UNIT 6 IDEOLOGY

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to explain the:

- complexities of defining ideology,
- nuances of ideology and the ways of looking at these,
- major stages in the writings on ideology from various standpoints,
- recent developments in the analysis of ideology,
- place of religion and ideology in society,
- philosophical background of land grants in the post-Gupta centuries, and
- specific religious developments in India through the millennia and their potentialities to act as ideology.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit deals with the problem of ideology. Broadly, three major issues have been discussed. First, the theoretical dimensions of ideology take cognizance of various approaches of studying ideology. It also mentions distinctive contribution in each case. Second, the Unit has also attempted to determine the place of religion and ideology in society. Finally, the theoretical understanding of ideology is applied in the Indian setting. In this context, the focus is on the role and nature of ideology in the post-Gupta centuries, though certain important religious developments of the pre-Gupta millennia have also been mentioned. The overall thrust underlines the need to study ideology in its potentialities to sway masses.

6.2 IDEOLOGY: VARIED STANDPOINTS

The concept of ideology has been one of the most controversial concepts in the history of socio-political thought as well as in the history of ideas. An understanding of multifarious components of ideology depends on the standpoint from which it is viewed. The standpoints are many:

- It can be viewed as a system of knowledge,
- scholars have emphasized its sociological components, and
- there have also been writings which emphasize the need to study it through psychological and cultural approaches.
Before undertaking an analysis of ideology as a concept of social thought it is necessary to distinguish between ideology as a concept and ideology as a political doctrine. The analysis of ideology in terms of its nature and functions is quite afar from its analysis as a body of political beliefs, such as conservatism, liberalism, socialism.

6.2.1 Ideology As a System of Knowledge

Amongst the earliest conceptions, the expression 'Ideology' designated a philosophical discipline concerned to examine the methodological foundations of all sciences and to guarantee their impartial application. Its basic conception goes back to the days of famous English thinker Francis Bacon (1561—1626 A.D.). He maintained that progress in science can be guaranteed only if scientific thought can be secured against fallacious ideas. With his doctrine of “idols” (phantoms of misconceptions) Bacon hoped to elucidate why human reason is inhibited from perceiving actuality.

Bacon spoke of four types of idols which affect humans very strongly. The idols of the tribe represent the incapacity to reflect reality adequately. This basic cognitive barrier—common to all humans—is further compounded by the idols of cave: human being appears as an isolated cave-dweller who tends to judge the outside world only from his personal viewpoint. The idols of the market place are misunderstandings in communication which originate in the imprecision of language. Finally, the idols of the theatre consist of obstacles conditioned by authority, tradition, convention and irrational doctrines. Thus, Bacon's doctrine of idols—the earliest form of a theory of ideology—points to feeling, will, communication and transmitted prejudice as factors disturbing pure cognition. Only by disciplining reason can unprejudiced knowledge, and thereby truth, be attained.

This hypothesis of Bacon was the basis for the French ideologues of the latter part of the eighteenth century (Condillac, Cabanis and de Tracy in particular) who sought to do for philosophy what the English thinker had done for science. The basic assumption of the ideologues was that all ideas, all knowledge and all faculties of human understanding (perception, memory, judgement) rest on sensory data. The study of the origin and development of ideas in terms of sensations is the only guarantee against errors in cognition and judgement.

Fallacious ideas can lay claim to a certain authority in society; indeed they may even be championed by those in authority. Consequently, the “ideologists” must not hesitate to apply their scientific methods to the critique of religion and official political ideas. Ideology is, in this sense, a genuine scientific endeavour in potential opposition to every sort of authority. However, the post-revolutionary France considered criticism of religious and political ideas as a threat to social stability. ‘Ideology’ became a term of abuse, and ideological thought was rejected as destructive. For example, Napoleon saw “ideologists” as “ideologues” in a pejorative sense, i.e. isolated worshippers of reason, lacking in common sense—as people who operate on ideas and not facts.

6.2.2 Sociological Approaches

C.W. Frohlich in Germany was first to state in 1792 A.D. that human thought depends on social relations. He goes on to demand that the critique of religion and metaphysics be carried to its logical conclusion by a change in property relations. According to Frohlich only a property-free society can make right thinking and moral action possible. This suggests an aspect of the ideology problem which is systematically developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

The works of Marx and Friedrich Engels represent a watershed in the study of the concept of ideology. They viewed ideology as a system of false ideas, a statement of class position, and a justification for class rule. Ideologies are secondary and unreal, since they are part of the “superstructure” and as such reflection of the more fundamental material economic “base”.

Marx and Engels attached a derogatory connotation to ideology, since they viewed all ideological thought as the dishonest use of reasoning; as the conscious or unconscious distortion of facts in order to justify the position of the ruling class. “The
class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force”. Ideology represents, in Engels’ memorable phrase, “false consciousness”.

In presenting such a notion of ideology, Marx and his associate were profiting from Feuerbach’s (a German Philosopher) insight into the projective character of the religious conceptual world. He perceives in religion the necessarily false form of consciousness deriving from social relations and conditioned by contradiction between human needs and the means available for satisfying them (Max Weber in Germany had seen the rationale of religion in this contradiction (See also Sec. 6.2.3).

For Marx critique of ideology implies more than mere negation of religion, since the latter constitutes privation for man—it is the reflection of characteristic human traits which have emerged under specific socio-historical conditions. Religion is understood as an “expression” of the social order and as a “protest” against it. Thus, religion is exposed merely in its role of justifying the political status quo: it is also perceived in its negative, anticipatory function and is included in the critique of social conditions which require ideological clarification. For example, the enlightened man opposes any further enlightenment in order to protect his own interests. Criticism of religion in a society where it has a power-political function is criticism of the political status quo.

Marx and Engels, by basing ideas on the socio-economic system, raised an issue that, at the hands of Karl Mannheim came to be known as the “Sociology of knowledge”, i.e. the study of social bases, conditions, varieties and distortions of ideas. However, unlike Marx and influenced by Weber, Mannheim gave up primarily class approach and based ideology on the total social structure, particularly political parties.

Conclusions strikingly similar to those of Marx were reached via an entirely different route by two early European sociologists—Mosca and Pareto. Both believed in a scientific approach to social analysis.

According to Mosca, as the most decisive feature of any society is its ruling class. A society’s art, culture, politics, religion, etc. are all determined by the dominant social stratum. As such, social analysis must begin and end with the ruling class. The leaders maintain, perpetuate, rationalize, and justify their own rule through the skilful manipulation of “political formulae” or ideologues.

Pareto divides all human conduct into two categories logical and non-logical—in terms of whether it employs suitable means in pursuit of attainable objectives. He stresses the prevalence of the irrational in human conduct. He insists that significant portions of human behaviour are motivated and sustained by non-logical drives lying well below the level of consciousness. All societies, he points out, are filled with taboos, magic and myths. In the political realm, codes, constitutions, platforms, and programme fail to meet the criteria of logical action. This is because, among other things, they are stated in the vaguest, most rhetorical, and most meaningless terms.

Thus, in the analyses of society by Mosca and Pareto, ideology is a major variable. Used synonymously with “myth”, “political formula”, or “derivation”, ideology is viewed as the guiding force in human society and the principal means for attaining social solidarity.

Among contemporary sociologists, Parsons defines ideology as “an empirical belief system held in common by the members of any collectivity”. It binds the community together, and it legitimizes its value orientations. More significantly, ideology involves an element of distortion. Daniel Bell is an exponent of the “functional” approach to ideology. It implies:

- action orientation,
- ability to promote or undermine legitimacy,
- potential for attaining social solidarity, and
- value integration.

The “functional” nature of ideology has also been in the sense of those forms of social consciousness that are so moulded as to maintain exploitative relations of production in any class society. The general function of ideology is to maintain social
cohesion through mystified social relations and class domination. In this way ideology in general is a mystified form of consciousness. Being part of social consciousness, ideology in general appeals to every person in the social formation. However, ideology does not spring automatically out of consciousness. In other words, consciousness does not develop (in an evolutionary sense) into ideology. Ideology has a material origin in the first place. The analysis of its function is pursued within the social formation as a totality with the social relation of production as the object of that analysis. Inevitably, the investigator is led to consider, in dealing with class-relations, in whose benefit ideology is. It is the specific social formation of which a specific ideology is an element, and the class struggle appropriate to it, which determines the character of that specific ideology.

In sum, the sociological approaches are centrally concerned with ideology as a system of socially determined ideas, without necessary truth-value but with great potential for social solidarity as well as for social control, mobilization, and manipulation. In addition, ideologies may serve to justify (or reject) a particular set of goals and values and to legitimize (or denounce) political authority. Some writers attach a derogatory connotation to ideology, whereas others see it in a neutral light.

6.2.3 Psycho-cultural Approaches

The psychological theories see ideology primarily as a means of managing personal strain and anxiety, whether socially or psychologically induced. Among the most important exponents of this approach are Sigmund Freud and Francis Sutton. Suggesting that religion and ideology have much in common, Freud makes the following statement: “Religious doctrines are all illusions, they do not admit of proof and no one can be compelled to consider them as true or to believe in them....”. The strength of religious ideas lies in the fact that it:

- performs the function of wish fulfilment,
- affords protection and security to the individual,
- controls instinctual behaviour and relieves humans of their sense of guilt, and
- counteracts human's alienation from society.

The case for substituting “ideology” wherever Freud uses “religion”, is strengthened by his following statement:

Having recognised religious doctrines to be illusions, we are at once confronted with the further question: may not all cultural possessions, which we esteem highly and by which we let our life be ruled, be of a similar nature? Should not the assumptions that regulate our political institutions likewise be called illusions?

Sutton and his colleagues offer a conception of ideology as a response to strain generated by social roles. Individuals daily confront conflicting demands and anxiety situations in the course of performing their roles. Ideology is a system of ideas that enables humans to cope with strain.

Such psychological approaches also remind us of Max Weber's emphasis on the “religious anchorage” of economic, political, social and cultural institutions primarily because “religion” was human's saviour in situations of scarcity, anxiety and deprivation. Weber thought that specific religious features are not only partially independent of the relevant social and economic conditions but the religious determination of life conduct and “economic ethic” was also a major consideration. Weber's was thus an anti-Marxist position.

Although there is some relationship between ideology and strain, the actual linkages are by no means clear or simple. This is because the individual may react to strain in a variety of ways. Hence ideology is merely one way of responding to stress.

Among the psycho-cultural approaches to ideology Leon Dion refers to ideology as “a more or less integrated cultural and mental structure”. By this he means a pattern of norms and values that is both objective (cultural) and subjective (mental). Clifford Geertz defines it in terms of symbols and symbolic action. For him ideology is more than a mere psychological response to strain; it embodies social and cultural element as well. Broadly speaking, ideology is a cultural symbol-system that aims to guide the
humans in their political life: “Whatever else ideologies may be.... They are, most
distinctively, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of
collective conscience.”

We have identified and examined at some length several approaches to the concept
of ideology. Each approach throws light on a different dimension of the concept;
together they reveal its extraordinarily rich heritage. Ideology is an emotion-laden,
myth-saturated, action-related system of beliefs and values about humans and
society, legitimacy and authority. The myths and values of ideology are
communicated through symbols in simplified and economical manner. Ideologies
have a high potential for mass mobilisation, manipulation, and control; in that sense,
they are mobilised belief systems.

Check Your Progress 1
1) List the four types of idols referred by Bacon?

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2) How “Ideology” was conceived by Marx and Engels. Answer in about ten lines.

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3) What are the categories of human actions defined by Pareto?

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6.3 RELIGION, IDEOLOGY AND SOCIETY

Without identifying religion and ideology, it may be safely asserted that writings in
the last decades—particularly those of Marxists in varied disciplines—have
considerably enriched the study of both as cultural forms and processes.

Amongst the classic statements about the relations between religion and society one
can mention scattered and unsystematic references to religion in the works of Marx
and Engels. As early as 1844, Marx wrote:

“The basis of irreligious criticism is “man makes religion, religion does not
make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has
either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again”.

For Marx “man is no abstract being encamped outside the world.” The only way for
man to rid himself of this illusion is to destroy the social world that produces it. As Marx proposes:
Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature.

So the struggle against religion is necessarily a struggle against that world whose "halo is religion" and "of which religion is the spiritual aroma". It is in this context that religion becomes the "opium of the people". Here Marx anticipates one of the crucial elements of his concept of ideology, namely, that religion compensates in the mind for a deficient reality; it reconstitutes in the imagination a coherent solution which goes beyond the real world in an attempt to resolve the contradictions of the real world. So Marx confirms his conviction that the ideological inversion responds to and derives from a real inversion. As he suggests:

Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, an inverted world consciousness because they are an inverted world. It was largely the earliest exponent of sociology of religion, Durkheim to begin with, who contributed to the discussion on religion as an ideology. Like Marx, Durkheim made clear that religion and ideology have a social basis, particularly in patterns of social relations and organisation, but they also have a degree of autonomy, following certain rules peculiar to culture.

Max Weber, a junior contemporary of Durkheim and a product of Bismarckian Germany, is known for his numerous writings not only on religions of specific countries such as India and China but also on specific religions as well as sociology of religion. From the perspective of sociology of religion, he highlighted the following three forms of relationship between social organisation and religious ideas:

a) Social groups with particular economic interests often show themselves to be more receptive to some religious ideas than to others. Where they were chivalrous warrior heroes, political officials, economically acquisitive classes or finally, where an organised hierocracy dominated religion, the results were different than from where genteel intellectuals were decisive. The social stratum including artisans, traders, entrepreneurs engaged in industry are attracted by all sorts of individual pursuits of salvation. Everywhere the hierocracy has sought to monopolise the administration of religious values. The individuals quest for salvation or the quest of free communities by means of contemplation, orgies or asceticism has been considered highly suspect and has had to be regulated ritually and controlled hierocratically. From the standpoint of the interests of the priesthood in power, this was considered natural.

b) Religious ideas lead to the formation of certain groups, such as monastic orders, guilds of magicians, or a clergy and these groups may develop quite extensive economic activities.

c) The gap between the elite and the masses poses a problem with which each of the great religions of the world has had to cope with. With specific references to religion in China, particularly Confucianism and Taoism, Weber shows how the former remained confined to the Emperor and the bureaucratic order but broadly excluded the masses. In contrast, the brahmanas in India, who were royal chaplains, spiritual advisers, theologians and authorities on questions of ritual propriety, achieved a "systematic rationalization of magic" and effected a compromise between their own elite interests in a dignified way of life and their need to provide for the release of the masses from the misfortunes that were their lot.

Surely with such an analysis, Weber had produced one of the most sensitive and complex accounts of "elective affinities" between social groups and sets of beliefs or ideologies. However, Weber's notion of the "religious anchorage" and his emphasis of channelling effects of "ideas" rather than "material interests" in determining people's action make him an anti-Marxist.

Recent developments in the analysis of ideology have been concerned with improving explanations of how and why ideology takes a particular form and how it works. Two important developments are noticeable.

i) First, more attention has been given to what Geertz has called "autonomous process of symbolic formulation," which as already seen above (See Sec. 6.2.3),
entails examining ideologies as systems of interesting symbols and the ways in which they provide plausible interpretations of problematic social reality. This has helped us in appreciating intricate and complex nature of symbolic processes, which cannot be differentiated simply in terms of false consciousness versus true consciousness.

ii) Second, there is now an awareness in the field of ideology in relation to classes and groups as being one of contestation and a 'lived relationship', not a mechanical process.

### 6.4 IDEOLOGY: THE EARLY INDIAN SETTING

There are certain crucial questions which need to be raised before the specificities of early Indian religions are taken up for discussion. If ideology is considered to be subservient to the interests of ruling/dominant classes, do we simultaneously assume the existence of an ideology of the dominated classes? What is the *raison d'être* of dominant ideas? Are they dominant because they are supposed to be widely shared by the dominated classes themselves? Under what conditions do the dominated groups come to share interpretations of the world that legitimize the existing social order not only by the eyes of the dominant group, but also in their own eyes? Do we say that the ideas of the dominated do not constitute an ideology since they do not legitimize the existing social order?

We review below certain phases of Indian religions to illustrate the theoretical position. The Indian scene may not enable us to answer various questions raised, nevertheless it would be worth determining the parameters of religion functioning as ideology in early India.

Amongst one of the earliest phases, the question of religion being an "intensifying factor" of "catalyst" of the urban growth under the Harappans has been highlighted in recent specialised writings. That this role has been attributed to religion on negative evidence is rather apparent to be overlooked. Equally exaggerated is the enthusiasm with which it is treated like an ideology. While it is possible to infer certain social divisions, it is not easy to share D.D. Kosambi's dogmatic assertion of the prototype of *brahmana* priesthood recognizable in the Harappan metropolis. Even if parallels from other contemporary centres of bronze age civilizations are invoked, one would do well to recall V. Gordon Childe's perceptive observation on priest kings of Sumer, viz., it was the economic system "that made the God (through his representative) a great capitalist and landlord his temple into a city bank." It must have been the potential of the people to generate agricultural surplus necessitating huge granaries at Mohenjodaro, Harappa and possibly at Kalibangan too. This is coupled with extensive mechanism and network of internal as well as long-distance overland and maritime trade symbolized in the Lothal "warehouse". This must have been instrumental in giving shape to such forms of religious manifestations as we are able to even speculate about.

The existence of many producers and managers of production in the later Vedic period is generally recognized by scholars. We argue that there was not only an antagonism between the two but amongst the non-producing classes too (*brahmans* and *kshatriyas*) and that the latter struggle can be rationalised in terms of fight for agricultural surplus. But do the exalted sacrificial cult of the *brahmans* and the *atma-vidya* of the *Upanishads* constitute ideologies of *brahmans* and *kshatriyas* respectively? It may be tempting to call both as ideologies of the ruling class. However, such characterization is not only simplistic but also ignores the dialectics of the development of these religio-philosophic systems. That none of them is a monolithic uniform image should be apparent from the minuete of various sacrifices. Just one of the numerous ceremonies of only one sacrifice, viz., the *ratnahavimshati* ceremony of the *rajasuya* shows how the tribal and matriarchal elements were being submerged by class, territorial and how priestly domination was being replaced by that of the *Kshatriyas*. That sacrifices aimed at the creation of large communities by transcending kinship considerations ought not be overlooked in the present context. Elaborate rituals were prescribed for the admission of the *Vrata* chief of Magadha
to Vedic society and the chief of the nishadas called Sthapati finds a place in Vedic rituals meant for higher orders.

Again it is generally accepted that as opposed to brahmanical Sanskrit works, the Pali texts of the Buddhists provided a different rationale of the origin of kingship, and the new monarchs of the Ganga Valley in the sixth-fifth centuries of the pre-Christian era were favourably disposed towards non-brahmanical religions. But it would again be an over-simplification to say that the Buddha's was an ideology of the kshatriyas. This is being suggested not only because all the concerned monarchies were certainly not in the hands of the kshatriyas but also because it would unjustifiably restrict the social base of early Buddhism. Apart from the material sustenance received by the Buddha from peasants and traders who were certainly out of reckoning of upper class dominance, a fairly extensive popularity of the master amongst brahmanas too is not unknown.

Ashok's Dhamma, which was anything but religion in the literal sense of the term, and is perhaps closer to ideology, offers yet another manifestation. If the imperatives of Dhamma are to be understood, one will have to go beyond the zeal of the so-called "philosopher-king" and the "revolutionary" impact of the great event—the Kalinga War. Recent studies on the concepts of state and empire, striking a severe blow to the notions of "centralised" Mauryan empire, enable us to highlight the compulsions of the economic logic of the set-up and comprehend the driving forces behind Ashok's Dhamma.

6.5 IDEOLOGY: ITS ROLE AND NATURE IN THE POST-GUPTA CENTURIES

Since we are concerned with ideology within the broad framework of society and culture between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, it would be worth working out its role and nature. We have been emphasizing the dominance of land-grant economy in the post-Gupta centuries. Could this phenomenon of almost pan-Indian dimensions be seen as an ideological force? Why land-grants at all?

6.5.1 Land Grants: Their Philosophy

Epigraphic records, which constitute our principal sources, are marked by a contradiction. On the one hand, they are quite eloquent about descriptions of cruelty, violence and lust for territorial power on the part of kings, while on the other, same powers show magnanimity to brahmanas donees. Perhaps these grants were meant to satisfy or the manifestation of Kings, vanity. The pompous genealogies, full of grandiloquent titles for donor and his predecessors were typical examples of political psychophancy. Apparently, there was certain amount of selfishness on the part of donor kings. The ostensible purpose for these large munificent gifts was to earn punya not only for donors but for their predecessors as well.

It is argued that landgrants served the purpose of financial support to selfless' brahmanas—who were engaged in imparting learning and education. The brahmanas used to lead a plain and simple life. Such an argument is an oversimplification for we have already seen (Units 5.6.1 and 5.6.4) that the vocations of brahmanas were getting diversified. There was a distinct transformation of brahmanas from priesthood to landlords—they were emerging as a property seeking and property owning class.

A significant dimension of the epigraphic evidence under discussion is the close correspondence between dharmashastric prescriptions and terminology of gift making in inscriptions. The whole concept of dana (gift making) was undergoing perceptible change. The dharmashastras underline prayashchitta (expiation, repentance) for sins committed in this world. Imagine, which King would have been free from sins and transgressions? After all, they had all been guilty of loot, arson, killing—particularly in wars. The lawmakers, who were invariably brahmanas, instilled a feeling of fear by a graded system of sins and punishments and by evolving such notions as that of mahapatakas.
The sense of guilt in kings coupled with principle of its prayashchitta was exploited by brahmanas. Huge gifts of cows, bulls, land and gold were strongly recommended by them if the kings did not want themselves or their ancestors to lead a miserable plight of an insect or lower animal in the next world. Of all the items of gift, land got the pre-eminent position. Vyasa, who is quoted very often in epigraphic records, is known to have laid down that giver of land lives in heaven for 16000 years. Many puranas, similarly, stipulate that the donor of land would have the good fortune of being in the charming company of apsaras (celestial nymphs). In the hands of brahmana lawgivers, the sacred texts did not remain abstract theories and prescriptive works only. Instead, they seem to have acquired the character of some sort of policy statements.

Were the kings who made large gifts of land, only victims of avarice of brahmanas? Evidently not. The quest for legitimacy was a major consideration for political authorities. (The issue has been discussed in detail in Block 3; see specially Units 9.7, 10.4 and 11.5). In the present context it would be sufficient to underline the mutuality of interests of the donor as well as the donee. The prashastikaras (eulogy singers), the dharmanasstrakaras (lawmakers) and purohitas (brahmana in the court) were all collaborators in the new landed order.

How did this new order manifest itself in the cultural ethos of the post-Gupta centuries? It appears that at the level of ideas the post-Gupta scene in the entire sub-continent is marked by two distinctive strains, viz. growth of bhakti and an all-pervasive influence of tantric practices. It is possible to explain their widespread dispersal in terms of the growth of the feudal mode of production epitomised in the phenomenon of land grants.

6.5.2 Bhakti and Pilgrimage

For about half a millennium from the mid-sixth century, Shaiva and Vaishnava saints (Nayanmars and Alvars respectively) and their followers practised and propagated bhakti in the countryside and went to pilgrim centres singing and dancing. The overall pattern is that of consolidation of classical brahmanical society in early medieval India. Originating in sixth century Kanchipuram, area under the Pallavas, it had traversed the full length of Tamilaham by the end of the ninth century and engulfed all the major kingdoms of the Cholas, Pandyans and the Cheras. If we are to believe in a recent analysis, the spread of the Bhakti movement in the north, epitomised in such a popular work as the Bhagavata Purana, was also the result of the impetus given by the Tamil saints. The spread of the movement is intimately associated with the temple base, which, in turn, derived its raison d'etre and economic sustenance through land grants received from not only kings and men at the helm of political affairs but even from influential members of the society.

Some recent writings on the Pallavas, the Cholas and the Alvars as well as Nayanmars have been able to show the gradual importance of the paddy cultivation in the Kaveri Valley and the resultant pattern of brahmanical settlements, which, in turn, contributed to the growth of the Chola power. To illustrate, the specific spread of the temple movement in the Kaveri Valley may be looked at. The three famous Nayanmars, viz., Appar, Sambandhar and Sundarar sang 307,384 and 100 hymns respectively. Out of these 442 temples, as many as 315 belong to the Chola period and all of which are concentrated in the Kaveri Valley (126 being situated north of this river while 189 were to its south). That this temple Bhakti movement was an important tool of the consolidation of political power by feudal chiefs and kings is apparent from the similarities in the vocabulary and symbols used to designate temple and its officers on the one hand and the King and his retinue on the other. For example: Koyil stands for both palace and temple; crowned deities were comparable with crowned kings; rituals of worship is conceived on the same pattern as the rituals of service to the King—bathing, anointing, decorating, dressing of deity, were replicas of similar practices in the court. Taxes and tributes were paid to temples, as they were expected for kings as well. Like the palace, temple is also constructed with mandapas, prakaras, dvarapalas, etc. (pavilions, walled enclosures, doorkeepers respectively), the chief deity of the temple, like the King, was accompanied by his consort and relatives and served by a whole army of musicians, dancing girls, actors, garland makers, etc. To compare the feudal pyramid consisting of plurality and co-existence of the lords—each commanding loyalty from his
immediate vassal — we see in the Bhakti movement a clear recognition of the plurality and co-existence of different deities — each deity occupying the position of the lord for his devotee. The devotee habitually addresses the deity as udayar or tambiran standing for “lord” and “master” and describes himself as adiyan, i.e. slave. What became the hallmark of greatness in the age of growing brahmanical power was the surrender of pride in the self and voluntary acceptance of the position of “the servant of the Lord” as Kulashchhara Alvar had proclaimed. To all this must be added the concerted drive on the part of men of religion to evolve a mechanism of regular pilgrimage ostensibly to earn merit (Punya). It is well known that the brahmanical literature alone mentions more than 400 tirthas in early medieval times and that the Mahabharata and the Puranas alone contain at least 40,000 verses on tirthas, sub-tirthas and legends connected with them. And this is not all — one can add not only numerous sthalapuranas but specific digests on tirthas dealing with brahmanical and non-brahmanical centres of pilgrimage.

6.5.3 Tantricism

Tantricism, like bhakti, permeates all religions in the post-Gupta centuries, not excluding even the so-called puritanical non-brahmanical religious systems. R.S. Sharma has rationalised it in terms of the preponderance of the cult of the Mother Goddess consequent upon the spread of agriculture as a result of land grants. A fascinating dimension of this analysis is the process of cultural interaction of priestly Sanskritik and tribal elements. A recent study, based entirely on literary data, argues that the Devi Mahatmya of the Markandeya Purana (c. sixth century A.D.) is the first comprehensive account of the Goddess to appear in Sanskrit — the explanation is sought in terms of Sanskritisation. It is underlined that the basic impulse behind the worship of Goddess is of non-Aryan and non-Sanskritic origin. A survey of Shakti sculptures in Madhya Pradesh alone refers to as many as 400 images. A great majority of their names such as Charchika, Umarimata, Bijasanidevi, Behamata, Birasanidevi, etc. link them with popular tribal deities.

6.5.4 Hero-Stones

In recent years there have been some very refreshing and stimulating writings on the notions of Death-in terms of rituals, religious beliefs and practices, art forms and above all, in association with socio-economic developments. These have resulted in a special genre of literature on an obscure field of religious and art history of the sub-continent. These studies centre round the hero-stones, which are littered over most parts of the Indian sub-continent. There has been a long and almost continuous history of these relics for more than 1500 years and extends to both brahmanical and non-brahmanical religions. They are locally called viragals, natugals, paliyas, govardhana stambhas, kirti-stambhas, chhaya-stambhas, or merely as chhatris, stambhas devalls, etc. These tablets or pillars fall into several groups originating in ritual or cult practices as well as religious or social customs of its patrons:

- The chhaya-stambha is among the earliest archaeological evidence, and it seems to be rooted in the social practices of the Buddhists.
- The nisidhi represents the ritual death practices exclusively by the Jains.
- The viragals or at least the currency of this term-cross religious demarcations, if not the conventional geographical limits of southern India.
- The kirti-stamba, paliya, chatri, āvali and stambha share the country between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas — mostly in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

The change in style of hero-stones seems to reflect a change in the status of the hero being memorialised. Many of the earlier stones from Tamil Nadu come from the North Arcot district which is known to have been at that time an area of livestock breeding, where cattle-raiding would be one method of increasing wealth. Later, elaborate stones commemorated heroes who claimed to belong to the upper caste groups, often claiming kshatriya status. The indication of the hero’s religious sect may have been due to the influence of the bhakti sects. The following is suggested on an impressionistic basis: topographically and ecologically there is a frequency of such memorials in upland areas, in the vicinity of passes across hills, and in areas regarded
traditionally as frontier zones which often included primarily pastoral region, the
outskirts of forests and the edges of what have come to be called the 'tribal areas' of
central India.

Hero-stones are relatively infrequent in the large agricultural tracts of the Indus and
the Ganga valleys and in the agriculturally rich delta areas of the peninsula. Frontier
zones were often maintained as buffer regions where political security was transient
and where royal armies did not necessarily guarantee protection to local inhabitants.
They would, therefore, inevitably have recourse to their own arrangements for
protection, in which the village hero or the local chief played a major role. This
would suggest a differentiation of military functions in a decentralised political
system. Further, since these relics proliferated in the post-sixth century period, it
would be worth finding out the correlation and correspondence, if any, between the
distribution of land grants on the one hand and that of the memorial stones on the
other. This is particularly desirable in view of several assumptions:

a) the phenomenon of the land grants is associated with the expansion of
agriculture,

b) both memorial stones and land grants are considered to be useful mechanisms of
cultic integration — the cult of Vithoba in Pandharapur (Maharashtra) is in itself a
case of the hero-stone being transformed into a deity, and

c) both the phenomena have also been instrumental in the processes of state
formation.

6.5.5 Religion as Ideology — For Whom?

Such prominent manifestations of the religio-philosophic outlook of people of the
Indian sub-continent of the post-Gupta centuries as the rise of bhakti, tantricism,
pilgrimage, etc. are indeed products of the land grant economy. Though the
brahmanas were the biggest beneficiaries of the mechanism and may have also
worked consciously in league with contemporary rulers to prepare a philosophic
background, it would again be difficult to rationalise these developments only in
terms of dominating brahmana ideology. Surely, it is impossible to eliminate the
symbiotic relationship between the brahmanas on the one hand and the tribals on the
other. The traffic of ideas was certainly a two-way one. And this receives support
from an unexpected quarter. For example iconographic studies have so far remained
confined to identification, description and interpretation of divine images and their
attributes. Largely forming a part of art history, these works have rarely been looked
as an index to socio-religious changes at macro and micro levels. Treating
iconography as an integral part of the history of religions a recent work on Vaishnava
Iconography in the Tamil Country tries to trace the evolution of the concerned
subject through folk movements and integration of tribal cults of pre-Pallavan
centuries. Similarly, another work undertakes a micro study of the process of cultural
coalescence and agencies of acculturation in the growth of Murugan. The growth of
this significant deity of the Shaiva pantheon is presented as a convergence of two
cultural streams — 'Sanskrit' and 'Tamil', without taking any of them as 'monolithic or
unidimensional'. An analysis of sacrifice and divine marriage in the South Indian
Shaiva tradition has also been done in the light of the many traditions that have
contributed to their formation, including vedic, epic, puranic, classical Tamil and
southern folk traditions.

What about the Buddhists and the Jainas? They were also affected by the nuances of
the land grant economy. Though the sphere of the influence of the Buddhists was
shrinking, it was not the case with the Jainas. In Karnataka, Gujarat and Rajasthan
specially, they had carved out a place for themselves in the mind of people. But ideas
such as bhakti, tantric practices and pilgrimage were essential components of their
creed too. The so-called 'Brahmana-Peasant Alliance' in the post-Gupta southern
India is based on very skimpy and shaky evidence. Even the hypothesis of the rural
base of the temple movement under the patronage of brahmana-king collaboration
leaves many gaps if the role of bhakti as an ideology is to be fully appreciated. To
illustrate, the Tamilaham, where this rural-based model has been applied, also
witnessed an extensive internal trade network as well as an ambitious programme of
maritime trade activity. What was the role of traders and merchants in the growth of
the temple movement? Perhaps because of the violent attitude of the Alvars and the Nayanmars, at least in the initial few centuries, non-brahmanical religions which used to get the support of these communities, had almost vanished from Tamilham. Did traders and merchants switch their allegiance to the new temple movement? Or they did not need any ideological prop? Evidence is mounting to show that even merchants and their assemblies (nagarams) exercised control over land and had interest in its agricultural output. Further, did not temple also tend to erect barriers of both language and rituals between peasant laity and the priesthood? If then, ideology is to be understood in terms of a mechanism of class interests in general and ruling class interests in particular how does one explain the role of bhakti? This dilemma would apply to other major post-quota religious manifestations as well. The role of religion in society, particularly as an ideology ought to be seen in its potentialities to sway masses and not classes.

Check Your Progress 2
1) Discuss the relationship between Religion, Ideology and Society. Answer in about fifteen lines.

2) What role did ideology play in the post-Gupta centuries. Answer in about ten lines.

3) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark (√) or (X).
   i) Bhakti, tantricism, pilgrimage etc. were products of land grant economy.
   ii) Religious ideas had no role in the formation of groups like the monastic orders.
   iii) Marx said that “religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature”
   iv) Marx did not say that “religion is the opium of the masses”
   v) The brahmanical literature mentions more than 400 śṛthas in early medieval times.
6.6 LET US SUM UP

This Unit was concerned with three broad issues, viz. the theoretical dimensions of ideology, religion and ideology and their place in society and finally an application of these in the specific Indian setting through millennia.

The underlined facets of the theoretical dimensions of the ideology showed:

- complexities of defining ideology.
- differences between ideology in terms of nature and functions and ideology as body of political belief.
- ideology as a system of knowledge is based on assumption that all ideas, all knowledge and all faculties of human understanding rest on sensory data.
- major stages in the writings on ideology from sociological standpoint with a pronounced focus on Marx and Engels.
- fundamental postulates and critique of psycho-cultural dimensions of ideology, and
- high potential for mass mobilisation and manipulation on the part of ideologies.

The section dealing with the place of religion and ideology in society has focussed on:

- recent developments in the analysis of ideology which are concerned with improving explanations of how and why ideology takes a particular form and how it works, and
- certain question requiring answers bearing on the nature, role and functions of ideology.

The issues raised in the theoretical discussions of ideology are sought to be applied in the specific Indian setting through the millennia—literally from the Harappan times to the thirteenth century A.D. The points highlighted in the discussion include:

- weakness of the hypothesis about the autonomy of religious ideas,
- hegemony and dominance attributed to religion and ideology are exaggerated and somewhat unwarranted,
- philosophic background of land grants in the post-Gupta centuries, and
- the need to study the role of religion in society, particularly as an ideology, in its potentialities to sway masses and not classes.

6.7 KEY WORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adiyan</th>
<th>slave</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alvars</td>
<td>Vaishnava saints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congruent</td>
<td>having some size and shape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>gift making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahapataka</td>
<td>great sinner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandapa</td>
<td>Pavilion in palace/temple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nayanmar</td>
<td>Shaiva saints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prakara</td>
<td>Walled enclosure in palace/temple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pravashchitta</td>
<td>expiation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punya</td>
<td>religious merit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raisuya</td>
<td>a Vedic sacrifice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Udaiyar</td>
<td>Lord/Master</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viranal</td>
<td>hero-stone.</td>
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Check Your Progress 1
1) These are idols of tribe: idols of cave, idols of market and idols of theatre. See Sub-sec. 6.2.1.
2) Base your answer on Sub-sec. 6.2.2.
3) Base your answer on Sub-sec 6.2.2.

Check Your Progress 2
1) Base your answer on the views expressed by Marx, Max Weber and Geertz. See Sec. 6.3
2) Base your answer on Sec. 6.5 and its Sub-secs.
3) i) ✓  ii) ✗  iii) ✓  iv) ✗  v) ✓