
UNIT 11 RELIGION AND SOCIETY*

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11.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- describe relationship between religion and society;
- discuss major sociological theories of religion and their prominent aspects;
- delineate the difference between a theological and sociological explanation of religion;
- describe the nature of religion as a social phenomenon;
- explain the emergence and nature of religions in India;
- discuss the historical factors that played decisive role in the emergence of religions in India; and finally;
- the core teachings of diverse religions of India .

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The existence of religion in human society is one of the enduring social phenomena stimulating sociological analysis. It is a social phenomenon which is woven into the fabric of everyday social life. It seems to play a solidifying function in society however religion has also been used to spread hatred and crimes against humanity. It has been one of the major sources of justifying inequality and exploitation. Still religion as an institution appears to exist in every society. Sociologists have tried to understand the meanings that religion

offers to people. Its significance in the organisation of social life is immense. It appears to help people in approaching and addressing the crisis situation in life. Scholars have argued that religion gives meaning to the human life to such an extent that it is characterised as the relief to the people who are trapped in the hardships of life. Sociologists have studied the evolution of religion from primitive to the 'modern' societies. Its role in 'modern' societies is being felt to be eroded or minimised but one may see the expansion of religious identities conflicts and movements. In this backdrop, it becomes all the more important to understand the emergence of diverse religions of India and their contemporary character.

11.2 SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES EXPLAINING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SOCIETY

This section briefly sketches the sociological theories that explain the relationship between religion and society. A sociological understanding across theoretical frameworks certainly informs that religion is a creation of humans. Within classical sociology, religion has been seen as an important theme. Sociological explanations of religion are less concerned with the theological issues than the social contextualisation of religion. Sociologically religion is defined as a social institution. In sociology we do not attempt to prove or disprove the existence of god rather we try to understand why people believe in God. Three stalwarts in classical sociology – Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber figure prominently in explaining the relationship between religion and society. Their intellectual engagement with religion and society offers multifaceted aspect of religion as a social institution.

11.2.1 Emile Durkheim

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, is regarded as the prolific author in the field of sociology of religion. His major contribution in this area is that he postulates the idea that religion is socially constructed and not of divine origin. The nature of religion, for him, is shaped by the prevailing social conditions. In his book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1961), Durkheim was concerned with the origins and causes of religion in society. He studied various primitive groups of Australia and North America to study the most rudimentary religious forms. He turned towards the study of elementary forms of religion (in this case **totemism**) as he wanted to make sense of religion in the complex societies through the study of organisation of religion in simple societies. According to him the most elementary form of religion would be found in those primitive tribal communities which are having an elementary social organisation.

According to Durkheim there are two basic components of religion i.e. beliefs and rites. He calls beliefs as **collective representations** which are products of the underlying social structures and rites which pertain to the operative part of the belief system i.e. various modes of action produced by beliefs. He reasoned that religion is a group phenomenon as its basic characteristic and unity is given by the group. In this way he emphasises on the positive function of religion as a force cementing the society together. The **functional theory** of religion as propounded by Durkheim hinders any study of the **dysfunctions** of religion.

This explains, for Durkheim, the reason for the ubiquity and permanency of religion. ‘Religious force’ is only the sentiment inspired by the group in its members. It is projected and objectified in outer world and the consciousness. He classifies beliefs into two separate spheres of ‘**sacred**’ and ‘**profane**’. He identifies ‘sacred’ as the most fundamental religious phenomenon. ‘Sacred’ is that part of religion which is set apart and forbidden and considered holy. ‘Sacred’ is venerated and placed in higher position to profane things. ‘Profane’ stands in opposition to ‘sacred’ and refers to the mundane aspects of everyday life. Durkheim writes that ‘all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or radically opposed to one another; i.e. the sacred and the profane.

11.2.2 Max Weber

Max Weber, a German sociologist, is known to have developed a theory of religion in which the economic relevance of religion is demonstrated. In his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1948), he assessed the contribution of Protestant ethics in the development of modern economic system of capitalism. For him Protestant ethics played a decisive role in the development of capitalism in the West, whereas it could not develop in Asian countries such as India. It is considered that the religious ethics of Hinduism, with regard to caste, hinders development of capitalism according to Weber. He considered Hinduism, as a ‘other worldly’ religion. Caste imposed structural restraints on economic development. (However, later scholars like Milton Singer and Bernard Cohn studied the Madras capitalists who did not subscribe to Weber’s ideas on Hinduism) He argues that there is a fundamental difference between Protestants and Catholics in terms of their inclination towards industrial and commercial actions. Protestants could acquire industrial skills and explored modern occupations and avenues of administrative positions whereas Catholics remained in traditional occupations. According to him, Protestants have methodical and ascetic norms of conduct which is the essential spirit of capitalism.

11.2.3 Karl Marx

Karl Marx, a German philosopher has developed the critical theory of religion unlike Durkheim and Weber. Marx was more concerned with how religion generate a **false consciousness** of the existing social reality thereby normalising and justifying the unequal social structure and giving people an illusory happiness. Marx was not only theorising the relationship between religion and society and how does religion affects human behaviour, but he was also addressing how to change the unequal structure of society which is disguised in religion. In this way, Marx was primarily dealing with the political aspects of religion rather than the functionality as Durkheim was. In his materialist conception of history, Marx argued that religion is actually a reflection of the material conditions of society. To quote him, “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness (1859).” This means that ideas at the level of consciousness cannot solely determine the social structure as Weber has propounded. Religious idea can justify the prevailing socio-economic conditions but cannot produce them alone. Religion cannot exist in an isolated fashion from the socio-economic structure. In this way Marx’s thesis on religion is opposite to Weber’s understanding.

11.3 SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN INDIA

India has a diversity of religions. Before one understands this diversity of religions, their emergence and core elements, it is essential for any student of sociology to grasp how studies on religion and society has been initiated in India. Orientalist and Indological approaches on religion in India have played a decisive role in the construction of a sociological understanding on religion. (some aspects of these you learnt in unit 1 of this course) Therefore, it is imperative to read these two approaches.

Activity 1

Read a book or watch a movie on religion, magic and science. Write the significance of religion and society on the basis of your ideas from it. Discuss with other students at your study center or family members the relation between all three of them.

11.3.1 Oriental and Indological Constructions of Religion in India

Orientalism as defined by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978:3) means a discourse based on the dichotomy of East and West where the West becomes the reference point for defining progress. It has provided ideological justification to colonialism and its expansion. When West (Occident) is seen as the reference point for progress and growth, by default the East (Orient) appears as the backward and in need of 'modernization'. He has unleashed a strong critique of Orientalist discourse which was legitimising the colonial aggression and loot. It was manufacturing the ideological ground for the political supremacy of colonial powers. "Orientalism refers to those particular discourses that, in conceptualizing the Orient, render it susceptible to control and management" (King 2001:82) "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, and so on. Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient." Said's work clearly indicates towards the complicity i.e. understanding between the scholarly accounts of the nature of 'the Orient' and the hegemonic political agenda of imperialism.

In this backdrop, it is obvious that British colonials have constructed an image of the oriental India in such a manner that the subjugation of India as a colony appears as natural and inevitable. There are various studies on religion in India conducted by Britishers that served this larger goal of colonial dominance. In this backdrop Orientalism meets Indology. Indology, in simple terms means the study of Indian culture and society. It was the administrative need of the British Empire to conduct systematic studies on the nature of Indian society. Such studies were primarily based on the textual view of Indian society. Although, Britishers used survey method extensively to document the customs of people in India. But indologists saw scriptures as the major source of information on the character of Indian society. This belief was largely manufactured by the reliance of the British Indologists conducted studies on the native people with the help of mostly Brahmins. Many of the scriptural texts were translated by Indologists

with the help of local Brahmins. Consequently the understanding of religion in India was inspired by the brahmanical view. Bernard Cohn in his celebrated book *An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays* (1987) has offered a detailed description of the brahmanical view of religion in India.

British indologists propagated their view of religion in India through various means such as education and their means of communication. One of the classic examples of how they have constructed an understanding of religion in India is the classification of Indian history in terms of religion of the rulers. James Mill, the British historian, in his three volume work *A History of British India* divided Indian history in three major periods - Hindu, Muslim and British. This periodisation is problematic i.e it leads to misunderstanding about India. Although, he did not name the British rule as Christian period but it does not come as a surprise that to view the religious conflicts in India as Hindu-Muslim conflict and the religious conflict in general is a colonial construction which continues even today.

The construction of Indianness in terms of Hindu identity has its roots in the oriental-indological perspectives. The core of Indian religiosity was traced through the vedic scriptures. The diversity of religious philosophies was reduced to a homogenous category of 'Hinduism'. The specific nature of Hinduism is the product of the interaction between brahmins and colonial orientalist.

Check Your Progress I

i) Discuss the ideas of Emile Durkheim on religion and society in about five lines.

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ii) How does Max Weber relate religion with economy?

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iii) What does Karl Mar C believe about the role of religion in society? Explain.

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The story of the colonial expansion is based or premised on the oriental constructions of Indian society but the same oriental construction became the basis to fight against colonialism. In India the nationalist leaders have used oriental constructions in the fight against British colonialism by the Indian leaders and the people. For instance, the “orientalist presuppositions about the ‘spirituality’ of India was used by reformers, such as, Rammohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and M. K. Gandhi in the development of an anti-colonial Hindu nationalism. This reflects the level of absorption or permeation of orientalist ideas amongst the native Indians also the colonial educated intelligentsia of India. Although, the orientalist discourses did not proceed in an orderly and straightforward fashion but they were applied in ways unforeseen by those who initiated them. The orientalist discourses soon became appropriated by Indian intellectuals in the nineteenth century and applied in such a way as to undercut the colonialist agenda. One of the streams of nationalist movement was based on the Hindu nationalism propagating the idea that India is a Hindu rashtra. The homogenised category of ‘Hinduism’ generated by oriental scholars has been a prime site of the ‘othering’ of minorities in India.

Activity 2

Discuss with any two persons in your friends circle, belonging to two different religions; what they think is the core value and belief of their religion. Write an essay of one page on religion as a belief and practice. Compare your essays with those of other students at your Study Center.

11.4 SOME MAJOR RELIGIONS IN INDIA

Given the complexity and diversity of the religious traditions in India, it is difficult to enumerate and narrate them here. The Census of India identifies seven religious communities—Hindu, Muslims, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and other religions and persuasions including unclassified sects. According to the Census 2011 following is the percentage of people belonging to these religious communities:

Hindu – 79.80 per cent

Muslim – 14.23 per cent

Christian – 2.30 per cent

Sikh – 1.72 per cent

Buddhist – 0.70 per cent

Other religions and persuasions – 0.66 per cent

Religion not stated – 0.24 per cent

Here we are going to describe only some of these major religions in India for your understanding

11.4.1 Hinduism

Sociologically there are debates on whether Hinduism is a religion or not. **Max Weber** in *The Religion of India* (1958) postulates that the term ‘Hinduism’ is a western coinage and it is not a religion. The term ‘Hindu’, according to Weber is an official designation used in the Census introduced by British colonials in India. The term was used to describe the religious complex rather than one

religion. Historians have argued that Hinduism is not a monolithic religion but an umbrella category used for a diversity of sects. Hinduism is also defined as a way of life, rather than a religion. B.R. Ambedkar remarks that Hindus find it baffling to answer the question ‘why is she/he a Hindu’ due to multiplicity of gods, beliefs, customs, and practices. Such sociological and historical enquiries stand in opposition to the contemporary political usage of the term ‘Hinduism’ as a religion practiced by Hindus. Historical method informs that the term ‘Hindu’ (with whom Hinduism is associated) originated with the Arabs who referred to people living beyond Indus River as ‘Hindu’. Historians (Thapar, 2010) have used the expression ‘syndicated Hinduism’ to address the political manoeuvring around the term ‘Hinduism’. One of the acclaimed sociological enquiries of ‘Hinduism’ in India is M.N. Srinivas’s and A.M. Shah’s essay on ‘Hinduism’ in which they argue that the doctrines of Hinduism, unlike Christianity and Islam, are not embodied in one book. It has a vast body of sacred literature. Hinduism does not have one founder. Subsequently, Hinduism does not have a god but innumerable gods. It is polytheistic in nature. They further write that there is no commonality of beliefs and practices and institutions. Hinduism contains many sects that developed historically and many a times depict contradictory practices and beliefs for example the Vaishnavite and the Shaivites sects of South India who are both part of Hinduism. Indian sociologist **T.N. Madan** in ‘The Sociology of Hinduism: Reading ‘Backwards’ from Srinivas to Weber’ (2006) argues regardless of whether Hinduism is a religion or not, it is undeniably a cultural tradition a way of life stimulating sociological analysis.

Srinivas who postulated the ‘**field view**’ as against the ‘**book view**’ criticises the ‘**bibliocentrism**’ and argues that it is essential that the textual view of Hinduism is connected with the actual behaviour of people. The normative cannot be taken as the cornerstone of any social analysis. People do not always abide by the prescribed texts as the concrete material conditions influence social behaviour. So one must look at the relationship between the text and the actual behaviour. Srinivas and Shah argue that Hinduism is entangled with Hindu social order to such an extent that it becomes difficult to demarcate them. In this backdrop, Srinivas challenges the book view of Hindu social order that describe the divine origin of four *varnas*. According to Srinivas, in reality it is not *varnas* but innumerable *jatis* that exist. “When the Hindu sacred or legal texts discuss caste, it is mostly *varna* that they have in view and very rarely *jati*.” The centrality of caste system to Hinduism is also discussed by Weber. “Caste, that is, the ritual rights and duties it gives and imposes, and the position of the Brahmans, is the fundamental institution of Hinduism. Before everything else, without caste there is no Hindu.”

Theologically the ideas of *dharmā*, *karma* and *moksha* provide the ideological justification for caste system. Ideas regarding **purity** and **pollution** are also cardinal in Hinduism.

Box 11.0: Concepts of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha

A life of righteousness for a Hindu is possible through the fourfold scheme of practical endeavour. It comprises the concepts of *dharmā*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*.

- i) Dharma is honest and upright conduct of righteous action.
- ii) Artha means a righteous and honest pursuit of economic activities.

- iii) Kama is the fulfilment of one's normal desires.
- iv) Moksha is liberation that is absorption of the self into eternal bliss. Related to these four concepts are the concepts of *karma* and *samsara*. Depending upon one's deeds (*karma*) one is able to reach the stage of *moksha* or liberation. The stage of *moksha* or liberation is a term for describing the end of the cycle of birth and rebirth. The cycle of birth and rebirth is known as *samsara*. The Hindus believe that each human being has a soul and that this soul is immortal. It does not perish at the time of death. The process of birth and rebirth goes on until *moksha* is attained. This cycle of transmigration is also known as *samsara*, which is the arena where the cycle of birth and rebirth operates. One's birth and rebirth in a particular state of existence is believed by the Hindus to be dependent on the quality of one's deeds (*karma*). For a Hindu, the issue of liberation is of paramount significance (Prabhu 1979: 43-48).

11.4.2 Islam

Islam emerged in Arabia in sixth century. It is a monotheistic religion, Quran being the only Holy book. Quran's major teaching is summarised in 'five pillars' namely – having faith in the creed, offering *namaz* five times a day, paying legal alms i.e. *zakat*, fasting during Ramzan, and pilgrimage to Mecca.

These beliefs and practices, according to Islamic theology, make a Muslim win over his passions and desires and attain a place in Heaven.

In fact the word 'Islam' means an absolute submission to God.

With regard to the founder of religion, there are two major sects which have emerged claiming one founder – Sunni and Shia. Sunnis believe in the authority of Prophet Mohammad, whereas Shias claim that succession belongs to Imams.

If we go by Srinivas's distinction between 'book view' and 'field view', then you will find that Islam in India has a different character. The caste system emerged in ancient India and central to Hinduism has its impact on Islam, thereby giving birth to a system of stratification different from the place of Islam's origin. Although "the acceptance of the caste principle among the Muslims is considerably weak and does not enjoy any sanction or justification in their great traditional religious ideology", Ahmad 1978: xxiii) Imtiaz Ahmad, renowned Indian scholar, in his book *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims* (1973) argues that caste exists among Muslims. Although, caste type categories based on purity and pollution do not exist among them.

The plurality of culture in India is incomplete without Islam. It has contributed to a greater extent in shaping the composite cultural heritage of India.

11.4.3 Sikhism

"Of the great religious traditions of humanity, Sikhism is one of the youngest, being barely 500 years old. (Madan 2011:76)" Sikhism emerged as a challenge to the feudal social norms in Indian society. It is essentially a religious philosophy that stands in opposition to the Vedantic philosophy. It was founded by Guru Nanak in the fifteenth century whose teachings formed the foundation of Sikhism.

It draws elements from the nirguna saints for its theological opposition to the caste system, hence Sikhism reflects a syncretic tradition. Guru Nanak carried forward the legacy of Kabir's thought that rejected caste and religious differences espousing opposition to scriptural knowledge and rituals. Both Kabir and Nanak were bhakti saints in medieval period of Indian history. Kabir, Nanak and other bhakti saints questioned and rejected the caste differences. They laid emphasis on *ikk* (one) God who could be apprehended within the hearts rather than by adherence to empty rituals. Along with monotheism, Sikhism has elements of materiality for the reason that it did not preach the denouncing of the world for spiritual elevation. Three principles of Nanak's teaching are expressed in three punjabi words – *Naam Japna*, *Kirti Karni* and *Wand Chakna* which means 'always remembering god', 'earning one's livelihood through honest means' and 'sharing the fruits of one's labour with others' respectively. It clearly signifies the aspects of material philosophy. To implement the idea of equality, Nanak started the institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat* which imply that all humans, irrespective of their caste and religion, sit in a congregation and practice commensality i.e. eat together from the community kitchen. Guru Nank was accompanied by Mardana, a Muslim musician, in his journeys to spread his gospel of love and truth. Given this syncretic nature of Sikhism, the Adi Granth, the holy book of Sikhs, contains the poems of bhakti and sufi saints such as Kabir, Namdev and Ravidas, who come from the lower strata of Hindu and Muslim communities.

There is an emphasis on the institution of Guruship in Sikhism. Nanak was followed by nine successive Gurus. The successive Gurus made significant contributions besides continuing with Nanak's precepts and ideals. For instance, the second Guru, Guru Angad Dev evolved Gurmukhi, a distinctive script. The Adi Granth, was written in Gurmukhi language.

11.4.4 Christianity

Christian Community: The Spatial and Demographic Dimensions

In India there is no one homogeneous Christian community, but there are many different ones, organised around regional, language and sectarian bases. There are Kerala, Goan Tamil, Anglo-Indians in North India, Naga and North East Indian Christians, who are different in their language, socio-cultural practices and economic status. It is difficult to speak about a general Christian way of life in India for these very reasons. There are many churches, many denominations or groups, many sects or brotherhoods among them.

According to the 1981 Census there were 18 million Christians in India and the percentage of Christians in India's population accounted to 2.43 per cent. The total Christian population had almost kept up with the national increase of 24.69 per cent over 1971-81. In 1991 their population was 2.32 percent of the total population. However, the distribution of Christian population has been very uneven in India. There are dense settlements of Christians in some parts of the country while in other regions there are small and scattered Christian communities. In Andhra Pradesh, in the year 1981, the Christians represented 2.68 per cent of the total population. In Kerala the percentage of Christians was 20.6. So also Manipur had a 29.7 per cent Christian population.

In fact, Meghalaya with 52.6 per cent and Nagaland with 80.2 per cent registered the highest concentration of Christian populations. Tamil Nadu had 5.78 per cent Christian which was over twice the national average. Very low percentages of the Christian population had been recorded in some central and northern states of the country. For example, Jammu and Kashmir 0.14 per cent, Madhya Pradesh 0.7 per cent, Rajasthan 0.12 per cent and Uttar Pradesh 0.15 per cent. In 1991, the highest concentration of Christians was found in Nagaland (87.46 per cent) and Meghalaya (85.73 per cent). In some States such as Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana etc. the Christian population was very low.

However, in spite of regional variations as described above there are certain tenets, which unite Christian life and experience all over the country. The first of these is that all Christians believe that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is their saviour. They believe that Jesus was born to Mary, a virgin, and that God, the Father, sent him to redeem people of their sins. The concept of virgin birth is accepted alike by Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians in India. Christianity asserts that Jesus was the Son of God. However, Jesus' father on earth was Joseph. He was a carpenter who protected Mary and took her away to Bethlehem where the baby Jesus was born in a stable. The story of the poverty surrounding Jesus' birth is a very important one for Christians. It establishes the background of much of what Jesus taught, and the manner in which his teachings celebrated poverty, meekness and humility.

Box 11.1

Here is an example where religion involves itself with politics to bring about social justice. Christianity has long addressed the suffering of the oppressed people of the world. Through a belief in a better life to come for the faithful. However a number of religious leaders in Latin America, in a radical move, are emphasising on social justice. This movement in Christianity is called liberation theology. Liberation theology developed in the late 1960s within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. In simple terms, liberation theology believes that the church has responsibility to help people liberate themselves from poverty.

11.4.5 Buddhism

Buddhism emerged in India during sixth century BC. It is known by the name of its founder Gautama Buddha. By the time Buddhism emerged in ancient India, a highly complex structure of stratification on the lines of caste had taken its roots in society. It was a period of rapid transformation and reformulation of political structures. There were two kinds of political structures of governance existing at the time of Buddha – monarchical kingdoms and *gana-sanghas*, the republican territories. The *gana-sanghas* were ruled by clans. Buddha himself was a prince, being the son of the chief of Sakya clan. Both monarchical kingdoms and republican territories were in constant conflict due to the political motives of expansion and consolidation of kingdoms. Rice cultivation and rich iron ores were its primary source of wealth and expansion. It was the phase of arrival of urbanisation in ancient India.

The philosophical ideas of Buddhism were innovative and remarkably different from the existing philosophy of Brahmanism of sixth century BC. Buddhism

is essentially a rejection of the basic beliefs of Brahmanism thereby challenging the authority of *Vedas*. “Within India Buddhism has appeared as an alternative to the hierarchical and inegalitarian ideology and practice of Hinduism. In contrast Buddhism is viewed as a system which was more sympathetic to oppressed groups and it has been considered an economic, political, and social solution to the problem of caste oppression.” (Chakravarti, 1996:1) Unlike the abstract spirituality of Brahmanism, Buddhism emphasised on the materiality of this world. It did not emphasise on the creation and preservation of universe by God. It believed in the natural cosmic rise and decline. It did not talk much about gods. It dealt with everything in a dialectical manner and never sought answers in metaphysical domain. Buddha developed a theory of cause and effect which is different from the *Vedic* theory of *Karma*. “Independence from deities was also evident in Buddhist ideas about the origin of government and the state. Whereas Vedic Brahmanism invoked the gods in association with the origin of government, Buddhism described it as a process of gradual social change in which the institution of the family and the ownership of fields led to civil strife. Such strife could only be controlled by people electing a person to govern them and to establish laws for their protection: an eminently logical way of explaining the origins of civil strife and the need for law.” (Thapar, 2002: 168). There are other major religious, like Jainism, Zoroastrian and several tribal religions followed by a substantial number of people in India. These religions also play an important role in understanding society in India.

Check Your Progress III

- i) Tick the correct answer
- A) a) Hinduism is a belief system
 b) Hinduism believe in several Gods
 c) It is a way of life
 d) All of the above.
- B) Tick the incorrect answer
- a) Islam believes in one God
 b) It is divided into two main sects of Shias and Sunnis
 c) Its followed by people only in India
 d) A Muslim offers prayers five times a day.
- ii) Who founded Buddhism and what were the conditions in which it originated?

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11.5 LET US SUM UP

You have read that religion is a social phenomenon. The classical sociological theories of classical thinkers like Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber have drawn a relationship between religion and society. They have differences in terms of how the relationship between society and religion can be looked at, but the common aspect of these theories is that religion is the creation of humans unlike the theological perspectives that emphasise on the divine origin of religion and society. The nature of the relationship between society and religion in India is outlined through the Oriental and Indological perspectives. Towards the end we have discussed the diversity of religious beliefs in India. We have explained briefly the emergence and arrival of various religions in India and their core values.

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11.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- i) Emile Durkheim, a French Sociologist, believes that nature of religion is shaped by the social conditions in which it exists. It is, therefore, socially constructed. He studied the elementary forms of religion, since he believed that the primitive religions i.e. totemism explains the religious focus of the more complex societies.
- ii) Karl Marx, a German philosopher, developed a critical theory of religion, unlike Durkheim and Max Weber. He says that religion is a ‘false consciousness’ developed by people to disguise the inherent social inequalities and disparities of poverty etc. that exists in society. It is, for this reason he believes that religion is the ‘opium of the masses’ which enables them to accept their social existence.
- iii) Max Weber, a German Sociologist in his celebrated book, ‘The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’ developed the thesis that the Protestant ethics (a sects of Christianity) in the West, played an important role in the development of modern capitalism in America. This ethic was different from the Oriental religions and even the Catholic beliefs and emphasized upon a distinct economic behaviour.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) A) (d)
B) (c)
- 2) Buddhism was founded by Gautam Buddha during the 6th Century BC in a princely family of Saka clan. This was a period of rapid urbanisation and presence of an extreme orthodox Hinduism. Buddhism came as a protest against caste, as well as, orthodox Hindu rituals.