



BPYG-171

Block 3

Religious Pluralism

Block Introduction

Today we are more conscious of the plurality of religious traditions than ever before. Hence there is a shift of interest from one's own religion to other religions. It is this shift that gives a new direction and meaning to the themes discussed in this block: religious pluralism, religious fundamentalism and inter-religious dialogue. Fundamentalism is a clinging to values practiced and selected doctrines or teachings currently perceived to be under threat by a group, a tribe or nation. The various fundamentalist groups in the world today owe their origin to some perceived threat, real or imagined to long-cherished traditional values. Diversity of cultures is a reality of our world today, and is perhaps the foremost cause of clashes and tensions.

Unit 1 familiarizes us with Religious Pluralism and secularism. This unit deals with the meaning of religious pluralism, conditions that promote or hinder religious pluralism, the responses put forward by philosophy to such a situation and the practical responses to religious responses and also deals with various conceptions of secularism, in brief, with an emphasis of Indian version of secularism.

Unit 2 will look at the rise and growth of Religious Fundamentalism. In this unit we look at the meaning of religious fundamentalism, and the threat that fundamentalism poses to peace of a community or country.

Unit 3 deals with Inter-religious Dialogue that is taking shape in the modern times due to the plurality of religions and the threat of fundamentalism. This is the result of the birth of a new converging consciousness, new ways of looking at the religious plurality, the need for dialogue and the ways that an inter-religious dialogue can take place.

Unit 4 studies the contemporary debates in the philosophy of religion. In this unit learners will study how modern thinkers see the issue of philosophy of religion. This unit will present analytic and continental approaches to understand the 'philosophy of religion'. This unit will also explore the contemporary trends to understand and resolve the religious disagreements.

While focusing on the recent trends in the area of religion, the present block calls for a shift from the traditional ways of thinking.

UNIT 11 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND SECULARISM*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Conditions that Promote or Hinder Religious Pluralism
- 11.3 Philosophical Responses to Religious Pluralism
- 11.4 Practical Responses to Religious Pluralism
- 11.5 Secularism
- 11.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.7 Key Words
- 11.8 Further Readings and References
- 11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVES

Until the middle of the last century, the philosophy of religion, as practiced in the West, presumed the uniqueness of Christianity, so that philosophical reflection on religion was centered around the Christian religion and has concentrated primarily on the Christian (or the Judeo-Christian) concept of God. However, during the last century philosophers of religion have increasingly felt obliged to take note of the fact that there are many other great world faiths and that monotheism is only one of the major types of religion, so that it is now common for philosophers of religion to include in their reflection the problems surrounding the plurality of faith traditions. The main objective of this Unit is to draw the attention of the students to existence of many religions and introduce them to the questions it raises for philosophers of religion. It begins by defining religious pluralism, contrasting it with plurality of religion, and looks into the conditions that promote or hinder religious pluralism. Then the enquiry proceeds to examine the ways philosophers have responded to the questions—both philosophical and

* Augustine Perumalil, Satya Nillayam, Mukhathala. The section on 'Secularism' is contributed by Dr. Ashutosh Vyas, Consultant (Philosophy), SOITS, IGNOU.

practical—connected with religious pluralism.

Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of religious pluralism and the problems it raises;
- to tolerate and even appreciate plurality;
- to understand the conditions that promote or hinder religious pluralism;
- to evaluate the various solutions proposed by philosophers in the past;
- to suggest new solutions to the problems raised by the awareness of the plurality or religion.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Some scholars make a distinction between religious plurality and religious pluralism and define the former as the fact of religious diversity and the latter as a simple acknowledgement and acceptance of that fact. This definition, though valid, does not exhaust the meaning of the expression “religious pluralism,” which is used in a number of related ways. Some consider religious pluralism as a worldview which acknowledges that one’s religion is not the sole and exclusive source of truth, and admits that there are at least some truths and true value in other religions. Another definition of religious pluralism involves accepting the beliefs taught by other religions as true though they differ from the ones taught by one’s own religion. This involves an acceptance of the concept that all religions are valid though their beliefs appear to be conflicting.

A broader definition of religious pluralism includes in its primary meaning not only the acknowledgement of the fact of plurality and an acceptance of the validity of all religions, but also an active engagement with plurality in the form of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. Thus, according to Diana Eck, “Pluralism is not the sheer fact of this plurality alone, but is active engagement with plurality. Pluralism and plurality are sometimes used as if they were synonymous. But plurality is just diversity, plain and simple—splendid, colorful, may be even threatening. Such diversity does not, however, have to affect me. I can observe diversity. I can even celebrate diversity, as the cliché goes. But I have to participate in pluralism. Pluralism requires the cultivation of public space where we all encounter one another.” Thus, in the broader sense, religious pluralism involves not only the acceptance of the validity of other religions, but also

dialogue among religions, where individuals of different religions discuss religious beliefs and learn from and work with each other without attempting to convince each other of the correctness of their individual set of beliefs.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Differentiate between plurality of religion and religious pluralism.

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11.2 CONDITIONS THAT PROMOTE OR HINDER RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

11.2.1 Conditions for the Existence of Religious Pluralism

One of the necessary conditions for the existence of religious pluralism is the existence of freedom of religion. Religious diversity can exist only if there is freedom of religion. To have freedom of religion it is not necessary that an individual religion accepts that other religions are legitimate or that freedom of religion and religious pluralism in general are good things. What is necessary is that religions accept to coexist, acting within a commonly accepted law of a particular region. Freedom of religion exists when different religions of a particular region possess the same rights of worship and public expression. Some argue that religious freedom alone is not enough for religious pluralism to flourish. For religious pluralism to flourish there has to be mutual respect between different religious traditions. The required respect can be promoted by societal and theological change aimed to overcome religious differences between religions and denominations within the same religion. Such a change can be introduced by a non-literal view of one's religious traditions and by emphasizing fundamental principles rather than more marginal issues. It is basically an attitude which rejects focus on immaterial differences, and

instead gives respect to those beliefs held in common. It is clear that in such an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation religious pluralism can flourish.

11.2.2 Conditions That Hinder Religious Pluralism

If religious freedom and respect for other religions promote religious pluralism, absence of religious freedom shuts out religious pluralism. In atheist countries there can be no religious pluralism, since in such countries there can be no religion at all.

Another factor that hinders religious pluralism is exclusivism. Exclusivist religions teach that theirs is the only way to truth and salvation; some of them would even argue that it is the duty of a true believer to wage jihad against the falsehoods taught by other religions. Some fundamentalist groups like the Taliban argue fiercely against other religions and teach that religious practices of liberal Muslims and of other religions are pernicious. This attitude led to the destruction of the Alexandrian library by Caliph Omar and of the ancient Buddha statues of Bamiyan as well as to the Crusades and witch hunt of the Early Modern Period. Exclusivism cannot see any good in other religions or tolerate them. It is easy to see that where such an attitude prevails, there can be no religious pluralism. This situation obtains in certain Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia where no religion other than Islam is permitted.

A lesser form of exclusivism consists in giving one religion or denomination special rights that are denied to others. This situation obtains in certain Islamic countries where Shariat law is promulgated. Though less deplorable than exclusivism, this sort of preferential treatment is detrimental to religious pluralism.

11.3 PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSES TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

11.3.1 Analysis of Religious Concepts

One of the early responses to religious pluralism was to show a desire to study the religious concepts of religions other than one's own. This gave rise to the branch of philosophy called comparative religion. Comparative religion is a field of religious study that analyzes

the similarities and differences of themes, myths, rituals and concepts among the world's religions. In the field of comparative religion, the main world-religions are generally classified as Abrahamic, Indian or Taoic, and attempts are made to analyze the similarities and differences among the various ideational aspects of these religions. Thus attempts have been made to analyse Eastern descriptions of unitive mysticism; Hindu and Buddhist notions of reincarnation, centering on the question of personal identity from life to life; such Buddhist ideas as anatta ("no self"), sunyanta ("emptiness"); and a number of other important concepts. But much remains to be done and many other major concepts await attention, both individually and comparatively. Indeed this area of philosophical inquiry has almost unlimited scope for development.

11.3.2 Reflecting on the Relationship among Religions

Another response to religious pluralism was to initiate a reflection on the relationship among various religions. This is one of the important philosophical questions in the area of religious pluralism, though naturalism, which views religion in all its forms as a delusory projection upon the universe of human hopes, fears, and ideals, dismisses it as a pseudo problem. Those who take the question seriously propose two different models of relationship which can be broadly classified into two groups: exclusivism and pluralism.

11.3.2.1 Exclusivism

Exclusivism addresses the problem of the relationship among religions in a simple way by dismissing as false all religions other than one's own. Basically, it is the view that there can only be one true religion. Other religions are dismissed as false and misleading, at least in so far as their beliefs are incompatible with those taught by one's own. This is the most widely-held view; most of the adherents of each religion (including some, but not all, of its reflective thinkers), at least implicitly assume this view.

However, a "hermeneutic of suspicion" is provoked by the evident fact that in almost all cases the religion one accepts (or against which one reacts) is selected by the accident of birth. Someone born to devout Muslim parents in Iran or Indonesia is very likely to be a Muslim, someone born to devout Buddhist parents in Thailand or Sri Lanka is very likely to be a Buddhist, someone born to devout Christian parents in Italy or Mexico is very likely to be a Catholic Christian, and so on. Thus there is a certain non-rational

arbitrariness in the claim that the particular tradition within which one happens to have been born is the one and only true religion. And if the conviction is added that salvation and eternal life depend upon accepting the truths of one's own religion, it may well seem unfair that this saving truth is known only to one group, into which only a minority of the human race have had the good fortune to be born.

This thought has been countered by some Christian philosophers by an appeal to God's foreknowledge. According to this proposal God knows that certain individuals would freely reject the Christian gospel, even if they had heard it. Those who had no opportunity to hear the Christian gospel are such people. This suggestion, which could of course be deployed from within each religion, involves an idea that is theologically objectionable to many, namely, that God has created vast numbers of people whom God knows will forfeit salvation.

To overcome this difficulty a separation is introduced between knowing the truth from receiving salvation. Then it is argued that though knowing truth is important, it is neither necessary, nor sufficient to attain salvation. It is claimed that some (or all) of those who do not in this life come to know the truth of the gospel may nevertheless, by divine grace, receive Christian salvation. Such people, it is suggested, may be counted now as "anonymous Christians." The question here is whether there is not still an arbitrary privileging of one's own religion as the sole channel of salvation. If each religion makes similar claims, it is difficult to see how such a dispute can be settled.

11.3.2.2 Pluralism

Uncomfortable with the implications of exclusivism, many contemporary thinkers look for pluralist views. Pluralist views in all its various forms reject the exclusivist view that there can only be one religion that knows the truth and is a locus of salvation, and accept that other traditions too can be sources of truth and salvation. The prominent pluralist views are: unity in diversity, complementarity of religions, and radical diversity.

The Transcendent Unity of Religions: One form of pluralism claims that the various historical religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are manifestations of a core universal religion. Thus the pluralist view adopted by Frithjof Schuon, Rene Guenon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Huston Smith and others distinguishes between the esoteric religion of the mystics and the exoteric religions of the mass of believers. It is then claimed that the former is, in its innermost core, identical across the

different religions, whereas the latter, consisting of culturally conditioned concepts, doctrines, imagery, lifestyle, and spiritual practices, differ and are indeed at many points mutually incompatible. Each exoteric tradition (historical Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) should accordingly maintain its own unique individuality, because each is a valid expression of the ultimate reality that is directly known by the mystics. Thus historical religions are seen as different manifestations of core experience; all religions are united at the level of this experience.

This view encounters two difficulties. First, by making mysticism the unifying core of religion, it relativizes historical manifestations. The second difficulty is more serious. The claim that the esoteric religion of the mystics is, in its innermost core, identical across the different religions, is not supported by facts. The fact is that descriptions of the mystics differ considerably. Whilst some mystics report union with a personal divine being, others report union with a nonpersonal reality, and still others report isolation or even blissful emptiness. Thus there seems to be no unity among esoteric traditions.

Complementarity of Religions: Ninian Smart and Keith Ward, while explaining the relationship among religions, stress the idea of the complementarity of the world religions. Ward speaks of “a Supreme Reality which wills all to be consciously related to it.” Complementary aspects of this Reality are revealed within the different world religions. Thus, for example, “the Semitic and Indian traditions are complementary, emphasizing the active and unchanging poles respectively of the Supreme Spiritual Reality to which they both seek to relate.” By their friendly interactions, each seeking to learn from the others, a “convergent spirituality” may emerge in ways which cannot be known in advance.

Radical Diversity: John Cobb denies any significant sort of relationship among religions. Each tradition is unique and independent; there is no unifying factor common to all religious forms. Not only the external expressions but even the Ultimates of religion are different. The personal God affirmed by monotheistic religions, for example, is different from the ever-changing, interdependent process of the universe (*pratitya-samutpada*) affirmed by Buddhism. On this view, each religion is unique; there is no significant unity among them, except that of a common name and some of some external structural features like moral codes, belief-systems and ritual practices. But the contents of these differ. Thus there is radical diversity. The attempt to find a unifying common core is futile. The difficulty with this view is that it fails to explain why the various belief systems are called religions. Individuals of a class must some way related; they must have at least some

central common elements.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What are the two important ways in which the relationship between religions is conceived?

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11.3.3 Resolving Conflicting Truth Claims

The third philosophical response to religious pluralism focuses on solving the problem of conflicting truth claims of the different religions. Suggested solutions generally proceed on two lines. The first line inquires whether there is a way of rationally validating the claims of various religions. It looks for evidential support for and against each of the conflicting claims, believing that disagreements can be resolved by the strength of such evidence. The second line of inquiry tries to resolve the problem of conflicting truth claims with the help of the theories about the relationship among religions.

11.3.3.1 Solving Religious Conflicts with the Help of Evidence

Pre-Kantian philosophy, especially deist philosophy, believed that the central religious claims such as belief in God and the immortality of the soul can be proved rationally. But after Hume and Kant a widespread consensus emerged that the traditional theistic arguments fail to prove religious claims—although there are prominent thinkers who resist this conclusions. However, attempts to validate religious claims were not given up. Instead of reason experience was proposed as a valid source of religious knowledge. It is argued that religious people report a wide range of forms of distinctively religious experience, including mystical experiences of direct awareness of, and even union with, God; a sense of divine presence in moments of worship or contemplation; an indirect consciousness of

God in the feeling of absolute dependence upon a creator, or of a divine presence and activity mediated through the beauties and sublimities of nature, the claims of conscience, the profound significance of human love, the crises of birth and death, and many kinds of personal and historical events. Can such experiences count as good evidences for resolving disagreements?

The older kind of apologetic used religious experience as a source of knowledge about God and supernatural realities. This is open to the objection that such experiences may have a purely natural origin in the powers of the human imagination. Religious experience thus remains objectively ambiguous.

At this point the “principle of rational credulity” is invoked, according to which it is rational to trust our experience as a source of valid knowledge except in so far as we have reason to distrust it. We apply this principle in our ordinary experience of our physical environment: we do not need a reason to trust sense experience in general but rather a reason to distrust it on particular occasions. And it is claimed that the same principle should apply impartially to religious experience as well. *Prima facie* it is an awareness of a non-physical divine reality; and we must trust it insofar as we have no reason to distrust it.

Critics have raised two objections against treating religious experience on a par with sense experience. First, whereas sense experience is universal and compulsory, religious experience is optional and confined to a limited number of people, so that whilst sensory reports can in principle be confirmed by anyone, reports of religious experience cannot be; and second, whereas sense experience produces a universally agreed description of the physical world, religious experience within the different traditions produces different and often incompatible descriptions of the divine. Because of these reasons, critics reject the claim of parity of religious experience with sense experience. Thereby the principle of rational credulity is rendered inapplicable in the case of religious experience.

A positive argument against the reliability of religious experience as a valid source of knowledge comes from the observation that it produces different and often incompatible descriptions of the object. Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhist and other religious groups claim that their non-compatible beliefs correspond to their religious experiences. If their claim is true, from a religious point of view the question now becomes: Whose description is true? Which is the true religion? Since all of them claim the support of religious experience, all of them must be equally true, though they do not agree! Thus the

fact of religious diversity and the inability of religious experience to settle the differences undermine the entire argument that religious experience has parity with sense experience in producing true beliefs and that it can be used to resolve religious differences.

11.3.3.2 Solving Religious Conflicts with the Help of Theories of Religion

Another way of solving the problem of conflicting truth claims relies on various interpretations of the relationship among religions. A variety of such interpretations of religion have been offered, each of which would solve the problem in its own way. The most important of them are naturalism, exclusivism, theory of transcendental unity, and complementarity theory.

Naturalism: Naturalism solves the problem in a simple way by denying its existence. It views all religious claims as false, arising from delusory projection upon the universe of human hopes, fears, and ideals. All religious claims of knowledge being false, their conflict does not present any problem. The difficulty with this view is that it does not take any religion seriously or offer constructive solution to the problem; it merely dismisses the problem as a pseudo problem. Consequently, many are dissatisfied with this approach, and insist on addressing the problem.

Those who take religion seriously insist that religious belief is not purely human projection. They admit that religious belief involves imaginative projection, but argue that it has high levels of cognitive content. According to them, religious beliefs, whilst obviously involving imaginative projection, attempt to describe experiences of a transcendent reality. When this view is adopted, the problem of conflicting truth claims is acute; and a variety of religious interpretations of religion have been offered to solve it, each of which would solve the problem in its own way.

Exclusivism: Unlike naturalism, exclusivism acknowledges the conflict as real. But having acknowledged the existence of a real problem, exclusivism, like naturalism, offers a simple solution. When there is a conflict, the beliefs of one's own religion are to be accepted as true and the others are to be dismissed as false.

This view favors one religion holding it as the sole depository of truth while dismissing all other ones, especially those that disagree with the religion of one's choice, as propagators of error. However, a "hermeneutic of suspicion" is provoked by the way one happens to favor a religion. Most often the decision to favor a religion is

prompted by the accident of birth, rather than rational considerations. Thus there is a certain non-rational arbitrariness in the choice of a religion to be accorded the status of being the one and only true religion. And if the conviction is added that salvation and eternal life depend upon accepting the truths of one's own religion, it may well seem unfair that this saving truth is known only to one group, into which only a minority of the human race have had the good fortune to be born.

The Transcendent Unity of Religions: The proponents of the transcendental unity of religions hold that the conflicts between the truth claims of religion are only apparent. Disagreements pertain to the nonessential externals of religion; they vanish at the source, where there is agreement. The pluralist view then tries to identify the common core of religion where disagreements vanish. This attempt has thrown up three suggestions.

In the first instance, a distinction is made between the esoteric religion of the mystics and the exoteric religions of the mass of believers, and it is claimed that the former is, in its innermost core, identical across the different religions, whereas the latter, consisting of cultural elements, differ and are indeed at many points mutually incompatible. Religious disagreements can be overcome by concentrating on the esoteric religion of the mystics rather than the exoteric religion.

This view encounters two difficulties. First, it relativizes the different religious belief-systems and ways of life. Secondly, the claim that the esoteric religion of the mystics is identical across the different religions, is not borne out by facts. As a matter of fact, the descriptions of the mystics differ considerably. Whilst some mystics report union with a personal divine being, others report union with a nonpersonal reality, and still others report an annihilation of the self or a merger into a universal self, or even blissful emptiness. Thus there seems to be no agreement even at the level of esoteric religion. Consequently, the problem of conflicting truth claims is left unsolved.

The second suggestion is based on a distinction between the core mystical experience and the report of that experience. It is suggested that the mystics of all tradition have similar experience, but while describing it, each one is obliged to rely on the concepts and thought-forms of one's own tradition. The differences in the description of the mystics are then attributed to varying theological interpretations of a common, ineffable experience.

Here it is disputed whether mysticism constitutes, as is claimed, a direct and unmediated awareness of the divine reality, or whether even this experience is conditioned by the thought-forms of the mystic's tradition. Are the differences in the reports of the mystics

to be attributed to varying interpretations of a common, ineffable experience; or should we hold that a preconscious interpretative activity enters into the formation of the conscious experience, so that the mystics' actual experiences are characteristically different? If the differences in the reports of the mystics are indicative of genuinely different experiences, the attempt to find in a common mystical experience a unifying principle beyond the multiplicity of religious beliefs and practices stands checkmated.

The third suggestion is based upon a Kantian-type distinction between the Real (or the Divine or the Ultimate) in itself and the Real as humanly conceived and experienced. The Kantian-type hypothesis meets the problem of the conflicting truth claims of the different religions by proposing that they do not in fact conflict because they are claims about different manifestations of the Real to different human faith communities, each operating with its own conceptuality, spiritual practices, form of life, treasury of myths and stories, and historical memories. On this hypothesis, Reality is one, disagreements arise because this one reality is experienced in different ways. One of the significant critical questions about this hypothesis is whether in reducing the distinctive belief-systems of the different religions from absolute truths to reports of one human perception of the divine reality, it does not contradict the cherished self-understanding of each as the depository of truth.

Plurality of Ultimates: The logical ground for proposing a single Ultimate at the source of differing experiences has been subjected to scrutiny. Are the differences in the reports of the mystics merely a matter of different experiences of a single Ultimate or are they indicative of the existence of different Ultimates? If the differences are indicative of the existence of different Ultimates, it is easy to explain why religious claims conflict: the claims of different religions do not agree, because they describe different objects and experiences. Here the critical questions concern the relationship among the different Ultimates.

Complementarity Theory: According to this theory, the Supreme Reality reveals complementary aspects of itself within the different world religions. Disagreements arise because no religion possesses the entire truth. It is then claimed that through their friendly interactions, each seeking to learn from the others, a total picture will emerge and conflicts will be resolved. The question here is whether religious truths are varying revelations of the same reality, or whether they are descriptions of different Ultimates.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What are the major objection against equating religious experience with sense experience?

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11.4 PRACTICAL RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Irrespective of the way we view it, religious plurality is a statistical fact that we are called to live with. Therefore, the practical question is, how are we to interact with people of religious beliefs and practices other than our own? In this context, three practical steps are suggested: religious toleration, appreciating diversity, and religious dialogue.

i. Religious Toleration

Toleration in general is the enduring of something disagreeable. Thus it is different from indifference toward things that do not matter and also from broad-minded celebration of differences. It involves a decision to forgo using power or coercion to change the things we dislike; so it is not merely resignation at the inevitability of the disagreeable. Toleration involves having power to change the disagreeable, but not using it. Tolerating other's views and actions is quite compatible with trying to change another's mind, as long as one relies on rational persuasion—or, perhaps, emotional appeals—rather than blunt threats or subtle brainwashing.

Religious toleration is an aspect of toleration in general; it is enduring disagreeable religious differences which are either expressed or acted upon. It is not to be confused

with secularization or erosion of religious devotion. It is also distinct from the sort of pluralistic ecumenicism that seeks consensus on central religious matters or views other religious beliefs as simply different routes to similar goals. We can believe that we are clearly right and others are egregiously wrong on a matter of huge and holy significance, and still decide not to use force or coercion to bring change in their beliefs and practices.

Philosophers have suggested various reasons for tolerance. Arguing pragmatically, Locke asserted that tolerance is necessary for civil peace. Then looking for rational grounds, he argued that any attempt to forcefully change other's religious beliefs and practices is "absolutely impertinent: because they are not proper to convince the mind." So coerced conversions are irrational not only because they are imprudent, but also downright self-contradictory, for "I cannot be saved by a Religion that I distrust, and by a Worship that I abhor. It is in vain for an Unbeliever to take up the outward shew of another mans profession. Faith only, and inward sincerity, are the things that procure acceptance with God."

Mill, on the other hand, bases his argument for toleration on individual liberty. In his work, *On Liberty*, right after noting that intolerance is so natural to humans, he asserts his "one very simple principle": no one shall interfere with the liberty of action of any of other except for self- protection. Combine this principle with a moral principle of respect for the individual and the individual's conscience and autonomy and we get classical liberalism's case for full toleration of religious practices—the contentious but peaceful coexistence of different religions in a neutral state.

ii. Appreciating and Encouraging Diversity

The arguments for religious toleration mentioned above must be distinguished from another consideration that Mill introduced, namely, the positive appreciation and promotion of diversity. Locke was not one to celebrate plurality; he merely argued the irrationality of not enduring it. One could go further and argue for actually appreciating and even promoting disagreeable practices. Thus an employer might set up work schedules that accommodate an employee's disagreeable religious practices, and a society may empower minorities to broadcast disagreeable viewpoints. Mill and others have argued that it is prudent for individuals and societies to promote the airing of what contradicts them, because that is how we correct our mistakes and arrive at better reasons and more truth. Democratic governments not only tolerate criticism, but set up structures like opposition parties and free media to air alternative, and often critical,

views. Theists also can take a leaf out of their book and set up structures that would protect and promote the airing of alternative views. The motivation for this can come from a view that human comprehension of God's will is inherently limited and fallible. This view would yield a theologically based, epistemological humility that not only tolerates but also enables the expression of what seems to be heresy, since the latter might give new insights into what one already believes. It must be specially noted that for promoting such cooperation one need not necessarily accept that the other is right at least in some way; such openness to accommodate those who differ from us is consistent with viewing the other as being wrong in a disagreeable way.

iii. Interreligious or Interfaith Dialogue

Another practical way of responding to religious diversity is to engage in interfaith or inter-religious dialogue. The term interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional level with the aim of deriving understanding and cooperation and if possible a common ground in belief. This can be achieved through a concentration on similarities between faiths, understanding of values, and commitment to the world. It is distinct from syncretism, in that dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions to increase acceptance of others, whereas to syncretism seeks to synthesize new beliefs fusing differing systems of belief. In dialogue no attempt is made to fuse differing systems of belief; what is sought is positive interaction between people of different traditions and beliefs, aimed to promote mutual understanding and cooperation.

The major argument in favor of dialogue is that besides bringing deeper understanding among religions, it would help to resolve conflicts fueled by religion and promote cooperation among them to construct a better world. The resolve for dialogue can be further buttressed by the assumption that all spiritual and religious traditions are a source of values that ensure dignified life for all, so that if we want to live our faith with integrity, these traditions need to be jointly explored.

11.5 SECULARISM

Secularism, in a broader sense, is a resistance of religious hegemony and religious fundamentalism and also of exclusion that is based on religion or religious belief. Following

this narrative, we can say that the general aim of secularism is to liberate social and political institutions from the hegemony of religion and to give the guarantee to an individual to choose or not to choose his/her own religion or religious faith. We can think of secularism that presupposes a 'wall of separation' or that presupposes 'no wall of separation or partial wall of separation'.

The word 'Secularism' is derived from the Latin word *saeculum*, which means 'this age', 'this time' or 'this world'. (T. N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, p. 6). Based on this derivative understanding of the word, we can say that secularism is a belief in the existence of 'this world' with a rejection of the belief of the lesser existence of 'this world' with respect to 'other world' (e.g., divine world). We can extend this understanding by saying that secularism believes in the equality of existence of each and every human existence. American Philosopher Ronald Dworkin distinguishes between 'equal treatment' and 'treating everyone as equal'. Sometimes unequal treatment is necessary to treat everyone as equal. It will be an injustice to organize a competition among lion, fish, and squirrel where winner will be the one who climbs on the tree in a lesser time.

We can put the characteristics of a secular state in the following points:

1. Principle of non-establishment of religion
2. Principle of establishment of peace among communities
3. Religious freedom for all religions and religious communities
4. Religious freedom for people of all religions without any discrimination
5. Freedom to choose any religion and freedom not to choose religious belief or not to choose any religion
6. No discrimination in the name of religion in terms of endowment or help given by the state
7. No discrimination in the name of religion, like in the educational and health institutions.

(Rajeev Bhargav, 'Secularism' in *Political Theory: An Introduction*)

Generally, secularism is considered as a theory of separation between religious institution and political institution. Historically, it is emerged as a resistance of mediation of church or priest between God and believer of God. It is also believed that secularism was emerged to resolve the conflict between church and state. The division of work was made in such a way that the

church will work in religious sphere and the state will work in political sphere and one will not intervene in the sphere of other. Accordingly, it can be said that state will remain neutral in religious matter. Neither the state will promote or support any religion or religious beliefs, acts, customs etc, nor the state will intervene in the religion or religious beliefs, acts, customs. All people will be considered equal irrespective of their religion or religious beliefs in the eye of the state.

This understanding of secularism has an assumption that religion is a private affair. It is a private affair between God and believer of God; between religious institution and believer of the religious faith preached by that religious institution. We can also derive from this assumption that the private affair will not affect people's public affair, and on the basis of this segregation between private and public affairs, the segregation between religious matters and political matters will become possible.

But is it really the case that one dimension of human life does not affect another dimension? Is it really the case that a person does not express his/her so called private affair into public affair? We can also think about the plausibility of segregation or separation between private and public affairs in our own lives. Is it possible to draw a clear line between private and public affairs in our lives?

Reflection on these questions pave the way to an-other story of secularism; an-other understanding of secularism. This understanding tells us that secularism is not a complete separation between state and religious institution or we can say that state is not religion-neutral. Though there is no religion or religious beliefs of the state, but state can help any religious institution and intervene in the religious beliefs where the freedom and dignity of an individual will be violated or in danger, but the state will not discriminate among religions.

Some scholars try to present this as a version of secularism, that is germinated/originated in Indian mind and Indian constitution is a document of this kind of secularism.

Preamble of Indian constitution represents the secular nature of Indian constitution. It states the aim of Indian democratic state as freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship and equality of status and of opportunity for all citizens.

For example, Article 15 (1) states that the state would not discriminate with an individual on the basis of caste, creed, gender or religion, Article 25 of Indian constitution grants 'freedoms of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion'. Article 27 states that no person could compel to give a tax that is used for promotion or fulfill the needs of a particular religion or religious belief.

There are many unique features of Indian version of secularism. Here we are mentioning only two features in brief. One is principled distance and second is contextual secularism. Indian version of secularism proposes that the state will make a principled distance with the religion, the state will only intervene in the religious matter, where secular values, like freedom, dignity will be hampered. Religion can also intervene in the state, if this is beneficial to nourish or promote the secular values. Otherwise neither it will promote any religion, nor

PONDER BOX-I

Think which articles of Indian constitution reflect secular values.

Think the examples from Indian history where you find secular values.

demote any religion. It gives freedom to the religious minorities to establish their own educational institutions and gives the guarantee of religious freedom. (See, Rajeev Bhargav, 'Secularism' in *Political Theory: An Introduction*)

Contextual secularism shows multi valued nature of India.

It is right that contextual secularism have conflict between two ideas and impermanent character, but this character paves the way to rethink, redefine and dialogue.

Some thinkers criticize Indian version of secularism on the basis of its flexibility. They argue that this flexibility and context-dependence is an obstacle to resolve the conflicts between state and religion, between different religions and individual and religion.

Obviously, we cannot deny this objection at the very outset, but we can think that this context-dependence provides a space to redefine secularism and it is very much coherent with the multivocal character of the term secularism. (See, T. N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, p. 5)

It is a general criticism that secularism is not the right model in the context of Indian society, because in India, there is plurality of religious faith, there is so many religions. You cannot make a wall of separation between state and religion. This is a valid criticism, but we can think over the secular structure of our constitution, we can see that it advocates a spirit of respect towards the religion with a critical attitude. It follows those Indian spirits who try to reform their religion, because they love their religion.

11.6 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, in our globalized and rapidly shrinking world, religious pluralism is obviously a major issue within the philosophy of religion. Besides the question of defining religious pluralism, discussion on the topic centers most frequently on two

issues: the relation among the religions and the most appropriate response—both philosophical and practical—to the obvious fact of plurality. These issues present so obvious a challenge to philosophical speculation that it seems inevitable that they will be increasingly widely discussed in the coming decades.

11.7 KEY WORDS

Religious pluralism: an acceptance of the fact of religious diversity and of the concept that all religions are valid, though they differ from one's own.

Religious exclusivism: the view that dismisses as false all religions other than one's own.

Naturalism: The view that denies spiritual realities beyond nature and accepts nature as the ultimate reality. It views all religious claims as false, arising from delusory projection upon the universe of human hopes, fears, and ideals.

Religious toleration: It is enduring disagreeable religious differences which are either expressed or acted upon.

Secularization: Dismissing religion from public life, and in extreme cases total erosion of religious devotion.

Ecumenicism: A search for consensus on central religious matters, or a view that other religious beliefs are simply different routes to similar goals.

Interfaith dialogue: Cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional level with the aim of deriving understanding and cooperation and if possible a common ground in belief.

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11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Some people make a distinction between religious plurality and religious pluralism, and define the former as the fact of religious diversity and the latter as a simple acknowledgement and acceptance of that fact.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Those who take the question of the relationship between religions seriously propose two models of relationship: exclusivism and pluralism. Exclusivism addresses the problem in a simple way by dismissing as false all religions other than one's own. Basically, it is the view that there can only be one true religion. Other religions are dismissed as false and misleading, at least in so far as their beliefs are incompatible with those taught by one's own. Pluralism, on the other hand, rejects the exclusivist view and accepts that other traditions too can be sources of truth and salvation.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. Critics have raised two objections against treating religious experience on a par with sense experience. First, whereas sense experience is universal and compulsory, religious experience is optional and confined to a limited number of people, so that whilst sensory reports can in principle be confirmed by anyone, reports of religious experience cannot be; and second, whereas sense experience produces a universally agreed description of the physical world, religious experience within the different traditions produces different and often incompatible descriptions of the divine. Because of these reasons, critics reject the claim of parity of religious experience with sense experience. Thereby the principle of rational credulity is rendered inapplicable in the case of religious experience.

A positive argument against the reliability of religious experience as a valid source of knowledge comes from the observation that it produces different and often incompatible descriptions of the object. Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhist and other religious groups claim that their non-compatible beliefs correspond to their religious experiences. If their claim is true, from a religious point of view the question now becomes: Whose description is true? Which is the true religion? Since all of them claim the support of religious experience, all of them must be equally true, though they do not agree! Thus the fact of religious diversity and the inability of religious experience to settle the differences undermine the entire argument that religious experience has parity with sense experience in producing true beliefs and that it can be used to resolve religious differences.

UNIT 12 RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM*

Structure

12.0 Objectives

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Definition

12.3 Context

12.4 Religious Militancy: Threat to peace, Democracy and Human Security

12.5 Religious Fundamentalism and Terrorism

12.6 Let Us Sum Up

12.7 Key Words

12.8 Further Readings and References

12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will look at:

- the rise and growth of religious fundamentalism
- the different issues and concerns which has brought religious fundamentalism into existence
- the cultural, socio-economic and political milieu in which it has grown far and wide.

Once you go through this unit, you will be in a position to understand:

- What is religious fundamentalism
- What impact it has on the individual, society, nation and the world at large.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Fundamentalism is a clinging to values practices and selected doctrines or teachings currently perceived to be under threat by a group, a tribe or nation. These ideas and customs must be

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preserved at any cost, even by resorting to violence. It is a religious movement or point of view characterized by a return to fundamental principles and often by intolerance of other views and opposition to secularism.

The various fundamentalist groups in the world today owe their origin to some perceived threat, real or imagined to long cherish traditional values. New ideas, proposals for change are frightening when not understood and the conservative mind resists. Many examples can be found in the pages of history all around the world. Basic to all is fear of change, an insecurity that flows from ignorance of the other, a determination to preserve the familiar at all costs.

In this course we shall learn more about the various forms that fundamentalism assume, the history of its origins in different cultures, with emphasis on our Indian situation and we shall look at the definitions, origins and development of this phenomenon in various cultures, political philosophies and practices.

12.2 DEFINITION

“All fundamentalisms follow a certain form. They are embattled forms of spirituality, which have emerged in response to a perceived crisis” (Karen Armstrong). The response to such a threat is neither democratic nor tolerant. Dialogue does not figure in the response; instead there is denial, rejection, withdrawal into its own stronghold of conviction that the “old” is the only truth, the only good and that all that contradicts it is evil. So it can even be seen as a struggle between good and evil, good and evil on a cosmic scale. This “Good and evil is to be defined absolutely in terms of the group with no scope for compromise.” Such a struggle has often turned violent and is in some degree the root of World Wars. Karen Armstrong suggests that all fundamentalist movements have certain common characteristics: fears, anxieties and desires that they are a reaction against scientific and secular culture. Fundamentalism often leads to terrorism which is the greatest threat to the peace and development of society in the present century. Greed for power, wealth and fame are the fuel that feeds violence in the 21st century and these are often disguised as religious movements, movements of social concern and justice. There are situations in which it is difficult to distinguish between fundamentalism and Idealism.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. How does fundamentalism lead to violence?

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12.3 CONTEXT

Fundamentalism develops in a situation that is at once political, social and religious and thrives on fear, insecurity and the determination to hold on to what it deems stable values. It opposes change if the new situation challenges its sense of security, but will reconstruct old doctrines to suit its purpose as it has done with Biblical texts. Similar adaptations have taken place in Marxism where strong fundamentalist doctrines have held sway since its inception. But political necessity and the demand of the ballot box have brought about changes, e.g., West Bengal. In Islam too political situations have been the tightening of shariat laws in some countries (Afganistan) and their relaxation in other (Turkey). Both social and historical factors contribute to the growth and spread of fundamentalism. Poor and deprived people cling to whatever gives them a ray of hope and when change, especially hostile change, threatens this minimal security, they want to fight in whatever way they can. Leaders emerge with vested interests- social, political, religious or ambitious aims and draw on the fears of the poor and needy. This is where they can assemble the thousands who march in their protest demonstrations, who are in the fore front of clashes with police and are numbered among the victims of violence. This is how fundamentalism breeds terrorism.

First of all, one aspect of religious fundamentalism is closely related to socialization process. It is usually the case that individuals coming from religious families are generally more religious than those brought up within more secular environments. Such people, like their parents and ancestors, tend literally to interpret religious text(s) in accordance with their

traditions. Their behaviors mostly fall in the category of “nonviolent intolerance”. They are usually ethnocentric, they would advocate language of militancy, but normally, they are not directly associated with physical violence. Some other people, albeit not so many, however, may consciously choose to be radically religious. The motives for these people may vary, mostly in accordance with personal variables. Many people, for example, may become devoted believers due to innerinsecurity, caused by a real or perceived frightening or confusing environment. Social psychologists identify a basic need to reduce uncertainty or anxiety (Hogg and Abrams, 1993), construct meaning, and avoid confusion (Reykowski, 1982). Religious fundamentalism, as literal thinking, serves to these ends in many ways. First, by sticking to a religious belief and accepting it as the ultimate source of knowledge, the individual finds “satisfactory” explanations of puzzling or mysterious phenomena. Religion satisfies the desire to know and to understand, and is resorted to when more worldly means of explanation fail. In that sense, religious fundamentalism can be said to offer intellectual security by largely satisfying cognitive needs of the person. Inexplicable problems, which cannot be resolved by any other means, are unraveled by recourse to theological and religious sources of knowledge.

Second, religion satisfies, so to speak, substantive needs of the individual in an imaginary way as well. Material needs which cannot be satisfied in other ways are believed to be eventually fulfilled, if not in this life, in the next life for sure. This belief, in turn, reduces anxiety by providing the individual with a sense of confidence.

Finally, religious fundamentalism serves to reduce anxiety by promising justice. Indeed, structural conditions, over which the individual has little or no control, bring about many frustrations hard to bear with. The powerful use the underprivileged, some exercise power over others. In most parts of the world, economic and social conditions are such that some enjoy prosperity and well-being, while some others hardly survive. Thus, in the face of earthy injustices, religion functions as a palliative pill by promising that justice will be done and all sins will be punished eventually. In the next life, everyone will get what he or she actually deserves. This belief helps the individual to face life’s difficulties with relatively comfort and confidence.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What are the factors that contribute to the growth and spread of fundamentalism?

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12.4 RELIGIOUS MILITANCY: THREAT TO PEACE, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN SECURITY

Religion appears, no doubt, as a political force in the whole world. Politics gains at the cost of religion. It is equally evident that religious militancy develops from the practice of using religion to achieve political gains. Political use of religion begets intolerance, hatred, jealousy and terrorism. All religions in the world advocate peace, tolerance and brotherhood. The powerful vested interests often associate it with violence. Religious extremism and violence have become almost two sides of a coin, and thus throughout the world religious violence is spreading fast. All the major countries of the world have witnessed, over the past few decades, the rise of dangerous forms of religious militancy and extremism.

The growing extremism of religious militants has mounted crises of democracy in the world. Terrorism on the whole originated from extreme religio-political fundamentalism, from religious intolerance and from the cherished antagonism against secular, progressive and democratic ideals. The scourge of terrorism is alarmingly threatening peace and democracy and abusing human rights leading to critical human security situation. The scourge of terrorism perpetrated by the home-grown religio -political groups of Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka in contemporary period have disrupted peace, made critical prospects of democracy and the state of human security alarmingly in the region. It has become imperative to seek measures to quell domestic violent movements grown out of religious extremism. Growth of terrorism never remains confined within one's own territory but has international ramifications. It transcends geographical boundary. Religious militants captured power in Afghanistan, and now they have developed their tentacles in neighboring countries. They

might extend their dreadful claws across continents.

12.5 RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND TERRORISM

12.5.1 Definition

“Terrorism: the systematic use of terror or unpredictable violence against governments, public groups or individuals to attain a political objective.” (Encyclopedia Britannica 1999 on terrorism). Terrorism has been used by political organizations both right-wing and left-wing, by nationalistic and ethnic groups, by revolutionaries and armies and the secret police of governments themselves.

Terrorism has been practiced throughout history and throughout the world. 5th century B.C. Greece recommended psychological terror against enemy populations. The Roman emperor Caligula (1st Century A.D.) used banishment, confiscation of property and execution to discourage opposition to his rule. The Spanish Inquisition (16th century) used arbitrary arrest, torture and execution to punish what was perceived as religious heresy. Robespierre openly advocated the use of torture during the French Revolution 1793-4 during the period known as the reign of terror. After the American Civil War (1861-65) the Southerners who wanted to retain slavery, set up a terrorist organization the Ku Klux Klan to intimidate supporters of freedom and Reconstruction. Terrorism was adopted by the Anarchists in the later 19th century in Europe, Russia and the United States. They believed the best way to bring about social and political change was to assassinate persons in positions of power. From 1865 to 1905 a number of kings, presidents, prime ministers and other government officials were killed by anarchists' bullets or bombs.

The 20th century saw great changes in the use and practice of terrorism. Automatic weapons and electrically detonated explosives gave terrorists a new mobility and more deadly accuracy and it became almost a state policy. Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler and the Soviet union Joseph Stalin used arrest, imprisonment, torture and execution without legal guidance or restraint to create a climate of fear and to encourage submission to their repressive ideology and their declared goals of economic, social and political goals. This was known as Totalitarianism.

Terrorism is more often associated with individuals or groups, rather than with state policy, with groups attempting to overthrow existing political structures. This activity has been used by one or both sides in anti-colonial conflicts- Ireland and the United Kingdom, Algeria and France, Vietnam and France/United States, disputes between different national groups for possession of a homeland-Palestine and Israel, Tamils in Sri Lanka , conflicts between different denominations.

The ease and speed of modern communications has contributed greatly to the spread of terrorism. Television gives notoriety and a fatal attraction to deeds of terror and young, unemployed, vulnerable people can be drawn into the net. The World Wide Web can provide access to information, instant information during ongoing attacks as happened during the Mumbai attack. Terrorists may be from disadvantaged backgrounds, but they are trained by organizations with money, power and skills that can outwit some very highly educated and intelligent people. (The foregoing is drawn largely from the Encyclopedia Britannica 1999)

But why do people, men and women, take the terror route? Robert Young asks the pertinent question:” Under what circumstances and with what rationale do people kill and maim one another, in particular innocent people and children, in the name of a higher cause? The situation Young has in mind here can only be described as Terrorism which is best described as mindless violence against the innocent. Throughout history acts of terrorism have frequently been motivated by religious fundamentalism increasing to the pitch of violence. It can be traced back to the Bible where Cain killed his brother Abel out of hatred. And hatred is the key to most acts of terrorism, though racism and fear also play an important role. No religion teaches violence, hatred or revenge against any persons or groups. Most of the time terrorism takes place because of the wrong interpretation of Holy Scriptures.

12.6 LET US SUM UP

There is no great ferment taking place in the world of religious ideas, beliefs, and rituals, or any marked increase in the sum of human spirituality. What we are witnessing today is less the resurgence of religion than of communalism, where a community of believers has not only a religious affiliation but also social, economic, and political interests in common. These may conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers sharing the

same geographical space. The basic reason for supposing that religiously inspired reform movements may be gaining momentum in our time is that perceptions of inequity in human affairs and the tangible realities that provoke those perceptions are on the increase. Population growth on the one hand, and advanced means of communications on the other, more often than not disrupt accustomed ways of life. They help to create personal uncertainty, isolation, and disappointment. The resulting distress can and often does find expression in fundamentalist movements that attempt to counteract uncertainty, isolation, and disappointment by forming supportive communities of fellow believers. It is no accident that these movements are based in countries where the continuation of old village ways is becoming impossible for a majority of the population, where urban-based mass communications, by penetrating the villages, have begun to erode an age-old framework of peasant life. The problem in India is that the nation continues to keep religion and the state intertwined. In a country that has many religions, the government and the people must realize that religion and the state have to be separate. Mixing the two has never worked, and it never will. The stability of the state system depends critically on the state's role in balancing and mediating relationships between thousands of separate communities. Such balancing requires careful and measured degrees of impartiality, neutrality, syncretism, and tolerance. What has bound communities to each other has been the manufactured mechanisms and symbols of the secular state. These structures, while supportive of local religious and sectarian institutions, had to remain impartial, neutral, or secular. Future conflicts will be those of communal survival, aggravated, or in many cases caused by, environmental scarcity. These conflicts will be sub national, meaning that it will be hard for states and local governments to protect their own citizens physically. This is how many states may ultimately die. As state power fades, peoples and cultures around the world will be thrown back upon their own strengths and weaknesses, with fewer equalizing mechanisms to protect them. The coming decades will see us more aware of our differences than our similarities. To the average person, political values will mean less and personal security more.

As we have already seen, Religious Fundamentalism is intertwined with many different motives which are often selfish and can be a serious source of intolerance, conflict and wars. Religion is meant to bring peace, good will, tolerance, love and social harmony among people. Thus religion becomes a doubled edged sword. What use we make of it depends on human mind and social conditions. We need to have better communal relations, tolerance and

understanding of one another. Religion is a personal relationship between man and God. No one can or should come between the individual and God.

The modern and contemporary Indian Philosophers are very liberal and dynamic in outlook. They do not believe in sectarian religion. They advocate for cult less, non-dogmatic and non-ritualistic religion. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Tagore, Gandhi and Dr. Radhakrishnan visualize a universal religion, which is open, dynamic and all embracing. Thus Mahatma Gandhi says, "My religion is Hinduism, which for me is religion of humanity and includes the best of all religions known to me." Ramakrishna Paramahansa emphatically says that all religions are true and they all serve as different pathways to the realization of God. The same truth runs in the heart of all religions. There is essential unity in all religions and yet there is diversity. While the renascent leaders have faith in the truth of all religions, they all hold that one particular religion should not be engrafted on another religion. Each religion has its value and serves society in a particular manner. The solace and satisfaction can be derived from religion only when it develops on indigenous lines. There should be growth in interiority and interiorization in all religions and they should flower independently on their own pattern. It will be harmful to reduce all religions to a colorless form of one particular religion.

Swami Vivekananda, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Mahatma Gandhi call on the Indian masses to break their narrowness and lead the life of *sanatana dharma*. The soul of religion is different from its body. The myths and rites constitute the body of a religion which are perishable. The spirit of Indian religion is that of an open religion based on the intuitive experiences of God. A religious person is a social reformer and a true karma yogi like Mahatma Gandhi.

We have but one choice, the path of secular humanism based on the principles of logic and reason. Our founding fathers gave us a nation founded on the principle that power belongs to the people and set us on the path of a secular democratic state that respects religious freedom and human dignity. This alone can offer us the hope of providing every citizen with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of excellence. Peace (Shanti in the Indian Scriptures) is fundamental to the Hindu way and view of life; in Islam beneficence and mercy (Rahman and Rahim in the Koran) are the main attributes of God.

PONDER BOX-I

Think about the incidents where you feel that secular fabric of india hampered.

With such profound similarities in mind , all Indians- Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and non believers- must re-examine their past, which can give them valuable clues on how to realize a more peaceful and cooperative future.

12.7 KEY WORDS

Antagonism : Feelings of hatred

Beleaguered: Experiencing a lot of criticism and difficulties.

Commitment: A promise to do or to behave in a particular way.

Communalism: A strong sense of belonging to a particular, especially religious, community, which can lead to extreme behaviour or violence towards others.

Conviction: A strong opinion or belief.

Doctrine: A belief or set of beliefs held and taught by a church, a political party etc.

Fanaticism: Extreme beliefs or behavior, especially in connection with religion or politics.

Incursions: Invasions, especially sudden or brief.

Inequity: Injustice.

Religious fundamentalism: The practice of following very strictly the basic rules and teachings of any religion.

Terrorism: The use of violent action in order to achieve political aims or to force a government to act.

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12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. In fundamentalism there is denial, rejection, withdrawal into its own stronghold of conviction that the "old" is the only truth, the only good and that all that contradicts it is evil. So it can even be seen as a struggle between good and evil, good and evil on a cosmic scale. This "Good and evil is to be defined absolutely in terms of the group with no scope for compromise." Such a struggle has often turned violent and is in some degree the root of

World Wars. Karen Armstrong suggests that all fundamentalists' movements have certain common characteristics: fears, anxieties and desires that they are a reaction against scientific and secular culture. Fundamentalism often leads to terrorism which is the greatest threat to the peace and development of society in the present century. Greed for power, wealth and fame are the fuel that feeds violence in the 21st century and these are often disguised as religious movements, movements of social concern and justice.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Religion appears, no doubt, as a political force in the whole world. Politics gains at the cost of religion. It is equally evident that religious militancy develops from the practice of using religion to achieve political gains. Political use of religion begets intolerance, hatred, jealousy and terrorism. All religions in the world advocate peace, tolerance and brotherhood. The powerful vested interests often associate it with violence. Religious extremism and violence have become almost two sides of a coin, and thus throughout the world religious violence is spreading fast. All the major countries of the world have witnessed, over the past few decades, the rise of dangerous forms of religious militancy and extremism.

UNIT 13 INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 The Concept of Plurality as a Way of Life
- 13.3 The Idea of Dialogue
- 13.4 The Dawn of Religions
- 13.5 The Imperative of Dialogue
- 13.6 How Does Dialogue Happen?
- 13.7 Let us Sum Up
- 13.8 Key Words
- 13.9 Further Reading and Reference
- 13.10 Answers to Check Your Progress.

13.0 OBJECTIVES

Diversity or Pluralism is everywhere. It shows in the way different people live, dress, communicate, celebrate events in life, worship, etc. Sometimes these differences are so sharp that they lead to war and tension. This unit helps throw light of the existence of Dialogue as way of settling problems among people but more than that shows the way Dialogue is perhaps the best way for religions to live together without suspicion and hatred.

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Know that Plurality is part of human nature, and diversity is desirable, because it's part of nature.
- That Dialogue as a common human objective is desired by all men and women of goodwill.
- Those religions although having their own respective characteristics, can live and co-exist with each other only if they talk to each other in a spirit of Dialogue.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

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Incidents of violence are common happening today. Often, they lead to large scale hostilities, wars and violence. Several times these acts of violence are connected with religious groups. We have seen large scale violence throughout the history of the world. Christians and Muslims fought for decades in Europe and Middle East in what is known as Crusades. The Jews and Arabs have been fighting from the time Israel became an independent country in 1947 and still continue although the fight has become far bloodier and has taken new aspects of political and geographical nature. Hindus and Muslims fought for centuries during the Moghul invasions and the worst and most clash was the partition. When India and Pakistan became two independent countries there were large scale clashes of people including neighbours killing each other for no other reason except that they professed a different religion.

In recent history, 9/11 or the attack on America's Trade Towers in September 2001 where more than 3000 people were killed, was a major milestone of violence which is recognized as one that changed the course of history and is considered as the beginning of the clash of civilizations. Clashes and wars have given birth to new nations like Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, etc. Hindus and Muslims have fought on the mere excuse of a cricket match, the carcass of an animal or a religious procession. In Sri Lanka too, the 30-year conflict that caused so much bloodshed was primarily a religious -cultural conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Such conflicts although in different settings are existent in Afghanistan, Iran, Chechnya, Philippines, Indonesia and there is no sight of any resolution of the conflict soon!

The world's major religions are undergoing a crisis, which we may truly call post-modernity. Although mostly dogmatic and generally change resistant, the factors that are changing the way human kind thinks and perceives has affected these traditional religious systems, more than anything else in its history. All religions are undergoing the most radical, far-reaching, and challenging transformation in history. Humankind itself is passing through a turbulent period and the stakes are pretty high and they affect the survival of the planet.

Amidst this incident of violence that sometimes have reached huge proportion that seem to indicate that there is no hope for peace, a creative movement is slowly visible. This creative movement or school of thought is leading a new way of thinking, a new way of

doing things or a new *global consciousness*. As part of this transformation the human race has drawn itself closer to each other, more than ever before. Distance, language and communication barriers no longer appear so frightening, although narrow groupings still continue to exist. And gently but steadily there is a great urge for spiritual experiences, for a taste of the spiritual.

Modernism and Post-Modernism were identified with the wave of intellectual and scientific awakening in the Western world, that led to a new questioning mindset, including that of religious beliefs and tenets. It questioned facts and predicaments that for long were taken for granted as real and unchangeable. It was also known as the Age of Enlightenment. Over the last four hundred years, Judaism and Christianity--and more recently Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam--have had to grapple with the forces of modernity, and compelled to assimilate some of its values, at the same time striving to maintain their religious heritage against modernity's thrust towards de-sacralization (reducing everything to the realm of the non-sacred).

One of the major outcomes of this new quest for meaning and seeking answers to issues that affect our lives, is the bold affirmation of pluralism which has become a widely accepted perspective of life. No longer is one form of expression, culture or way of life, accepted as a compelling reality and plurality of forms and ways of thinking and expressing has gained greater legitimacy. The Age of Enlightenment that sought "unified truth" is no longer the buzz of the world. This has wider significance beyond religious beliefs and practices. As a result of this new form of thinking, the social outlook too has changed dramatically. In the existing systems where people accept or are used to believing that there is only one way of looking at things, often those who are in authority or those able to exercise authority and their views are considered to be the only right views. When diversity or plurality gains wider acceptance, people are able to appreciate and understand the existence and need of others. This is particularly true about the fact that new thinking resulted in the more open recognition of the existence and the problems of people who are poor, oppressed, marginalized, those without voice as their voices are not heard, etc. Diversity also brought into the focus the problems of neglected people, because diversity requires that people are enabled to see others as they are, with their difficulties and their different views, and grow in sensitivity in dealing with problems.

Multiculturalism is the accepted reality of the twenty first century in the western world. The fact however remains that the idea of modernity and scientific evidence are concepts unfamiliar to the eastern world. Therefore, one must look for other avenues to explain the convergence of view regarding plurality in the eastern world, where there are large numbers of followers of Hindu and Buddhist faiths as well as other eastern or tribal religious streams.

13.2 THE CONCEPT OF PLURALITY AS A WAY OF LIFE

In order to be able to look beyond our immediate concerns, communities, cultures and religious beliefs and towards a wider world, we must disengage ourselves from blind attachment to any particular culture or religion, situating ourselves at a viewing point from where we can see clearly diversity of cultures and religions in a global perspective. In doing so, we will be like someone placed at the top of the mountain who is able to look at the world around him without the constraint of the boundaries of his position.

The astronauts who traveled into outer space and looked back on the earth were overwhelmed by what they saw! For the first time in history, humans actually saw the earth as a whole. They saw the earth's clouds, oceans, and continents, but not as distinct from the blue planet. The blue planet they saw, was a borderless planet with the clouds, its oceans as one new reality. It was an entirely different one from what we can see on the horizon with its limited vision. What they saw was an interrelated, organic whole--a single globe of remarkable beauty and unity. It is striking that at the very moment in history when culture is becoming globalized, we have obtained our first-time impression of the earth as a single globe. This image of the beautiful blue globe, shining against the black background of the universe, moving in its orbit in space can concretely symbolize the emergence of global consciousness on the eve of the twenty-first century.

History has left a pattern of philosophies and religious movements from vastly distant and different areas of the world, that responded to the world's needs almost in a similar fashion. If we look at our world, during the first millennium B.C.E. (Before the Christian Era), we observe a remarkable phenomenon. From the period between 800-200 B.C.E., peaking about 500 B.C.E., a striking transformation of consciousness occurred around the earth in three geographic regions, apparently without the influence of one on the other. In China,

we see two great teachers, Lao-tze and Confucius, from whose wisdom emerged the schools of Chinese philosophy. In India the cosmic, ritualistic Hinduism of the Vedas was being transformed by the Upanishads, while the Buddha and Mahavira ushered in two new religious traditions. Farther west, we discover a similar development in the middle eastern region. In Israel the Jewish prophets--Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah call for a new moral awareness from their people. In Greece where Western philosophy was born, Socrates rouses the moral consciousness of the Athenians and Plato and Aristotle make the first metaphysical forays of the western world, leading into a perspective that is universal against the particular and empirical.

Half a century ago, Karl Jaspers, the German philosopher, made a significant point in his book *The Origin and Goal of History*. Referring to this period from 800-200 B.C.E. he stated "it gave birth to everything which, since then, man has been able to be." It is here in this period "that we meet with the most deep cut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short, we may style this the Axial Period." Jaspers' perspective of history seems to materialize in the fact that humankind underwent a radical change in the way it saw itself and in the way it (mankind) understood its role in the world. This radical perspective of itself, that mankind steadily developed affected every culture of the world, be it China, India, Europe and the Americas. Almost simultaneously we see the rise of great empires in Egypt, China, Mesopotamia, etc. who adopt more refined cultural forms, although largely similar.

Prior to this important period of 800 – 200 B.C, most cultures and religious movements can be easily identified with belief forms that are tribal, ritualistic, mythic and of cosmic nature. All early religious movements were built around visible objects and symbols, and were heavily dependent on rituals (things are done as part of religious practices, including sacrifices, fasts, poojas, etc.). Another aspect of early religions and still prevailing among tribals is the myths (beliefs that are based on assumptions, and legends created around that legend, hence called Mythic). This is the characteristic to all primitive communities. From the subsequent development of these tribal, ritualistic, mythic and cosmic nature (making the natural phenomena like sun, moon, earth, seasons, etc. part of worship and cult), it becomes clear that the consciousness of these primitive communities had a clearly underlying undercurrent of creative harmony of the world of nature that was celebrated through myths and rituals. Just as they considered themselves

part of nature, so also, they experienced themselves as part of the tribe. This web of inter-relatedness sustained them psychologically and energized their lives. To be separated from the tribe threatened them with death, not only physical but psychological as well. However, their relation to the collectivity often did not extend beyond their own tribe, for they often looked upon other tribes as hostile. Yet within their tribe they felt organically related to their group as a whole, to the life cycles of birth and death and to nature and the cosmos.

Check your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is diversity or plurality?

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2. Why is there a new hope that in spite of our differences, more and more people are talking and working for greater understanding with each other?

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13.3 THE IDEA OF DIALOGUE

The Period of 800-200 B.C. which Jaspers names, the Axial Period ushered in a radically new form of consciousness. There is a clear and definite shift from tribal, collective consciousness to an individualistic perspective of life. The Greek philosophers and thinkers speak of reflection, "know thyself", the Upanishads teach of the "Atman" reflecting the transcendent within. Gautama Buddha preaches individual enlightenment and the Jewish prophets call for an individual moral responsibility. This period is marked by its complete

departure from the tribal and the nature linkage to individual identity as distinct both from the tribe and the nature. From this flow other characteristics: consciousness that is self-reflective, analytic, which can be applied to nature in the form of scientific theories, to society in the form of social critique, to knowledge in the form of philosophy, to religion in the form of mapping an individual's spiritual journey. This self-reflective, analytic, critical consciousness stood in sharp contrast to primal mythic and ritualistic consciousness. The self-reflective "*logos*" (word, reason) replaced the "*mythos*" (myth). It cannot however be denied that mythic and ritualistic forms of consciousness still survive today, but they are often considered as sub-altern.

The paradigm shift from the primal to the Axial period severed the harmony between nature and the tribe, and it empowered the individual with his identity although without organic harmony with nature and the community. This delinking from nature and life enabled him to question the social structures, and launch himself into the discovery of the abstract laws of nature and their manipulation, as well venture into the beyond through metaphysics. This new way of life was decisive for the emergence of the traditional major religions and their departure from their tribal predecessors. The great religions of the world as we know them today are the product of the Axial Period. Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Judaism took shape in their classical form during this period; and Judaism provided the base for the later emergence of Christianity and Islam.

13.4 THE NEW DAWN OF RELIGIONS

The inwards look by the followers of major religions, in face of this new consciousness released enormous spiritual energy. Meditation and contemplative practices thrived making the inner way and the new found subjectivity an avenue to reach the transcendent. It opened the way for the inner self to sort out the difference between the illusion of the phenomenal world and the authentic vision of reality. On the ethical level it allowed individual moral conscience to take a critical stand against the collectivity. And it made possible to establish a link between the moral and the spiritual aspects of the self, so that a path could be charted through virtues toward the ultimate goal of the spiritual quest. The rise of monasticism is a major product of this new awareness. Although begun first in Hinduism, it saw its definite growth in Buddhism and Jainism, later developed in

Christianity.

Whereas in the period 800-200 B.C.E, in the known world we see the unity of perception already mentioned earlier, 20 centuries later at the dawn of 21st century, we find a similar phenomenon which appears to be as significant as the first one. In the last 50 years almost simultaneously around the world, there has been a steadily growing confluence towards unity: Perestroika, China-U. S, European Union, China-Japan, Pan-African Unity, the call for Ecology preservation, coupled with technology that has brought humankind close to each other, making it to be called a global village are significant signs of returning to primordial unity. Developing and developed countries are seeking to work together, and no longer is this being done, as a matter of appeasement but as a necessity to create harmony that all so dearly desire. None has been more radically affected by this movement than the major religions of the world

Teilhard de Chardin, the great paleontologist, thinker and philosopher concludes that in the last 100 years, due to a process called "*planetization*" (a movement towards bringing together everything on the planet to a kind of organic unity), and a shift has taken place in the cosmos that is oriented towards convergence rather than divergence. According to him, when human beings first appeared on this planet, they clustered together in family and tribal units, forming their own group identity and separating themselves from other tribes. In this way humans diverged, creating separate nations and a rich variety of cultures. However, the spherical shape of the earth prevented unlimited divergence. With the increase in population and the rapid development of communication, groups could no longer remain apart. After dominating the process for millennia, the forces of divergence have been superseded by those of convergence. This shift to convergence is drawing various cultures into a single *planetized* community. Although we have been conditioned by thousands of years of divergence, we now have no other course open to us but to cooperate creatively with the forces of convergence as these are drawing us toward global consciousness.

According to Teilhard in spite of this global consciousness towards convergence, there will be divergent movements, that will seek to cluster among themselves, which he calls creative unions. The specificity of these creative unions will be, that they will admit plurality within their unions. His concept of diversified unity is beautifully articulated through what he calls the law of "complexity-consciousness" and "union differentiates."

The humankind's consciousness according to Teilhard has become more and more aware of its unity in spite of and amidst its complexity, with the result that it creates a new paradigm of pluralities within unity. At this point of history, because of the shift from divergence to convergence, the forces of planetization are bringing about an unprecedented complexification of consciousness through the convergence of cultures and religions.

13.5 THE IMPERATIVE OF DIALOGUE

In the first Axial Period (800-200 B.C.) the world religions began on differentiated lines in several geographical areas and were driven by the forces of divergence and as a result developed their consciousness on differentiated lines, from where they began. This produced a remarkable richness of spiritual wisdom, of spiritual energies and of religious-cultural forms to express, preserve, and transmit this heritage. Now that the forces of divergence have shifted to convergence, the religions must meet each other in center-to-center unions, discovering what is most authentic in each other, releasing creative energy toward a more complex form of religious consciousness.

The dawn of the 21st. century is characterized by a new consciousness that drives towards unity. Inter-religious dialogue is such a creative encounter, that has been called the "dialogic dialogue" (a conversation to bring about understanding, unity) to distinguish it from the dialectic dialogue (a conversation to prove one's point to other or even to refute the claims of the other). This dialogic dialogue has three phases: (1) The partners meet each other in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, ready to change misconceptions about each other and eager to appreciate the values of the other. (2) The partners are mutually enriched, by passing over into the consciousness of the other so that each can experience the other's values from within the other's perspective. This can be enormously enriching, for often the partners discover in another tradition values which are submerged or only inchoate in their own. It is important at this point to respect the autonomy of the other's tradition: in Teilhard's terms, to achieve union in which differences are valued as a basis of creativity. (3) If such a creative union is achieved, then the religions will have moved into the *complexified* form of consciousness that will be characteristic of the twenty-first century. This will be a *complexified* global consciousness, not a mere universal, undifferentiated, abstract consciousness. It will be global through the global convergence

of cultures and religions and *complexified* by the dynamics of dialogic dialogue.

The forces of convergence are not limited to religious and cultural understanding but are conditioned by the challenge to existence that the earth is passing through. Humankind's consciousness is reconnecting itself to its roots in the earth, as the original human populations did. The tools of industrialization, progress and tapping of resources that led to the convergence of humankind are undercutting the biological support system that sustains life on our planet and the future of mankind is shrouded in a cloud of uncertainty by the pollution of our environment, the depletion of natural resources, the unjust distribution of wealth, the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. Unless the human community reverses these destructive forces, we may not be able to continue life here for much longer. The human race as a whole, all the diverse cultures and the religions must face these problems squarely. There is an imperative to rediscover the dimensions of the consciousness of the collective and cosmic spirituality of the primal peoples rooted in the earth and the life cycles.

Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue must recapture the unity of humankind by seeking humankind as a unity with its diverse cultural and religious perspectives. This means that the consciousness of the twenty-first century will be global from two perspectives: (1) from a horizontal perspective, cultures and religions must meet each other on the surface of the globe, entering into creative encounters that will produce a complexified collective consciousness; (2) from a vertical perspective, they must plunge their roots deep into the earth in order to provide a stable and secure base for future development. This new global consciousness must be organically ecological, supported by structures that will ensure justice and peace. The voices of the oppressed must be heard and heeded: the poor, women, racial and ethnic minorities. The emergence of this twofold global consciousness is not only a creative possibility to enhance the twenty-first century; it is an absolute necessity if we are to survive.

13.6 HOW DOES DIALOGUE HAPPEN?

What does this mean for religions of the twenty-first century? It means that they have a double task: to enter creatively into the dialogue of religions and to channel their energies into solving the common human problems that threaten our future on the earth. It

means that they must strip away negative and limiting attitudes towards other religions. They must avoid both a narrow fundamentalism and a bland universalism. They must be true to their spiritual heritage, for this is the source of their power and their gift to the world. They must make every effort to ground themselves in their own traditions and at the same time to open themselves to other traditions. In concert with the other religions, they should commit themselves to creating the new complexified global consciousness mankind is experiencing.

Just to meet, even creatively, on the spiritual level is not enough. They must channel their spiritual resources toward the solution of global problems. For the most part, this calls for a transformation of the religions. The religions must rediscover the material dimension of existence and its spiritual significance. In this they can learn from the secular world: that justice and peace are human values that must be cherished and pragmatically cultivated. But they must not adopt an exclusively secular attitude, for their unique contribution is to tap their reservoirs of spiritual energy and channel this into developing secular enterprises that are genuinely human.

The dialogue's initial stumbling block will often be the existence of stereotypes about the "other" that each community has, because any individual's or community's life experiences are much wider and more complex than issues of religious identity. It is necessary that dialogue aims at dissolving the fundamental objective lying at the core of the human mind about the "other" being what he is, and one being what "one" is. Somehow dialogue has to reach the level where two individuals or communities do not interact with each other as 'One' and the "Other", but on a common identity and platform of human beings who are searching for solutions that are mutually needed and indispensable for living.

Dialogue begins with the willingness to question, and to be questioned, while realizing that mutual understanding and working together toward common goals requires accepting differences. In part, dialogue is an effort to comprehend the inherent value of difference and commonality, for the sake of learning and living together--as well as for the sake of increased productivity and peace in a viable and sustainable human society. Interreligious dialogue provides us with insights into each other and a successful methodology can be found in the experience of thousands of years of our human existence.

There are also structural differences between various religious cultures because of divergent aims and points of view. Therefore, dialogue will have to be first conducted within each community, because not seldom there are disputes about the form and aim of intercultural dialogue and often even resistance to the very idea of a dialogue. Therefore, an intra- religious/class/ethnic/gender etc. dialogue has to be initiated, taking into account that religious comments/expressions are not always a sign of strong religiosity but instead point to a strong rooting in a culture in various contexts which we may name “inculturalisation.” Hence, all dialogue begins with practical and functional agreements. Dialogue needs pragmatics rather than dogmatics.

Dialogue should focus on specific topics and have specific aims (even sensitive topics such as democracy, human rights, education, globalization, ecology and religious tolerance, rights of women, commitment to cultural diversity); dialogue cannot remain an exchange of superficialities. Differences should be discussed as well as similarities and commonalities - the aim of dialogue is not necessarily to adopt what the "other" believes or follows, and dilute what one believes, (which could be understood as syncretism or amalgamation), but rather develop a respect for the difference.

Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and or between Hindus and Muslims or Buddhists, is not without pain and serious difficulties, since discussion on various issues that differentiate one from the other often defy clarification and resolution. The factors that divide are more than what the terms express, as they touch the core of human hearts and minds. Therefore, any process of dialogue between cultures and religions should not be restricted to "*culturalization*" (tendency to reduce everything that is being discussed to culture) and "*confessionalization*" (tendency to reduce everything that is being discussed to religion). What is needed therefore is to understand the 'other' by broadening and extending the dialogue beyond the realm of religious beliefs and practices: Dialogue efforts have to happen simultaneously at all levels, between communities and groups representing several areas of human activity, in diverse lived social and cultural situations. Similarly, 'Dialogue is not a random conversation, but aims at persuasion, at discovering the truth. Otherwise, it is worthless'

Check your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What do you understand by "culturisation" and "confessionalization"? Why should dialogue go beyond these two?

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13.7 LET US SUM UP

When we talk about religious pluralism, we are talking about a new encounter; an encounter with a "difference" or "otherness" in whatever religious form it may take. It may appear to be a cliché, but an inter-religious encounter is much more a meeting with two people with different ideas, likes and dislikes. It often is a meeting with someone who treasures something that I find preposterous, unacceptable, stupid or despicable. Raimundo Panikkar, who has done a great deal of work on inter-religious dialogue, says that "What to do with the barbarian?" is the central question for religion in the time of pluralism. We all have some notion of "barbarian" in our minds: for all of us, there is some presence, some person, or some tradition that is barbarian to us. In practicing religious pluralism, let us ask how it is that we make a relationship with that which is other or different from ourselves. "Pluralism respects the differences that reside in the variety of religious traditions, without reconciling or integrating those differences into a single path. Pluralism is willing to rest in the ambiguity of religious difference. From this point of view, pluralism is a very courageous practice, an engagement with the *fact* of diversity in our world. And this practice is appropriate and important for contemplative communities. In fact, I'm not sure if it is possible to be truly contemplative without engaging in pluralism."

Although the principles of inter-religious dialogue appear to be philosophically clear, the task of real dialogue is extremely different. To commence and sustain dialogue between different religions and cultures, it is absolutely indispensable for us to adopt new methodologies of understanding the "other", which is different from any other existing

model of communication. When we know we have a limited perception of a reality, which is outside us, it is possible to discuss this perception with others, since the perception of others about the reality is also limited. We can use commonly accepted categories and symbols that can help us communicate in the same level.

In interreligious dialogue the process is far more difficult, because the perception of the "other" is original and perfect. Who I am in dialogue with, does not have the same perception of the reality that I have about what I believe, in the similar manner? I do not have the slightest understanding about what the other believes, and yet we communicate. Dialogue seeks truth by trusting the other, just as dialectics pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. Dialectics is the optimism of reason; dialogue is the optimism of the heart. Dialectics believes it can approach truth by relying on the objective consistency of ideas. Dialogue believes it can advance along the way to truth by relying on the subjective consistency of the dialogical partners.

There are certain ground rules or indispensable prerequisites for dialogical dialogue. These include a deep human honesty, intellectual openness and a willingness to forego prejudice in the search for truth while maintaining "profound loyalty towards one's own tradition." In fact, the starting point for dialogical dialogue is the internal or *intra*-personal dialogue by which one consciously and critically appropriates one's own tradition. Without this deep understanding of and commitment to one's own tradition, there are simply no grounds for the dialogical dialogue to proceed. Second, one needs a deep commitment and desire to understand another tradition which means being open to a new experience of truth since "one cannot really understand the views of another if one does not share them." This is not to assume an uncritical approach to the other tradition so much as a willingness to set aside premature judgments which arise from prejudice and ignorance, the twin enemies of truth and understanding.

Although our cultural and religious traditions have been conditioned by thousands of years of divergence, animosity, and violence, we can still envision a world human society in which all men and women experience a peaceful, healthy and safe environment. A world where all citizens have access to quality education, health care, and housing. An ecologically balanced, *global society* wherein the opportunities created by a just and equitable order are truly accessible to all. In order to release our full potential, the advent

of *global consciousness* should allow for the total elimination of the social problems that inhibit the equality of humankind.

Although the friction and the resulting clashes and bloodshed existed in our society for centuries, human kind always yearned for something better, something that is part of our consciousness, or we may even call it global consciousness. There is no doubt that humankind has yet to actualize its full potential, and even our best efforts at creating a better world have fallen far short of the mark. As the twenty-first century transits, there is clear evidence of an emerging social awareness that over time, problems such as these can and must be solved on a global scale. There is a crying need for a global ethos (good way of living).

13.8 KEY WORDS

Complexification of Consciousness: Complexification of consciousness is the theory that attempts to explain the existence of diversity (multiple forms) of nature including beliefs and opinions while at the same time, an underlying sense and need of unity, harmony and peace as a legitimate desire of humankind.

Diversity or Pluralism: Diversity of pluralism is the ability to see the many forms of life or differences of opinion that exist around us and accept them as such, without wanting to reduce it to one's limited view.

Planarization: is a term used by Teilhard de Chardin, to explain the underlying forces or dispositions of everything in our world towards creating an organic unity, through interdependence, understanding, adaptation, social justice, etc. in order to reach harmony, peace and progress.

13.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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13.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress - I

1. Although our world is made of millions of things one different from the other, from colours (millions of combinations) to immense differences of plants and animals as well as thousands of different ways, people eat, drink, dress and think, often we are accustomed to think and see the world through very limited and even narrow outlooks, mainly because as a group and community we have certain common ways of doing and seeing reality. Diversity or plurality (in our context) is the ability to see reality as it is and accept it in our conversation and dealing with others.

2. Because although in the last 50 or more years more and wars and clashes have taken place that appear only to be getting worse, more and more people and greater efforts

are being made to bring people together through globalization, communication, travel, more equal distribution of goods, creating more and more bodies where consensus and conversation take place. More and more people see the needs to talk, negotiate, understand, etc. in order to bring about peace and harmonious living.

Answers to Check Your Progress - II

1. *Culturisation* is an attitude that tends to place everything that is part of our human life under the banner of culture, and discuss it as such, while *confessionalization* is the tendency to reduce everything to religion. It is important to understand here that human groups and communities have diverse ways of looking at life and living it which takes the sum total of human action much beyond culture and religion. Many gestures and customs are a result of many other factors that identify a group and form part of its belief system. Dialogue therefore is a conversation of talking to each other without labelling each other's action under a particular label.

UNIT 14 CONTEMPORARY DEBATES*

Structure

14.0 Objectives

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Proofs for the Existence of God

14.3 Feminist Philosophy of Religion

14.4 Let Us Sum Up

14.5 Key Words

14.6 Further Readings and References

14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are:

- To understand the nature of the contemporary trends in philosophy of religion.
 - To understand the differences in approach to the traditional questions of philosophy of religion.
 - To engage with the difference in context within which these contemporary debates emerge, such as the rise of modern science, challenge to the traditional framework of philosophy of religion from feminist thought, etcetera.
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14.1 INTRODUCTION

Philosophy of religion is a vast and burgeoning domain of debates, and discussions in the contemporary world. Theists, agnostics, atheists, equally partake of discussions in this domain. Religion in itself is something that is tied with the evolution of human civilisations, and questions of religion have always occupied the human mind.

There has been a marked change in the way in which religion is discussed in the modern world. With the growth of modern science, and the enlightenment, approaches to religion have also changed. In Europe, prior to the separation of state and religion, religion was one of the central institutions that governed an individual's life; however, with the separation of state and religion, it came to be relegated to one among the various aspects in an individual's life, and largely became a matter of the private life of an individual. This change caused a

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major shift in the way in which religious issues came to be discussed in western thought, and through colonialism, also percolated to eastern thought.

In the contemporary world, philosophy of religion is largely discussed as the analytic philosophy of religion, which focuses on concepts, arguments and beliefs. The continental tradition is seen to be discussing issues of anthropology, culture, mythology, practice, etcetera, but not philosophy. This divide is in itself something which is being questioned in contemporary discussions. Several traditional debates are being revisited in the light of the challenge posed by the modern scientific, secular world. Questions about God's existence are no longer issues within the domain of religious belief, but have to confront the evidential framework of modern science. Some of the other major issues are the role of religious experience in justifying belief in religion; religious pluralism, and belief in one's own religion in a globalized world; religious identity and its intersection with race, gender, caste, and other identities; religion and the ecological crisis – several such discussions, and debates are part of the contemporary scenario.

In this unit we will take up two major issues for discussion – proofs for the existence of God, as presented through the Kalam Cosmological Argument, and the Fine-Tuning Argument in relation to modern science, and the feminist philosophy of religion. The first topic is a traditionally core issue of philosophy of religion, and the other is a topic, which has emerged as a challenge to the traditional understanding of philosophy of religion.

14.2 PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

In this section we will revisit the Cosmological Argument, and the Teleological Argument for God's existence, in the light of contemporary discussions among philosophers of religion, and scientists. These arguments in the contemporary world are majorly discussed in the form of the Kalam Cosmological Argument, and the Fine-Tuning Argument.

14.2.1 Cosmological Argument

Dr. William Lane Craig is the most vocal, and well-known proponent of the Kalam Cosmological Argument. In fact, he is the one who gave this name to this form of the cosmological argument. Let us begin with a basic statement of the Kalam Cosmological Argument, which is as follows:

- (1) If the universe began to exist, then the universe has a cause of its existence.
- (2) The universe began to exist.
- (3) And, therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.

This is a deductive argument, wherein if the premises are true, then the conclusion that follows must also be true. Typically, in trying to refute such an argument the premises of the argument must be proven false.

The first premise of the argument – if the universe began to exist, then the universe has a cause of its existence – has actually been reformulated by Craig into its present form. Al Ghazali, a medieval Islamic theologian, who originally propounded the argument

PONDER BOX-I
What is 'no-thing'? Can something come out of this nothing?

reasoned that ‘*everything* that begins to exist must have a cause for its existence’, which is a bolder assertion, but can also be attacked on the basis of the laws of quantum physics at the level of subatomic particles, as subatomic particles at the quantum level do not follow the ordinary laws of causation. Craig’s formulation is more modest, and avoids this difficulty. It is also accepted by most contemporary thinkers, as its refutation would entail that something can come out of nothing, which essentially puts into question the very nature of causality as we observe it in our everyday experience. If something can come out of nothing, then anything can come out of anything, which confounds any sense of order in change that we generally observe. We attribute this order to the principle of causality, and a rebuttal of this premise is seen by proponents of the Kalam argument as a metaphysical absurdity. Philosophically speaking, there have been questions raised in the history of philosophy about the nature of causality, in both Eastern and Western traditions, however, since we are looking at contemporary discussions of the cosmological argument, we will confine ourselves to only those discussions for now.

Most critics take on the second premise of the argument for discussion – that the universe began to exist. This is the most controversial part of the Kalam Cosmological argument that the universe has a finite past, or that it began to exist. Craig offers two kinds of arguments to defend the second premise of the Kalam Cosmological Argument – philosophical and scientific.

14.2.1.1 Philosophical Arguments

The philosophical arguments have been around for much longer than the scientific proofs. In fact, the scientific proofs are offered only in the 20th century. Prior to that there were only philosophical arguments that focused on the metaphysical absurdity that results from accepting actual infinities. The history of western philosophy is replete with philosophers, and mathematicians using the notion of infinities to make their arguments, however, it is the notion of actual infinities that is challenged by the proponents of the Kalam Cosmological Argument.

Their general argument is that it is impossible to have an actual infinity, and that more specifically, it is impossible to have an actually infinite collection by addition of successive elements to that collection. This second formulation particularly responds to the notion of time being seen as a series of successive moments that characterizes the existence of the universe in time. If this series is taken to be infinite, then absurdities will result from it*. There will be no particular reason as to how we have arrived at the current moment, and it is this lack of causation that results in metaphysical absurdity, according to Craig.

PONDER BOX-II

Think about the notion of infinity. What would Hilbert's Grand Hotel look like, and how would it exist?

German mathematician, David Hilbert's famous thought experiment of the Grand Hotel, is also used by proponents of the Kalam argument to show the absurdity in accepting actual infinities. The thought experiment in itself is perfectly logically consistent, and is in part meant to reflect on the mind-bending nature of the concept of infinity, however what is of foremost interest for the Kalam argument is the absurd conclusions that would result from the actual existence of something like the Grand Hotel, posited by Hilbert – an infinite hotel, which is completely full, can always still accommodate an infinite number of new guests!

14.2.1.2 Scientific Arguments

With the coming in of the 20th century, and the progress made in the world of cosmological sciences, questions about the ultimate nature of the universe came within the ambit of modern science, which were earlier limited to the domain of religion and philosophy. The Big Bang Theory became one of the most well-accepted theory about the origin of the universe, and yet interestingly, it is this same theory that is used by defenders of the Kalam Cosmological

* Look at Grim Reaper's paradox, or Thomson's Lamp paradox for an illustration of this issue with actual infinities.

argument to argue for a universe which began to exist. Starting with Einstein's equations on the general theory of relativity, to the Friedman-LeMaitre model of the expanding universe, which in turn was corroborated by Edwin Hubble's observation of the "red-shift" effect from galaxies far away, these and other related findings, eventually led to more and more cosmologists accepting the Big Bang theory. The central idea of this theory that our universe, with its space and time actually began at a particular point (singularity), and is not eternal, is cited as evidence for the second premise of the Kalam Cosmological argument.

There is yet another alleged scientific proof for the Kalam Cosmological Argument, and that is the second law of thermodynamics – the law of entropy. This law states that if energy is not being supplied to a closed system from the outside, then the entropy (state of disorder) in that system will increase. This implies that at some point in the far away future (billions of years in the future), our universe will encounter heat death or complete entropy. The issue raised by Craig with regards to this law, and its implications, for our universe is that why isn't this already the case, if the universe has existed since eternity? Why haven't we already run out of energy?

These arguments are used by Craig to defend the second premise of the Kalam Argument. If we accept the arguments presented above, then we can definitely establish that the universe has a cause for its existence, and we cannot meaningfully hold onto the idea of an eternal universe. The Kalam Cosmological Argument goes further and tries to argue that the cause of the universe is a personal God. We will not go further into this line of argumentation; however, we will look at some of the criticisms raised against the Kalam Cosmological argument by scientists, and atheists.

14.2.1.3 Criticisms

The Kalam Cosmological Argument makes use of scientific evidence to corroborate its thesis about the cause of the universe. However, some scientists disagree with these implications. For instance, one of the arguments is that in the scientific discourse the state of singularity, is argued to be inherently chaotic and unpredictable, where the natural laws of physics do not apply, and based on this assertion it is further argued that there is no guarantee that the universe that will emerge will be a universe with any particular order. The famous scientist Stephen Hawking held this position. This position also, then entails that if the first theorised state of the universe is chaotic and unpredictable, then there is no necessity for accepting a

cause which brings order to the universe i.e., God. The universe may or may not have been so, and the necessity for the existence of a God then cannot be accepted.

Further, Big Bang theory is currently the most well accepted theory, however there are other theories as well that speak of the nature of the universe, which may not support the Kalam argument. These theories speak of multiple dimensions, string theory, or even multiverses, though they have not yet been corroborated with any empirical evidence.

Religious apologists have responded to these criticisms, and the discussions continue. This is a fairly rich, and provocative area for discussions in contemporary philosophy of religion.

Check your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is the Kalam Cosmological Argument, and how is it justified?

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2. What are some of the criticisms of the Kalam Cosmological Argument?

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14.2.2 Teleological Argument

The teleological argument in its traditional form was seen as part of Thomas Aquinas' *Five Ways*. It was discussed further by William Paley as the intelligent design argument, in the

19th century. Interestingly, the intelligent design argument had already been critiqued by David Hume in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), which was before Paley had developed his arguments. Implications of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, further rebutted the intelligent design argument, and it seemed to be refuted for good.

The teleological argument however, has found a new lease of life in the latter half of the 20th century, where along with the Kalam Cosmological Argument, it is one of the most discussed arguments for the existence of God, especially with respect to the scientific community. One of the major reasons for this revival is the Fine-Tuning Argument, which is what we will discuss in this section.

14.2.2.1 Fine-Tuning Argument

Along with other religious apologists, Dr Robin Collins is one of the strongest proponents of the Fine-Tuning Argument. It is also a deductive argument based on empirical evidence, and probability. The major thesis of the Fine-Tuning argument is that for intelligent, embodied, conscious agents to exist, the conditions in the universe are very finely-tuned to that end. The argument is that the universe is akin to a huge biosphere, which sustains intelligent life, and the conditions of this biosphere are so minutely adjusted to sustain this intelligent life that it but entails an intelligent designer i.e., God.

PONDER BOX-III
Think about the laws of nature that support life, and how these laws are interrelated with one another.

Collins argues for three types of fine-tuning – laws of nature, constants of physics, and the initial distribution of mass and energy at the time of the Big Bang. With respect to each of these parameters, there are a specific set of laws, and constants that allow for life to exist. Any change in these laws or constants, by even 2%, would not allow life to exist in the universe. There are several examples discussed in the literature to indicate this fine-tuning such as, the law of gravity, cosmological constant, electromagnetic force, etcetera.

There are two major possibilities that emerge based on a consideration of these laws and parameters – either the universe is there by necessity, and design, or that it is there randomly, by chance. The theist, in view of this evidence, argues that there is a much higher probability of an intelligent design that supports the universe, and it is then the onus of the atheist to show otherwise.

14.2.2.2 Criticisms

As stated, this is one of the most often discussed arguments in contemporary discourse, there are obviously scholars who disagree with this thesis. One of the major criticisms of this argument comes from the idea that perhaps there is no (one) universe, but in fact there are multiverses, maybe an infinite number of them. Given that there are an infinite number of universes, then it is quite probable for one to have this particular configuration of matter and laws, and thereby sustain life, which then cannot be attributed to intelligent design. There are scientific models of this infinite universe generator system, in theory, which challenge the fine-tuning argument. Another criticism is that the universe could also be argued to be just a brute fact, and we as conscious beings attribute meaning to its nature. There is also the arguable possibility that in the observable universe we may just be a random fluctuation, which allows for intelligent life to emerge, and this again would require no designer.

There are also criticisms which question who created the designer. The designer must be more complex than the design, and if so, then how does the designer come into being. Related to it, is also the criticism that there may actually be multiple designers, and not one.

All these questions deal with philosophical and scientific possibilities, and there are responses from both sides on these issues, which keeps the debate ongoing.

Check your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is the Fine-Tuning argument?

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14.3 FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

The next issue that we will discuss is very different from what we have discussed so far, as it will question the very basis of modern western philosophy of religion. Most modern western philosophy of religion is characterized by the analytic method, which focusses largely on conceptual clarity, and precision, and questions of practice, and situatedness are left out. This is where the critique from the feminist perspective comes in, which is largely influenced by continental thought, and they also seek influences from non-western paradigms.

From the point of view of the social sciences, religion has largely been viewed as a patriarchal institution. Feminist philosophy of religion also, recognizes the dominance of the 'male-neutral' perspective in western philosophy of religion, which means perspectives and concepts that are dominantly male, but are presented as neutral or facts, tend to dominate philosophy of religion. Feminist thinkers, such as Pamela Sue Anderson, in this domain argue for new ways of thinking and theorizing, keeping in mind the interventions by feminist thought. Feminism in itself is a fairly complex, and multi-faceted domain of thought, with its own take on different aspects of philosophical thought, and there is no one way of characterizing feminist philosophy that can be articulated, except perhaps to recognize the marginalization, and oppression of women, and their voices from the mainstream.

In view of this, there are some observations that have largely been accepted about western philosophy from the feminist perspective, such as the dominance of reason over passion, mind over the body, which is also reflected in modern western philosophy of religion. Philosophy of religion's preponderance with conceptual clarity, and discussions only of beliefs, and not practices and experiences, indicates the bias that feminist thought highlights. For instance, one of the examples taken by feminists is in terms of the problem of evil. Feminists argue that why is the problem only characterized in terms of the justification of evil, in the light of an omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent God? Why is there no consideration of what is the nature of suffering, and who is suffering? Why are they suffering, and if something can be done to alleviate that suffering? This difference is also highlighted in the way philosophy of religion, and theology approach different issues. Feminists point out that the strict distinction philosophy of religion tries to keep from theology is based on this divide between concepts and practices, or reason and experience, where philosophy is the domain of reasons and concepts, and theology can take into account experiences, practices and embodiment, but the two cannot interact.

PONDER BOX-IV
Is God a male?

Feminist philosophers of religion seek newer ways of theorizing about religion, without seeking to reject religion altogether. This is a fairly new domain of thought which has emerged only in the last two decades, and newer forays are consistently being made. These thinkers are looking at the history of western thought, and examples of women, who have challenged the dominant ways of thought in history. We have multiple examples of this in the west, as well as the east. The bhakti tradition in the Indian subcontinent particularly, highlights the contributions of women, who challenged the status- quo, and carved out their own space for practice, and thought within the ambit of traditional religion, thereby also reforming it.

Check your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What are some of the criticisms for philosophy of religion from feminist philosophy?

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14.4 LET US SUM UP

Despite the changing nature of the modern world, religion continues to occupy an important space in the range of human activities, which also reinstates the importance of philosophy of religion in the present world. The above discussion is not a comprehensive view of all the debates of the contemporary times; however, it highlights some of the important ones. The issue of the existence of God has been discussed since the time of medieval philosophy in western thought, however in the modern world the nature of the debate has been reformulated in the light of the challenges posed by modern science, in both the Kalam Cosmological Argument, and the Fine-Tuning Argument. In distinction to this, we also looked at the nature of the feminist critique of the framework, and method of the mainstream philosophy of

religion, which sought newer ways of questions and theorizing in this context. Both these issues are allied to other disciplines as well, which brings up numerous possibilities of interdisciplinary dialogue and debate.

14.5 KEY WORDS

Cosmological Argument : An argument type that makes an inference from the alleged state of the universe to the existence of a unique being i.e., God.

Teleological Argument : Arguments for the existence of God that focus on identifying aspects that indicate the operation of a mind, or intelligence in the order or design of the universe.

Singularity : An initial point of infinite density and gravity, and before this event there was no space or time.

Embodiment : The notion of having a body, and what it particularly means with regards to the female body, in feminist philosophy.

14.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1. The basic statement of the Kalam Cosmological argument is:

- 1) If the universe began to exist, then the universe has a cause of its existence.
- 2) The universe began to exist.
- 3) And, therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.

The second premise of the argument is more controversial, and is justified by using philosophical arguments which point out the metaphysical absurdity of having actual infinities, and two scientific arguments which depend on the implications of the Big Bang Theory, and the law of entropy.

2. Scientists dispute the application of the implications of the Big Bang theory. They argue that the state of singularity, is argued to be inherently chaotic and unpredictable, where the natural laws of physics do not apply, and based on this assertion it is further argued that there is no guarantee that the universe that will emerge will be a universe with any particular order. This position entails that if the first theorised state of the universe is chaotic and unpredictable, then there is no necessity for accepting a cause which brings order to the universe i.e., God. Further, Big Bang theory is currently the most well accepted theory, however there are other theories as well that speak of the nature of the universe, which may not support the Kalam argument. These theories

speak of multiple dimensions, string theory, or even multiverses, though they have not yet been corroborated with any empirical evidence.

Check Your Progress II

1. The major thesis of the Fine-Tuning argument is that for intelligent, embodied, conscious agents to exist, the conditions in the universe are very finely-tuned to that end. The argument is that the universe is akin to a huge biosphere, which sustains intelligent life, and the conditions of this biosphere are so minutely adjusted to sustain this intelligent life that it but entails an intelligent designer i.e., God.

Check Your Progress III

1. Feminist philosophy of religion recognizes the dominance of the ‘male-neutral’ perspective in western philosophy of religion, which means perspectives and concepts that are dominantly male, but are presented as neutral or facts, tend to dominate philosophy of religion. There are some other observations that have largely been accepted about western philosophy from the feminist perspective, such as the dominance of reason over passion, mind over the body, which is also reflected in modern western philosophy of religion. Philosophy of religion’s preponderance with conceptual clarity, and discussions only of beliefs, and not practices and experiences, indicates the bias that feminist thought highlights.