.3.4 Inter-community Dynamics

14.4 Aspects of Fundamentalism

14.5 Protestant Fundamentalism in the U.S.A.

- 14.5.1 The Historical Background
- 14.5.2 The "New Religious Right" Movement

14.6 Let Us Sum Up

14.7 Key Words

14.8 Further Reading

14.9 Answers to Check Your Progress


## 14.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this unit you should be able to—

- The concepts of fundamentalism and communalism;
- Explain communalism with the help of relevant examples; and
- Know a case of fundamentalism in America.

## 14.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we begin by clarifying the basic concepts of communalism and fundamentalism. We then explain up each of these basic concepts and expand on them. We take up first the concept of fundamentalism and describe it. Next we turn to communalism and note down the reasons for communal riots and examine their economic and social dimensions. This is followed by an analysis of inter-community dynamics.

Later on we discuss the rightist religious movements in America which call to attention the fundamental or essential ideas of nation and its people. The nature of fundamentalism

*The Unit has been adapted from ESO-15, Unit 15 and 32 with necessary edition.

in America is quite different — there is no religious state in America, yet the rightist religious ideals seemed to permeate the American political system and life.

## 14.2 BASIC CONCEPTS

Let us put forth the basic concepts of our unit first.

### 14.2.1 Communalism

While discussing the nature of politics in the new states of Africa and Asia, Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist (1963: 105-157), wrote, "When we speak of communalism in India we refer to religious contrasts, when we speak of it in Malaya we are mainly concerned with racial ones, and in the Congo with tribal ones". Here the significant link is between communal and political loyalties. Thus when we talk of India we are talking mainly of religion based oppositions. Communalism has been described as a sectarian exploitation of social traditions as a medium of political mobilization. This is done to punish the interests of the entrenched groups. Thus communalism is an ideology used to fulfill socio-eco-politico hopes of a community or social groups. It requires proposals and programmes to ensure its very existence. These become active in phases of social change. Communalism arose in India during its colonial phase. Communal politics bases it strategies on religion and tradition. The interpretation of history is for purposes of mobilisation. Communal organisations have little room for democracy. Secondly they may also involve racist contrasts and perpetrate the same. They consider egalitarianism as abnormal and support patriarchy as a familial and social norm. Communalism is therefore a—

i) belief system

ii) social phenomenon.

Communalism arises out of a belief system, and assumes great solidarity within a community which is not always true. We find that there are often intercommunity quarrels. Further, the protagonists of communalism hold a particular view of history and take care to point out that community has been identified with common sufferings and goals as a whole, lack of exclusiveness of the community is stressed. Fundamentalism, Communalism vis a vis other communities, and it is therefore considered logical to fight for one's rights in a literal way.

Communalism in India has, as noted earlier, a colonial legacy wherein the rulers (Britishers) used religious contrasts, existing among the different communities to their advantage by giving them prominence.

After Independence economic modernization of India expanded economic opportunities but not enough to curb unhealthy competitiveness. Job sharing among the different communities from as smaller pool of opportunities in causing much heartburn. Independence from the colonial power unleashed a horrendous communal holocaust, caused by the partition of the country into two parts on the eve of Independence in 1947.

### 14.2.2 Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism stresses the infallibility of a scripture (e.g. the Bible, the Granths, the Gita or the Quran) in all matters of faith and doctrine. The believer accepts it as a literal

historical record. The result is that a militant stand is taken by the followers; often preceded or followed by a desire for a separate homeland. At times, this too is taken as a prophecy in the scriptures. Fundamentalism thus separates a certain community from the mainstream. However, society, by its various arms (the police, army and so on), attempts to suppress or eliminate the fundamentalists. This is especially so when they begin acting outside of the law. Communalism is associated with eruption of violence and riots; these conflagrations may not have any particular aim or goal (apart from communal ascendancy or supremacy). Fundamentalism however is an organised all-encompassing movement which aims at promotion of societal goals specifically in the light of religious enshrinements. Operational strategy includes peaceful as well as war-life uses and movements.

## 14.3 COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

Communalism took deep roots in Indian polity during the later phase of the national movement and this was encouraged by the colonial rulers. This process was a continuation of the weakness and inadequacy of secularism as conceived and practised during the anticolonial struggle.

Implicit in all the theories has been the assumption that the growth of Hindu-Muslim tension was not the natural and inevitable outcome of changes taking place in the Indian society. Partition was the culmination of the conflict which could and should have been avoided. Further this line of reasoning states that nation building essentially means obliteration of communal moulds and creation of a common identity which decries the existence of differentiated groups based on religion, caste or language. Communal forces are therefore viewed as division and a sign of political underdevelopment. *Communalism arises when one or two characteristics of an ethnic identity e.g. religious beliefs are taken and emotionally surcharged. Communal movements are often brief and exist in a dyad, comprising an opposing force or ideology which has to be countered. Unlike fundamentalism, communalism can only exist dyadically.*

Hindu-Muslims riots reflected the religious fears and socio-economic aspirations of the Hindus and Muslims. Sometimes these riots occur for very minor reasons such as quarrels between Muslim and Hindu shopkeepers (Ghosh, 1981: 93-94).

The important point is that these are not isolated acts but often deliberate mechanizations of various socio-religious organisations. Recurrent collisions were engineered on festivals by stopping them and various religious occasions by interfering in their process. This was done to inflame communal passions and bitterness. According to Ghosh (1981) the acme of communal rioting was reached in August 1946 in Calcutta when the Muslim League observed a 'Direct Action Day'. Bombay did the same in the following month. Thus Independence was erected on the corpses of many thousands of people. With Mahatma Gandhi's assassination the riots abated awhile, and this situation was basically sustained by Nehru. Again the passing away of Nehru in 1964 and the deteriorating socio-economic circumstances led to the resurrection of communal violence.

### 14.3.1 Recent Communal Riots

Thus during the late 60s and 1970s there was large scale communal rioting in Ahmedabad, Baroda, Ranchi, Jamshedpur etc. Communal configurations in towns such as Ranchi cast a shadow over predictions and beliefs in the future of worker's unity. Again in Bhiwandi where there was carnage in 1969, it was a shock for the

leftists. The grassroots movement among the handloom workers fostered by committed communists was unable to stem the on rush of communal violence.

In 1969 itself a communal riot occurred in Ahmedabad. The inflammatory factors were insults to holy scriptures and sacred cows. It was suspected however, that these riots were politically motivated.

These riots indicated clearly that there were various political factors behind the surface level factors of religion based tensions and confrontations. In the mid-seventies the communal riots abated a bit both due to the Emergency and the Janata Regime. The first exercised iron control and discipline the second aroused the hopes of both Hindus and Muslims. The first six years of the eighties once more created an upward incline in the riot-graph. Patel (1990) feels that Communal violence is backed by religious arguments and backing. He feels that those resorting to it are neither true Hindus nor true Muslims. Religion does not preach enmity. However, the causes which are often given for communal violence hurt religious sentiments. The causes are flimsy such as playing music before a mosque, insulting the Prophet or the Holy Quran. This is sufficient to provoke violence among some of the Muslims. So also disturbing by Muslims of a religious yatra is enough to rouse Hindu ire (Patel, 1990: 41-42).

### 14.3.2 Reasons for Communal Riots

In the context of our section of recent-communal riots we turn now to some further reasons for the same. As Ghosh (1981) points out, the several arguments have been forwarded for the existence and continuation of communal riots. These are:

i) Riots are part of progress in an under developed country. The class struggle is converted into a communal struggle weakening the solidarity of the proletariat class. Further the middle and backward classes have acquired greater political and economic strength and influence and these often assert themselves. Economic conflicts lead to riots as in Bihar Sharif and Bhiwandi.

ii) Electoral politics determine the objectives and direction of communal violence e.g. Delhi 1986.

These explanations cannot be binding— they cannot be held to be necessary and sufficient. Often economic reasons emerge after (not before) the rioting has begun. Again in a developing society economic factors where competitive or one lagging behind the other can lead to a riot. The same applies to reductionist political causes. The idea of behind-the-scene political manipulation may not be valid.

### 14.3.3 Economic and Social Dimensions

Lastly the Punjab tragedy, the terrorist acts while antagonising the Hindus, are not considered to be the acts of the Sikh community as a whole.

Hindu-Muslim riots in recent times have been confined to medium sized towns and cities. These include areas like Meerut, Aligarh, Moradabad, Pune etc.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1) Give three reasons for Communal rioting.

2) Fill in the blanks:

Hindu ..... riots have in recent times been confined to …….. towns.

Thus in recent decades from the 60s onward the trend has been for collectivity orientation and in-group loyalties. Moreover, the functional independence of caste and community are disintegrating and replaced by competitive patterns. This makes for greater tension in interactions between people let alone communities.

**Activity 1**

Read carefully sections 14.2 and 14.3 on the reasons for communalism and communal riots. What reasons for the existence of communalism can you add to this analysis? Ask people of different communities their opinions and note them down. Then write a note of about 300 words offering your explanation for the phenomena of communalism. Discuss this with other students at the Study Centre, if possible.

### 14.3.4 Inter-Community Dynamics

Medium sized towns/cities are being divided on communal lines. We find that the workers do not have class consciousness. The educated middle class professional act as a bridge between Hindus and Muslims. During preparation there were Muslim doctors, lawyers etc. who also attracted Hindu clients—Similarly Hindu professionals were patronized by Muslim clients— Thus,

i) common bonds developed

ii) there were common networks and patronization.

Again the existence of Muslim professional administrators etc. created a positive image for the Muslims. Post partition mass migrations saw these advantages vanishing. Many trade and economic activities are run by Hindus and there were no problems so long as the Muslims were not competitive. There was interdependence between Hindu employers and Muslim artisans. However, in recent times, economic competitiveness come from Muslims and has turned into a religious threat to Hindus. Again channelling of Arab money into mosque renovation and lavish festival celebrations has resulted in an admixture of economics and religion which creates intercommunity tensions and eruptions of violence.

**Box 14.01**

Bihar sharif owes its name to the *mazar* (tomb) of a Muslim saint. It is considered a cultural heritage in Bihar on the lines of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Trouble began over a piece of land near a mosque called 'Mughal Kuan'. Muslims claimed that piece of land as its own. The Hindus planted a tulsi sapling and installed an idol on it. The dispute worsened by 1979 and led to the death of a harijan.

What are the factors which can remedy the communal divide in India:? Some suggestions have been given (Verma, 1990, 63-65). The suggestions include that religion should be separated from politics and communal bodies should be banned. Further the freedom of press should not extend to spreading communal ideas.

Communalism needs to be denounced by political leaders and all leading citizens. Measures should be taken for raising the economic lot of the minority community. Above all overall ethos should be created which leads to peace between communities and an end to communal violence. Community leaders should explain the situation to the community and defuse tensions.

Thus communalism has an ugly aspect and goes against national integration. Religion should not become the whipping boy of political ambitions.

## 14.4 ASPECTS OF FUNDAMENTALISM

Fundamentalism as a concept was first used in 1910-1915 when anonymous authors published 12 volumes of literature called 'The Fundamentals'. In the early 20s the print media used this word with reference to conservative protestant groups in North America. These groups were concerned about liberal interpretations of the Bible. Alarmed by this the conservatives insisted on some "fundamentals" of faith. These, included belief in the virgin birth, divinity, the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ and the infallibility of the scripture. As mentioned these and other fundamentals were published in 12 pamphlets called *The Fundamentals* between 1910-1915. *Thus* began the specialised usage of the concept of "fundamentalism". Thus a fundamental movement is one which takes infallibility of a scripture as a basic issue and as a guide to life. Some fundamentalists add that there is no need to even interpret the scripture as meaning in it is self-evident. *This often amounts to intolerance of any form of disagreement or dissent. Thus there is an apprehension that fundamentalists are narrow minded, and bigoted.*

T.N. Madan (1993) has pointed out that the word Fundamentalism has gained wide currency in the contemporary world. According to him it refers to a variety of norms, values, attitudes which either judge the fundamentalists or condemn them outright. This word is sometimes erroneously used in place of communalism. In fact, the word fundamentalism has become a blanket term. That is to say that various fundamental movements across the world are actually not identical but differ in various ways. But they are linked by a 'family' resemblance.

Fundamentalist movements are of a collective character. They are often led by charismatic leaders who are usually men. Thus the 1979 Iranian movement was led by Ayatollah Khomeini, and the recent Sikh fundamentalist upsurge by Sant Bhindranwale (Madan, *ibid).* Fundamentalism leaders need not be religious leaders.

The fundamentalists are a practical people and try to purge the way of life of all impurities (religiously speaking). They reject all corrupt lifestyles. An example of this is Dayanand's critique of the traditional, superstition filled way of life. Thus Maududi characterised the present Muslim way of life as 'ignorant' and Bhindranwale talked of the 'fallen' Sikhs who shave off their beards, cut their hair and do not observe the traditional Sikh way of life. Thus fundamental movements are not only about religious beliefs and practices, but lifestyles generally.

Thus fundamentalist movements are reactive and a response to what the persons involved—the leaders and participants, consider a crisis. The crisis calls for urgent remedies. The basic programme is presented as a return to the original tradition. That is to say to the contemporarily redefined fundamentals, which cover the present-day needs. This usually involves a selective retrieval of tradition. It may even be an invention of tradition.

The case of Dayanand illustrates this very well. He tried to evolve a sanitized Hinduism in response to the challenge for conversion by Christian missionaries (Madan, *ibid).* He claimed that the Vedas were the only true form of Hinduism and his call was back to the Vedas.

In Iran Khomeini developed an Islamic state based on the guardianship of the jurists. Again Bhindranwale gave a selective emphasis to Guru Gobind Singh's teaching rather than those of his immediate successors. Assertion of spiritual authority and criticising the culture are two aspects of fundamentalism. A third crucial element is that of the pursuit of political power.

Thus an objective intellectual analysis should consider fundamentalism as a distinctive category. It is not theocracy or backward communalism.

## 14.5 PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE U.S.A.

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

### 14.5.1 The Historical Background

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

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

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

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

**Box 14.02**

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

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

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

### 14.5.2 The "New Religious Right" Movement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

vi) Earlier manifestations of American religious conservation and extreme right wing groups tended to be marginal. They preferred to adopt an anti-intellectual and a political stance. They felt themselves to be outside of the national mainstream and preferred to stay that way. In sharp contrast, the New Religious Right has tried to become part of the national mainstream. It wanted to be taken with intellectual seriousness. Ferry Falwell, one of its most influential preachers, established a college called Liberty University, which he boasts, ranks alongside the best colleges in America.

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

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

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

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

ix) The movement undermines the heterogeneity of American culture and stresses homogeneity. As earlier discussed, American culture has been fed by many and diverse ethnic and religious streams. Heterogeneity encourages a multiplicity of beliefs and ethical standards. The conservative movement, though, argues, for absolutes. It cites the Protestant Christian way of life as the only one compatible with American democracy. Instead of celebrating the variety of religious experiences

that are available to humans, the movement preaches correct teaching, correct values, and a distinctly Protestant life-style. It sees outside influences as threatening to the exclusive American way of life.

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

**Check Your Progress 2**

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

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

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

## 14.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we began by explaining the basic concepts of communalism and fundamentalism. We then turned to an examination of communalism and fundamentalism. The reason for communal riots and some of the inter-community dynamics were then laid bare.

We have also tried to show the background in which the rightist religious movement in America is also hinged on a sense of rootlessness. This feeling of insecurity is very often exploited by the advocates of fundamentalistic ideals, whether it is in America or other countries.

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## 14.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Check Your Progress I**

1) a) Economic reasons

   b) Political reasons

   c) Sociological reasons.

2) Muslim; Medium Sized.

**Check Your Progress II**

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

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

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

# UNIT 15 CIVIL RELIGION*

**Structure**


15.0 Objectives

15.1 Introduction

15.2 The Concept of Civil Religion

15.3 Characteristics of Civil Religion

15.4 Varieties of Civil Religion

- 15.4.1 Ancient Greek and Roman Cities
- 15.4.2 France
- 15.4.3 America

15.5 Let Us Sum Up

15.6 References

15.7 Further Reading

15.8 Answers to Check Your Progress


## 15.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you will be able to —

- Define the concept of "Civil Religion";
- Outline the nature and development of civil religion; and
- Describe some of the varieties of civil religion.

## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit is closely related with the ritual and religious aspects of society. But how is this so? To answer these questions, you must learn about the close inter-relation between rituals, both secular and religious, and the concept of civil religion.

In this unit, section 15.2 gives you the definition of the concept of civil religion. Section 15.3 briefly outlines the nature and development of civil religion and section 15.4 describes some of the varieties found in different societies during different periods of time.

## 15.2 THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL RELIGION

What is civil religion? Civil Religion has been defined as "the religious or quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions found recurrently in the history of the political states" (Nisbet, 1968: 524-527).

This regard for the civic values and traditions of the political state is expressed through special festivals, rituals, creeds and dogmas which honour great personages and events

*The Unit is adapted from ESO-15, Unit 9 with necessary edition.

of the past. These persons, such as freedom fighters and social and political reformers and eminent Presidents like Abraham Lincoln are some of these who have played a major role in the socio-political history of their society.

We can give the example of the celebration of our Independence Day, 15th August when our Prime Minister unfurls the National Flag every year on the historical Red Fort in Delhi. Another example is the Republic Day Parade celebrated on the 26th January every year. This celebration too is marked by a semi-religious fervour. It serves to heighten the sense of national and political identify of the Indian citizens. It reminds them of the sacrifice made by our leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad and several others who fought for our Independence.

This kind of semi-religious fervour in celebrating political events and birth days of great persons is found in all societies at all times. It is religious in the sense in which the eminent French sociologist, Emile Durkheim has defined religion.

According to Durkheim, a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things that is to say things that are set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. He says that cities and nations are just as susceptible to the nomenclature, i.e., naming of the sacred as are the social bodies called church. He gives the example of France during the French Revolution at the end of the 18th Century (Nisbet, 1968: 524-527).

Carlton J.H. Hayes' in his Book *Essays on Nationalism* (1926) writes that human history reveals that human beings have always been distinguished by what is called a "religious sense". In other words, they are moved by a mysterious faith in some power outside of themselves, a faith always accompanied by feelings of reverence and usually expressed by external acts and ceremonials (Hayes, 1926: 95).

It is in this context of the sense of religion, the feeling of patriotism or nationalism, of belonging to a distinct socio-political group that we have to understand the concept of civil religion. Civil religion is the religion of an advanced modern society with higher technology. As Nisbet mentions, civil religion has been a highly visible aspect of the modern national state in the West.

In the contemporary period, the most distinct form of civil religion can be found in the American society. You will learn more about civil religion in America in the following sections. Let us first understand the characteristics of civil religion.

## 15.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF CIVIL RELIGION

The concept of civil religion has been present in many societies from ancient Greece and Rome to the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance in Western Europe. The ancient sacred kingship of the Mediterranean world had elements of civil religion, such as, the worship of the King or Emperor as a God. This feature has been characteristic of many societies, including our own, in the pre-British period.

The king was supposed to be divinely ordained to rule over his subjects. This aspect was highlighted by rites and ceremonies held at certain times each year. The "rajyabhishek" or the religious ceremony to crown a prince is an example of such a fusion of the political and the religious.

A similar example of fusion of the political and the religious is found in Japanese history also with respect to the Emperor till at least the World War II. The nineteenth century historian, Fustel de Coulanges, has described in his ramous book *The Ancient City* (1864) the civil religions of the ancient Greek and Roiinin city states. You will learn more about them in the next section of this unit.

As stated earlier civil religion—the quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions found recurrently in the history of the political state—has been a highly visible aspect of the modern national state in the West. Nisbet (1968) says that this was as a result of certain social, political and historical factors. During the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries destructive conflicts were taking place between the European Protestants and Catholics, the two main sects of Christianity. This period was followed by the period of the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment period refers to the Europe of the 18th Century which embodied the spirit of the French philosophers. It marked a radical change from the traditional thinking of feudal Europe. During this period the traditional Christianity; as all other kinds of revealed religions; came under attack. This created a vacuum of belief among several groups in Western Europe. At this time, efforts were made to establish faith in a deistic god, or a god of nature or progress. This was to replace the traditional conception of Christianity, but this move proved to be unsuccessful.

However, instead of this deistic god what proved to be more effective was the notion of *patrie***.** This term was coined by the French philosophers. It refers to a new conception of the political state. For these philosophers a state was one which was paternal, that is, fatherly in its regard for its citizens. For many centuries, the state was considered more or less as a governing body which was the engine of warfare and taxation. Therefore, this new conception of state was a radical change.

It was the concept of patrie that Rousseau had in his mind when he wrote his seminal work in political philosophy, *Social Contract* (1762). He is one of the philosophers whose ideas inspired many of the French revolutionaries including Robespierre. Rousseau has glorified people and what he calls "the general will" in this work. It is in this work that we first find the mention of the concept of civil religion.

According to Rousseau, the religious need lies in everyone. He believed that all the existing religions, especially Christianity, were inadequate in the ideal state. Therefore, he proposed a systematic civil religion "of which the sovereign would fix the articles". In other words, the political head would determine the articles of this religion and these articles are, as mentioned by Rousseau "social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject" (Nisbet, 1968: 524).

Rousseau took the concept of civil religion very seriously since he even proposed sanctions against those who defaulted. These sanctions included banishment, that is, throwing the defaulters out of the community, and even death. These defaulters would be those who first accepted and then flouted the articles of belief which constitute the civil religion.

During the French Revolution, when it was as its height, from about 1793-1794 a civil religion was instituted. It was led by Robespire and officially known as the religion of the Supreme Being. This religion worshipped the Revolution itself which was on event that had seized the minds of millions in the West. It has the political state, specifically the revolutionary state as the essence of belief and rite (Nisbet, 1968: 524).

**Activity 1**

You have just read the section on the Concept of Civil Religion, nature and development of Civil Religion. From your own experience write a note of about two pages on civil religion in our own society.Compare your note with those of other students at your study centre.

During the 19th Century the phrase or the idea of Civil Religion seems to have disappeared from the political discourse. However, the spirit or religion of nationalism continued to thrive according to C.J.H. Hayes. He believed that the most impressive fact of the present age, i.e. the nineteen-twenties was the universality of the religious aspects of nationalism.

Hayes points out that there exists a parallel between the traditional Christianity and the new national or civil religion which emerged during this time. The "God" of this civil religion is said to be the national state which itself had emerged in Europe primary due to the Napoleonic Wars. It was during this war that Napoleon spread the message of the nationalist slogan of the French Revolution to all the parts of Europe.

According to Robert Nisbet (1968) the flame of nationalist feelings found during the 19th Century Europe and United States carried with it an enthusiasm of a religious kind which differentiates this civil religion from the civil religions of the ancient and the medieval societies. He gives the example of Hegel, a German philosopher who declared the national state i.e. Prussia to which he belonged as "the march of God on earth". This personal opinion of Hegel may or may not have been accepted by the nationalists of Europe and America but the majority of nationalists came to perceive their respective nations as being touched by divine.

This rise of nationalism combined with militarism and racialism, to a certain extent, became the reason for several mass upheavals or reactions taking place during this time. This kind of phenomena has been observed in human history only during the religious wars of the 16th and the 17th centuries in Europe. Nisbet says that most probably World War I represented the culmination of the nationalist religious fervour in Europe.

This religious fervour for one's nation and what it stood for came under question after the Second World War when rise of Nazi nationalism and the Jewish holocaust brought an image of fear and revulsion in people's mind against excessive patriotism.

Today we find that patriotism of the kind found during the World War I and along with it civil religion had declined throughout the democratic world. However, we can still observe some form of religious-like sentiment associated with one's regard for the nation.

In the next section, we are going to discuss the varieties of civil religions found in different societies, with special emphasis on the American society.

**Check Your Progress 1**

i) Define the concept of civil religion in about 8 lines.

ii) Describe Rousseau's ideas on Civil Religion in about 10 lines.

iii) What is the religion of the Supreme Being? Describe using about 8 lines.

## 15.4 VARIETIES OF CIVIL RELIGION

Scholars of sociology of religion such as, R.N. Bellah and Peter Hammond (1980) have found the existence of some kind of common faith in different societies particularly in Japan, Mexico and Italy. These societies had different 'structures in which this common faith was reflected. Bellah and Hammond also discovered in their cross-cultural comparison that none of these societies possess the full structure of civil religion as found in America. Let us examine some of these varieties of civil religion found in some of the societies during different periods of time.

### 15.4.1 Civil Religion in the Ancient Greek and Roman Cities

During the history of human societies, the explicit forms of gods of archaic religion had emerged due to certain circumstances and religious understandings. Bellah pointed out that various forms of social organisation are necessary for the emergence of a certain type of religious organisation on the form that it takes.

In this same context Swanson, a scholar who studied religion during the cross cultural comparison, showed that in statistical terms the presence of a pantheon of gods as characterised by the archaic religions is closely linked with the presence of a number of groups of specialists within the society (Swanson, ~~G.D.~~ 1960: ~~pp.~~ 82-96). He discovered that there is a pattern of development of superior gods within territorial consolidation and social and occupational differential of society.

According to Swanson, and another scholar Murray, this pattern originates from the family which is the ultimate sovereign group. It is in the family that the first religious practice is directed towards the worship of ancestral spirits or family gods or deities who protect the interests of that particular family or clan. The particular interest of the family is the particular interest of that family's god. This interlinkage becomes more and more differentiated as the societies become increasingly complex. In this evolutionary perspective of religion, the god of one family becomes associated with a particular occupational specialty.

With the emergence of larger social groups, scholars feel that some local gods may have merged with others to form the single god of the same occupational specialty or particular season. But this emerging itself depended on a clear idea of the final entity so that the process of merging stopped at some stage. Where a clear conception did not exist, the archaic religion did not reach its final phase of religious development.

However, in places where this final merger of local gods could not take place there the social and political differentiation in that society made it more natural for religious expression to take the form of a pantheon of gods. This is where we find the case of civil religion of the ancient Greece and Rome (Hargrove, 1989: 109-112).

Religious practices were held in the family first, then in the city government in both the Greek City-States, as well as, Roman City-States. Each and every family of citizens who belonged to these city-states had their own sacred fires and appropriate rituals to propitiate their gods, for maintaining, using, honouring and renewing this sacred fire. But this ritual activity was conferred to only the Patrician families who claimed full citizenship. The class of Plebians and strangers were left outside the body politic because they in essence did not belong to, that is, had no part in this civil religion.

The plebians shared the religious ceremonies only if they came under the protection of a partician family in a client relationship, with the patrician family being the patrons. According to Bellah, the most characteristic feature of archaic religions was the presence of the strong two-class system as found amongst the Greek and later the Roman city-states. The religions of the two classes also were not the same.

The upper classes believed that they had higher religious expression. In the Greek mythology we find a dual system of gods. There are the gods who have obviously developed from the primitive ritual divinities such as the mother earth, corn goddess of agricultural people and the lower classes, on the one hand, and on the other there are in the pantheon the Olympian gods of classical Greece imposed over the gods of the lower classes. The nature of these Olympian gods indicates the source of the conquerors which formed the upper class of the Greek society. They were the Aryans who invaded ancient Greece from the north.

Thus, civil religion in the ancient Greek and later Roman society, as reflected in their respective mythologies, reveals the importance given to the state and citizens of that state.

### 15.4.2 Civil Religion in France

France during the 18th Century witnessed an age of not only socio-economic and political upheaval but also of religious skepticism and theological doubt. This period can be adjudged as the most crucial period in human history as it transformed the European society from a largely feudal to a democratic one.

It was this period of the French Revolution when intellectuals such as Voltaire and other "enlightened" litterateurs came down heavily on "supernatural" religion and ecclesiastical institutions. They criticised and mocked Christian tradition as well as the Christian Bible.

Being influenced by the natural sciences, "reason" and scientific approach came to be held as a measure of judgement. In this mental framework, miracles, superstitions, traditional ways of thinking and believing all came to be questioned. Christianity was denounced as superstitious and its clergy as humbugs

For the first time in the Christian history a large number of influential adherents to Christianity had come out openly in the criticism of the truth and the worth of its most fundamental tenets. As Hayes (1926: 93-125) pointed out, many of the 18th Century intellectuals perceived in the Trinity (i.e. the holy alliance of God, the Father; the son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost and in the Christian sacraments) only the vain imagining of dupes or hypocrites. They saw nothing in Christian Revelation or in any "supernaturalism" to which human beings could justifiably attach any sense of devotion or reverence.

The intellectuals of the 18th century Europe, especially France were logical in their arguments. They refused to follow Christianity. But yet, according to Hayes, these selfsame intellectuals did possess a religious sense which they have shown in many strong ways. They came to believe in a God of Nature who as he says "stated things which could not stop and who was so intent upon watching numberless worlds go round in, their appointed orbits and so transferred by the operation of all the eternal immutable. Laws which he had invented that he had no time or ear for the little entreaties of puny men upon a pygmy Earth" (Hayes, 1926: 92-125).

Hayes says that this God of Nature was very much inferior to the God of Christians but he was outside of man and these 18th Century intellectuals managed to develop a mysterious feeling about him.

The God of Nature was not the only power that these intellectuals felt a religious devotion about. Some of them also discovered and paid obeisance to a mysterious force outside of themselves called Science. Later it was found that when capitalised this Science proved to be but a theological hand maid to the God of Nature.

There was another "hydra headed monstrosity" which these intellectuals worshipped i.e. the Humanity. These intellectuals were especially devout people. This devotion could be because when the whole of Humanity is deified it will be having a far greater mystery and awe attached to it, than the conception of a single God, Man or even the Trinity.

Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the father of sociology too during the latter half of this academic career propagated a religion of the Supreme Being i.e. the religion of the Humanity amongst the intellectuals of France during the 18th century.

With the warning of faith in Christianity during this time and increasing devotion to Nature, Science, Reason, Progress, Humanity, and so on, the intellectuals of this period were giving expression to their inherent sense of religion. During this very phase there was another sort of worship i.e. the worship of the Political State.

The French Revolution was a landmark in the development of nationalism as a religion. As you have already seen, the intellectuals of this period brought about a sea change in the ideas and perspectives of people regarding society, economy, polity, and so on.

In the beginning these intellectuals tried to syncretise the 18th Century philosophy with Catholic Christianity in a state church so that it would become democratic in organisation and can be conducted in the national interests. A philosopher of this period Abbe Rayanal said, "The state, it seems to me is not made for religion, but religion is made for the state. The state has supremacy in everything. When the state has pronounced^ the church has nothing more to say" (Hayes, 1926: 101).

The twists and turns that the history and polity of France took during the revolutionary period too, reveals the nature of the development of the civil religion. It aimed to create a national clergy, under the control of the civil power, with the same standing as other state-officials. This move was however, resisted by the traditional clergy of France which had till then enjoyed very high status, and power.

The civil Constitution was condemned at Rome in April, 1791 and since then this issue was squarely combined in France between the religions of Catholicism and Nationalism. Christianity was not formally rejected but only the clergy who swore allegiance to the Civil Constitution were allowed to perform Christian services. According to Hayes, the Catholic churches in most parts of France were transformed into civic temples. By 1793 the persecution of the clergy who resisted the change began because in the minds of the French Revolutionaries the Catholic clergy as a whole had committed the greatest infamy of all of defying the national state.

Nationalism became a religion in the true sense of the word with the French Revolutionaries. These Revolutionaries believed that a miraculous regeneration would take place in France in the "new order" and this regeneration would extend to the whole human race. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was hailed

as "the national catechism", and a sincere belief in this Declaration was prescribed by the Constitution of 1791, drawn in France.

Those who refused to swear by this Constitution and what it stood for were cut off from the community by civil excommunication. The written Constitution embodying the Declaration became holy writ.

Hayes writes that the religion of nationalism in France, and other countries of Europe, during this period, had lodged deep in popular consciousness. It emerged eventually in many strange forms opposed to the older philosophies and world religions as the most dominant religion of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

### 15.4.3 Civil Religion in America

Civil religion in its most crystallised and evolved form is found in the American Society. The American society represents, in the most dramatic way the *religion of nationalism in the West during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.*

The religion of nationalism led to the rise of a political clarity in every country in Europe which was devoted to the nation in the same way as the clerisy i.e., the clergy was devoted to the church during the medieval period. Children were now born into, and received their primary identities from the national state, as they had once been born primarily into the church. Birth, marriage and death all became a concern of the civil state. In the areas such as, family, school, and charity i.e. social welfare measures, the civil government began to take charge instead of the church.

In America the great events like the birth-days of great political figures like Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln came to be celebrated as solemnly as the feasts of the Christian saints and martyrs were once celebrated. Likewise, the great events of historical significance for the nation were also given a religious regard. The fourth of July, just like our Fifteenth of August, took on some of the same religious kind of significance as the Feast of the Nativity did in Christianity (Nisbet, 1968: 526).

R.N. Bellah (1967: 1-20) in his article on "Civil Religion in America" writes that "Christianity is the national faith, and others that the church and synagogue celebrate only the generalised religion of "the American Way of Life", few have realised that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well institutionalised civil religion in America".

Nisbet maintains that the American Civil religion had its widely recognised theology, one complete with creed, catechism and dogma. In America, as in many other nations too, a complex ritual surrounds the American flag and other symbols of national civil unity.

He says that during this period Protestants generally scorned the Catholics use of external adornments of faith such as, statues or idols of God, mural, portrait and so on. But yet they saw no harm in the use of these decorations where the worship of their nation was concerned. He says that in America it would be a rare public square which did not have at least one statue of some departed political saint. This is true of all European countries of that time.

We can find a resemblance to this in our own country. After Independence, the statues of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose and others who sacrificed their lives for India's freedom stand testimony to the great historical event of the struggle for freedom of our nation.

Bellah has examined the way in which Americans treat religion on public occasions in community life. He has analysed the inaugural speech of American Presidents to show the great significance of civil religion in America. He pointed out that words and acts of the founding fathers of America, especially the first few presidents, shaped the form and tone of the civil religion as it has existed ever since then. Much of this religion is selectively derived from Christianity but yet it is itself clearly not Christianity. Presidents like George Washington, Adams or Jefferson have never ever mentioned Christ in their inaugural address and nor have any of the subsequent presidents. But it is very significant that none of these presidents have ever failed to mention God in their speeches.

According to Bellah, the God of civil religion is not only rather "unitarian" but is also on the austere side, much more related to order, low and right of people than to the question of salvation and love (Bellah 1967: 1-20).

Bellah examined Kennedy's inaugural address of 20th January 1961 and found the Kennedy mentioned the name of God in two or three places. Similar references to God are also found in the speeches of other Presidents of America.

Bellah says that the reference to the term God reveals the essentially irrelevant role of religion in a secular society like America. The reference of God in this speech as well as in public generally indicates that religion has "only a ceremonial significance": it gets only a sentimental nod which serves largely to placate the more unenlightened members of the community before matters of great socio-political concern are discussed by the President.

Bellah says that a cynical observer of these proceedings might even say that an American president has to mention God in his speech otherwise he will risk losing votes. An appearance of religiosity is a kind of unwritten qualification for the office of the American President.

Kennedy's speech and his references to God, which reveals the essentially vestigial place of religion in America, raises some important questions regarding the issue of how civil religion relates to the political society on the one hand and the private religious organisation on the other. Kennedy, in his speech mentioned God only in a general sense. He did not use the name of Christ although he himself was a Catholic Christian.

Bellah says that Kennedy did this because the specific reference to the Christian religion or any other for that matter is the business of the Presidents' own personal life. It does not in any way concern the conduct of his public office. Thus the principle of separation of church and state guarantees the freedom of religious belief and association but at the same time it also clearly segregates the religious sphere, which is essentially private, from the political one, which is public.

However, the reference to God in the President's speech is justified in the sense that the separation of church and state, does not rule out the religious dimension from the political spheres. Despite the specific elements of religious belief of every citizen, the Americans in general have certain common elements of religious orientation which they all share. These common elements play a crucial role in the development of American institutions and provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere.

Bellah says that this public religious dimension found in American society is expressed through a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals which as a whole constitutes the American

Civil Religion. It is in this context that the inauguration of a president is an important ceremonial event which reaffirms the religious legitimation of the highest political authority of the President.

Kennedy, in his speech said, "I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebearers prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago". Here the oath mentioned is the oath of office, including the acceptance of the obligation to uphold the Constitution. This speech shows that beyond the Constitution, the President's obligation extends not only to the people but to God.

Therefore, Bellah maintains that in American political theory, sovereignty rests with the people but along with that, implicitly and often explicitly, the ultimate sovereignty has been attributed to God. Thus it shows that the will of the people is not itself the criterion of right and wrong. There is a higher criterion in terms of which this will, can be judged. It is accepted that the will of the people may possibly be wrong. The President's obligation, therefore, extends to this higher criterion i.e. God.

According to Bellah, the whole presidential address reveals the theme or meaning which lies deep in the American tradition. This theme is that of the obligation, both collective and individual to carry out God's will on earth. This was the motivating spirit of the founders of America and it still continues till today in every generation.

**Check Your Progress 2**

i) Give in brief the salient aspects of civil religion in the Greek and Roman city-states.

ii) Why did the intellectuals of the French Revolution period reject the traditional beliefs and ideas? Were they non-religious?

iii) The public religious dimension found in American polity and society can be distinguished from the private religious dimension. Discuss.

## 15.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have explained the various dimensions of civil religion. Civil religion has been defined as "the religious or quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions found recurrently in the history of the political state". You learnt that this concept was associated with a semi-religious fervour or regard in which political events and birth days or martyr days of great personages are celebrated.

Civil religion is not a new phenomenon but was found as far back as the ancient Greece and Roman Societies. In Civil religion we find a fusion of the political and the religious elements. This could be seen clearly in Japanese history till the World War II.

During the French Revolution the notion of "patrie" emerged. It was coined by the French philosophers and refers to the new conception of the political state. For them the state was one which was paternal in its regard for its citizens. You learnt about Jean J. Rousseau who for the first time used the term "civil religion" which forms a chapter of his seminal work in political philosophy, *Social Contract* (1762).

Finally, in this unit you have learnt about the nature and development of the concept of civil religion in human history briefly from ancient to modern period.

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## 15.7 FURTHER READING

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## 15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Check Your Progress 1**

**i)** Civil religion has been defined as that feeling of quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions which are found recurrently in the political history of a nation. This regard has a religious or semi-religious nature and is expressed through special festivals, rituals, creeds and dogmas which bestow honour to great political leaders or historical events of great significance to the nation.

ii) Rousseau, a French philosopher was the first one to use the concept of civil religion in his seminal work in political philosophy, *Social Contract* (1762). He used this term as the title of one of the chapters in this book. He was influenced by the notion of "patrie", i.e. the new conception of the political state which implies a paternal or fatherly regard of its citizens by the political state as developed by the French philosophers. Rousseau took the concept of civil religion as fulfilling the need of human beings for the religious.

iii) The religion of the Supreme Being worshipped the French Revolution itself. As indicated, the civil religion emerged during the French Revolution when it was at its height (1793-1794). It was initiated by Robespierre, one of the French Revolutionaries and came to be known officially as the religion of the Supreme Being. It believed in the political state, specifically the revolutionary state as the main focus of an element of its belief and rites.

**Check Your Progress 2**

i) In the Greek, and later Roman city-states the religious practices were conducted in the family first and then in the city government or the city-states. Each family of citizens of these city-states had their own sacred fires and gods and goddesses to propitiate. Family unit was responsible for performing the rituals for maintaining, honouring, using and renewing this sacred fire. However, as only the class of patricians i.e. those who were the lords and masters of the land were considered

the rightful citizens of the city-state, only they had the right to participate in this civil religion. The class of plebians or the serfs was not considered citizens and as such could not participate in the ritual activity of propitiating their family Gods. Sometimes they shared the religious ceremonies of their master but only as their clients.

ii) The intellectuals of the French Revolution rejected the traditional beliefs and ideas as during the Enlightenment Period each and every idea came to be questioned. Nothing was accepted on its face value or because it was God given. Not only socio-economic and political ideas were critically evaluated but the religious ideas of traditional Christianity also came to be questioned. However, as Hayes (1926) says this did not mean that these intellectuals were without religious feelings. For they developed a religion like regard for such concepts as "reason", "progress", "humanity", "the Supreme Being" and so on.

iii) Nationalism became a religion in the true sense of the word with the French Revolution because it was during this revolution that the worship of the political state emerged by the Revolutionaries. The Revolution itself came to be worshipped and the new Constitution and its symbols became part of this civil religion. A national clergy emerged under the powers of the civil state with the same status as that of the state officials.

iv) The public religious dimension found that the American polity and society can be distinguished from the private religious dimension. The first one is general and regards the nation and citizenship as the main goal of worship or religious rites and ceremonies while the second one is the private affair of each person as it is specific to their being members of a specific religion.

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# GLOSSARY

**Akbarishiahs** : A practice observed by Shia Muslims, particularly so in Persia, to keep a woman as a wife for a fixed period.

**Altruism** : Unselfish concern for the welfare of others.

**Animism** : theory which holds that religion is belief in spiritual beings.

**Apostles** : Jesus Christ's twelve original disciples and Paul.

**Arzal** : Unclean

**Asaraf** : Honourable

**Ashrama** : There are four well-defined stage of life in Hinduism. These are *Brahmacharya* (for youth), *Grihastha* (for adult), *Vanaprastha*(for middle aged) and Sanyasa (for old aged).

**Baptism** : A ritual by which a person is admitted to the Christian community.

**Bhaktism** : Religions ideology of devotionalism.

**Biddat** : Innovation. It sometimes it may mean deviation also.

**Case study** : A sociological method of analyzing and presenting data using specific examples.

**Civic** : It is related with being a citizen.

**Clergy** : All persons, such as priests who are in holy order associated with church.

**Communalism** : This is a situation wherein religion and religious communities view each other with hostility and antagonism. They may often come out in open conflict such as in communal riots.

**Empirical** : Knowledge which is based on observation and experimentation.

**Functionalist** : one who believes that society is a system of interrelated parts; the functioning of the parts have consequences for the whole system.

**Fundamentalism** : This word stresses the infallibility of a scripture in matters of faith and doctrine. Certain groups take this to espouse a militant stance and claim sovereign-hood of a territory based on the same principles.

**Ganga-Sanghas** : Geographically located units and inhabited and ruled by the Kshatriya clans.

**Gospels** : The first four New Testament books telling of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Gotra** : Exogamous groups indicating common ancestor of that group, family or clan.

**Heterodox** : Ideas opposed to usual practising religious beliefs.

**Holocaust** : The large scale killing of Jews during the World War II by the Nazis.

**Holy Spirit** : The active presence of God in human life constituting the third person of the Trinity.

**Incarnation** : The union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ.

**Indigenous** : Belonging naturally to soil or country.

**Kanga** : Comb

**Keshas** : Unshorn hair

**Khalsa** : The word Khalsa, literally meaning God's own is used for baptised Sikhs.

**Kirpan** : Sword

**Langar** : Free meal served in the Gurudwara.

**Nishan Sahib** : Yellow colour Sikh flag.

**Liturgy** : Body of rites prescribed for public worship.

**Oligarchies** : A form of government in which ruling powerbelongs to few people.

**Orthodox** : Conforming to the established religious doctrine.

**Patriotism** : The devotion or love that one has for one's country.

**Profane** : that realm which is kept away from and in opposition to the sacred. In other words, profane is the world of humanbeings.

**Prophet** : One who utters divinely inspired revelations.

**Quias** : Reasoning by analogy to guide the people to carry out the activities.

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

**Regeneration** : The regermination or emergence of new social institutions, body of norms, values and beliefs "after a period of decline and decay in a society.

**Resurrection** : The rising of Jesus Christ from the dead.

**Ritual** : A systematic and repetitive system of actions directed towards a specific target or religions goal.

**Sacred** : the world ofthe supreme, the venerated, the Holy. According to Durkheim, it is kept away from the profane.

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

**Sangat** : Congregation

**Social Contract** : An understanding reached by mankind to accept the norms andvalues of each other for congenial social existence.

**Stridhana** : Movable property given to women at the time of marriage.

**Sunna** : Customs, Usages.

**Taboo** : Act, or system, of setting apart a person or sacred thing.

**Totem** : an animal or vegetable or a mythical ancestor. It symbolises the clan and issacred.

**Trinity** : The unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three persons in one God, according to Christian dogma.

**Varna** : Broad ascribed status groups in Hinduism. There are four *Varnas* in Hinduism–Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra.

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