
UNIT 2 THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Naturalistic Origin of Religion
- 2.3 Anthropological Origin of Religion
- 2.4 Psychological Origin of Religion
- 2.5 Social Origin of Religion
- 2.6 Socio-political Origin of Religion
- 2.7 Critical Exposition
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Key Words
- 2.10 Further Readings and References
- 2.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to present an overview of some popular vantage points from which the origin of Religion has been discussed and theorized. By the end of this Unit you should be able to become conversant with the theories concerning the,

- Naturalistic,
- Anthropological,
- Psychological,
- Social, and
- Socio-political origins of Religion.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

* Antony Kalathil, Assisi Ashram, Kottayam. (This unit is a revised version of Units 'Theories of the origin of Religion-I' and "Theories of the origin of Religion- II' of BPYE-001 compiled by Mahak Uppal, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Hindu College, University of Delhi.)

In the secular-based theories concerning its origin, religion is viewed as an empirical entity that can be traced historically and mapped geographically, such that all religions are regarded as being human creations whose history is part of the wider history of human culture. Thinkers subscribing to this view trace the development of the concept of religion by identifying it as a clear and bounded historical phenomenon. They speculate that the first religions were a response to human fear, and were established to give people a feeling of security in an insecure world, and a feeling of control over the environment where there was otherwise little or no control. Here we shall deal with naturalistic, anthropological, psychological, sociological, and sociopolitical theories of the origin of religion.

2.2 NATURALISTIC ORIGIN OF RELIGION

From Enlightenment onwards there have been several attempts at giving a naturalistic account for the genesis of religion. Why is it that people in almost all societies seem to believe in the existence of invisible supernatural beings that may influence human life for good or ill and whom it is advisable to pray to or propitiate? And why have almost all societies developed rituals, both elaborate and demanding, in connection with such beliefs? Despite much discussion, general agreement on answers to such questions has hardly emerged.

Ernst Haeckel (1834 – 1919), a scientist turned philosopher, came to be identified as one of the pioneers of the naturalistic theory of the origin of religion. He held that the discoveries of nineteenth century science present a solution to the enigmas that have perplexed mankind over the centuries. He regarded his view as “monistic” in its essence, as it stood in opposition to all “dualisms” which drew distinctions between God and nature, soul and body, spirit and matter. Haeckel believed that there is only a single substance and it manifests itself both as matter and energy or body and spirit. Every material atom has a rudimentary soul which is far below the level of consciousness. In the course of evolution, the rudimentary psychical character of substance gradually advances to consciousness which, according to him, is a purely natural phenomenon. “Monism”, in Haeckel’s understanding, therefore implied that there is no matter without spirit or energy, and no spirit without matter.

This monism is founded on the demonstrable results of science and pledges to solves the

riddles of existence. It gives negative answers to the traditional problems of God, freedom and immortality, suggesting that the very ideas of God, freedom and immortality are in fact based on a mistaken dualism. It tells us that there can be no God apart from the universe. An invisible God who thinks, speaks, and acts is considered to be an impossible conception. In the monistic deterministic cosmos, there appears to be no room for the immortality of the soul or the freedom of the will.

2.3 ANTHROPOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

The naturalistic interpretation of religion gained support from the developments in the discipline of anthropology as well. The ideas of Edward Burnett Tylor (1832 – 1917) inspired other thinkers like James George Frazer (1854 – 1941) and Salomon Reinach (1858 – 1932) to formulate the anthropological theory of the origin of religion.

Tylor began with two assumptions: (1) that human culture (including knowledge, arts, religion, customs, etc.) has certain laws of its own, which can be studied scientifically, such that just like in nature, in culture too we can find the uniform action of uniform causes; and (2) that the varied kinds of cultures found across the human race can be identified as stages in an ongoing process of development or evolution. Apart from these assumptions, another idea to which he drew attention was the phenomenon of ‘survival’. He believed that an idea or a custom, once it gets established, tends to persist and survive, to the extent that it may continue to penetrate into the later stages of cultural development, despite having the tendency of losing its original meaning and significance. Tylor’s main contribution came in the form of his theory of ‘animism’, i.e., the belief in spiritual beings. He explained that on being confronted with the phenomena such as death, sleep, dreams etc., the primitive man accounted for them in terms of a spirit separable from the body. These ‘Spirits’ were believed to animate almost all aspects of nature, with some of them occupying the ranks of powerful deities as well. Since these spirits were supposed to control events and to affect human lives, it was natural and expected of humans to revere and seek to propitiate them. According to Tylor this is how the very beginnings of religion might have originated, with the belief in such ‘spiritual’ and ‘animated’ beings as its minimal condition. As far as the higher, more sophisticated forms of religions was concerned, Taylor asserted that they too developed out of the matrix of primitive animism. The superiority of the higher religions specifically consisted in their moral ideas, which were almost entirely lacking in the primitive form of

religions. And it is these moral ideas, that have turned out to be the abiding fruit of animism. James George Frazer explained that we can distinguish three stages in the mental development of mankind: magic, religion and science. At the magical level humans depend on their own strength to overcome the difficulties that trouble them in their attempt to gain the ends. They believe that there exists a certain order of nature which they think they can understand and manipulate by occult means. But experience teaches them that they are mistaken and this is where they turn to religion. In religion humans no longer rely on themselves but seek the help of invisible beings. They believe that these beings possess the power to control natural events, which magic failed to accomplish. The religious attitude supposes that there is some elasticity in the course of nature, but experience again teaches humans that they are mistaken here as well. The rigid uniformity of nature is discovered, and religion, which was otherwise regarded as an explanation of nature, is displaced by the scientific temperament. In science humans revert back to self-reliance, but not through occult means (as in the stage of magic) but rather through rational methods.

Salomon Reinach was primarily an archaeologist and an anthropologist who was extremely devoted to the investigation of religion. He considered his times to be the most appropriate for the development of a science of religion. He believed that just like in all fields of knowledge, secular reason must exercise its right to investigate even the domain of religion. He wanted to present religion as a natural phenomenon, and defined it as a sum of scruples which hinder the free exercise of our faculties. Through this definition Reinach wanted to eliminate from the domain of religion the concepts of God, spiritual beings, and the infinite. These scruples, he believed, have arisen from the irrational taboos of primitive societies where they were associated with an animistic view of the world. While those scruples which have proved useful continued to persist and got transformed into rational rules of conduct, those which showed no such usefulness sank into the background. Thus, human progress, according to Reinach has taken place through the gradual secularization of those elements which were originally enveloped in the sphere of animistic beliefs. This process has not only led to the transformation of taboos into moral rules but has also led to the development of science out of magic. He visualized further progress in the direction of education and the extension of the rational outlook.

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, according to George Frazer, are the three stages in the mental development of mankind?

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

The naturalistic interpretation of religion received further stimulus from the development of the psychology of religion. The main proponents of this theory were Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) James Henry Leuba (1867 – 1946).

According to Leuba the reason for the existence of religion is not the objective truth of its conceptions, but its biological value. He clarifies this idea with the example of the belief in a personal God. Earlier theologians had put forward metaphysical arguments, such as the argument from design, for the existence of such a God. The progress of the physical sciences has destroyed the strength of such arguments, leading subsequent theologians to change their arguments and appeal to inner experience instead. Here, as Leuba thinks, they have to agree with psychology, which applies the scientific method onto the innermost experiences of the individual. The inner experience, instead of establishing the existence of a personal God, shows how belief in such a God has arisen from the gratification it provides for affective and moral needs. Leuba paid special attention to mystical experiences which are considered to be the pinnacle of religious experience of God and tried to explain it in psychological and physiological terms. He compared it to the sublimation of sexual passion in the ascetical life, as well as to an altered state of consciousness induced by certain drugs. He also pointed out its affinity with such pathological conditions as hysteria and epilepsy. For the psychologist who remains within the province of science, religious mysticism is not the revelation of God

but of man himself. Human beings can no longer subscribe to a religion and its associated transcendent beliefs with intellectual honesty.

Sigmund Freud, the originator of psychoanalysis, regarded religious beliefs as illusions and fulfillments of the oldest, strongest, and most insistent wishes of mankind. He considered religion as a mental defense against some of the most threatening aspects of nature – earthquake, flood storm, disease, and the inevitableness of death. He explains that it is inn and through these forces, that nature appears to be rising up against us, with its majestic, cruel, and inexorable forcefulness. In response, human imagination transforms these forces into mysterious personal powers and the impersonal forces remain eternally remote. Now, if the natural elements are identified as having passions that rage as they do in our souls, if everywhere in nature there are beings around us of a kind that we know in our own society, then we can breathe freely, can feel at home in the uncanny and can deal by psychical means with our senseless anxiety. Though we are still defenseless, yet we are no longer helplessly paralyzed. We can at least react. We can apply the same methods against these violent supermen outside that we employ in our own society. We can try to adjure them, to appease them to bribe them, and, by so influencing them, we may rob them of part of their power.

Freud divides the mind into three provinces— Id, Ego, and Superego. “Id” is the unconscious region in which the basic instincts of our nature crowd together with no sense of order or value. “Ego” is the region in which contact with the external world is maintained, and it aims at self-preservation, selecting some of the Id’s demands for satisfaction and rejecting others, according to circumstances. “Superego” is the deposit of the parental influences of childhood, and it exercises a further control by banning those activities which are socially undesirable. We come to know about consciousness and the mind through an analysis of its disguised manifestations. It contains primal instincts or drives as well as repressed experiences. These repressed experiences still live on in the unconscious and become manifest in varied ways. These manifestations are what lead to ‘neurosis’ and Freud thinks that religion is the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity which may be left behind when humans learn to face the world relying no longer upon illusions but upon scientifically authenticated knowledge.

Freud utilizes his idea of the Oedipus complex (based on the Greek myth of a tragic hero who murdered his father and married his mother) to explicate the origin of religion. He believes that in primitive times human beings lived in small groups, each under the domination of a father who possessed all the females. The sons were driven out or killed as they induced the

father's jealousy. But they grouped together and killed the father, and partook of his flesh so as to share in his power. This was the primal crime, the parricide that has set up tensions within the human psyche out of which developed moral inhibitions, totemism, and the other phenomena of religion. Having slain their father, the brothers were struck with remorse, at least of a prudential kind. They also found that they cannot all succeed to his position and that there is therefore a continuing need for restraint. The dead father's prohibition accordingly takes on a new (moral) authority as a taboo against incest. This association of religion with the Oedipus complex, which is renewed in each individual, is held to account for the mysterious authority of God in the human mind and the powerful feeling of guilt which make men submit to such a phantasy. Religion is thus the return of the repressed. The idea of God is therefore a magnified version of the image of the human father. The transformation of the father into God takes place both in the history of the race and in the history of individuals. Individuals in adult life project upon the world the infantile memory of the father, and raise this image to the rank of a Father God. The father who gave them life, protected them, and demanded their obedience, becomes the God who is similarly the creator, preserver, and lawgiver.

What Freud wished to emphasize upon through this explanation was that a religious belief is determined by the psychological history of the person who holds it, and that such a belief is essentially infantile and neurotic. It is a projection of the nursery upon the world, and is thus a flight from reality. In the real world, which is a rigidly determined atheistic cosmos, there is no Father God who reigns over it.

2.5 SOCIAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

In the work of Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) the theory of the origin of religion gets a sociological slant. His views not only imbibe a sociological theory of the origin of religion but they represent a complete philosophical perspective known as 'sociological positivism'. In Durkheim's philosophy the idea of society occupies the center position and functions as the key for understanding several other philosophical problems. According to him the idea of Truth and Falsehood are objective only in so far as they express collective and not individual thought. Even the laws of logic are taken by him to reflect the needs of civilized society. Here a Society needs to be understood not merely as the sum of the individuals included in it, but

rather it represents a peculiar kind of entity which is the source of constraints, governing the thought and behavior of its members.

In his social philosophy Durkheim devoted special attention to the subject of religion. According to him the character of primitive religion is best seen not in animism but totemism, which he considers as the more fundamental and primitive form of religion. The totem stands in a peculiar relationship to a particular social group, normally a tribe or clan. The totem is for this group the type of the sacred and the basis for the distinction of sacred and profane, and this he takes to be essence of religion.

Taking totemism as the type of religion Durkheim concludes that religion is to be understood as a social phenomenon. Religion serves the needs of the society in which it is practiced; and the object of its cult, concealed under the figures of its particular mythology, is the society itself. He points out that the earlier theories of primitive religion suffered from the defect of a one-sided concentration upon religious belief; whereas his own theory regards religion primarily from the point of view of action. So, he claims that there is something eternal in religion, for although particular beliefs become outworn, any society must from time to time reaffirm itself, and such reaffirmation is essentially religious.

Religion and society are so closely interwoven for Durkheim that religion is regarded as the matrix out of which other human activities, including science, appear to have grown. Religion is by no means discredited by the sciences, but it must always be looking for more adequate symbols in order to express its realities. In modern times, he explains, we have come to understand that the ideas of divinity and of society are foundationally the same. So, though no new religion of humanity has displaced the traditional religion, but this may happen in due course. There are no gospels which are immortal, but neither is there any reason for believing that humanity is incapable of inventing new ones.

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. Explain the sociological positivism of Emile Durkheim.

.....
.....

2.6 SOCIO-POLITICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

Here we shall mainly discuss the thoughts of Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx.

“God” was Feuerbach’s first thought: the young Feuerbach was a theologian. He was studying theology to become a protestant pastor but from the standpoint of a rational religiosity. “Reason” was his second thought: for Feuerbach the theologian became a Hegelian. Oscillating between philosophy and theology and inwardly torn apart, longing for truth he came to Hegel’s lectures. After having attended Hegel’s lectures Feuerbach said “I knew what I ought to do and wanted to do: not theology but philosophy. Not to believe, but to think”. “Man” was Feuerbach’s third and last thought: for now, the Hegelian became an atheist. He wanted to follow Hegel’s path consistently to the very end. He believed that the old split between here and hereafter must be removed, not only in thought (as with Hegel) but in reality too, so that humanity can again concentrate wholeheartedly on itself, on its world and on the present time. In his “Essence of Christianity” Feuerbach enthroned materialism and dethroned God. He said that apart from nature and man nothing exists and the higher beings produced by our religious imaginations are merely the weird reflections of our own nature. He was against the idea of a personal God as well as the selfish belief in immortality.

To Feuerbah, consciousness of God was self-consciousness, and the knowledge of God was self- knowledge. Religion, was thereby the source of humanity’s earliest (though indirect) form of self-knowledge. The universal man, the community, and the unity of man with man was considered by Feuerbach as the Supreme Being and the measure of all things. The consciousness of the infinite was nothing else than the consciousness of the infinity of consciousness. In the consciousness of the infinite, the conscious subject has for his object the infinity of his own nature. Thus, the notion of God merges; man sets up his human nature out of himself; he sees it as something existing outside himself and separated from himself; and he projects it. In short, the notion of God becomes nothing but a projection of man himself. The absolute to man is his own nature. God appears as a projected, hypostatized reflection of man, behind which nothing exists in reality. The divine is the universality of the human, projected onto the hereafter. The attributes of God—love, wisdom, justice etc.— in reality are the attributes of man, i.e., of the human species.

The personal God of Christianity, believed to be independent and existing outside man, is nothing other than the specific notion of man given independent existence—the personified nature of man. Man contemplates his nature external to himself. The attributes of God are really the attributes of the objectified nature of man. It is not that God created man in his own image, but rather man created God in his own image. Man is a great projector and God is the great projection. God as intellectual being is a projection of human understanding. Here God is nothing but the objectified universal nature of human intelligence. God as the all loving Being, is also a projection of human heart. In prayer, man worships his own nature, and venerates the omnipotence of feelings. My own interest is declared as God's interest. My own will is identified as God's will. My own ultimate purpose is regarded as being God's purpose. Karl Marx maintained a negative attitude towards religion, for he found the latter to be incompatible with his theory of action, and therefore he rejected religion altogether. Marx inherited speculative atheism from Feuerbach. He was an atheist, even before he developed his theory of action.

Feuerbach's atheism was rooted in a speculative theory of man. According to him all the predicates attributed to God were purely human. It was for this reason that he said that the subject of these predicates should also be human. Thus, man simply projects his own infinite powers on to a transcendent being. God is an alienation of man. It is a self-estrangement. Feuerbach did not explain satisfactorily the origin of this alienation, though he maintained that the reason behind it was the individual's love of ease, sloth vanity and egoism. According to Marx as well man exists as an alienated being. Unlike Feuerbach, Marx pointed to the social and economic conditions of modern life as the cause of this alienation. Religion is only its expression. As a result of the division of labor, the means of production became the private property of individuals; the workers in the modern industrialized and technologized process of production have nothing but their sheer labor – merely a commodity– to offer. In the process of exchange, the product of their own labor becomes for wage earners an alienated, commodity; something separated from them. As man is frustrated in his earthly existence, he takes refuge in the phantasy world of the beyond. The culprit behind the continuance of these frustrating conditions is not religion, but the political structure which legalizes and protects the social status quo. Yet, neither the state nor religion itself reveals the roots of alienation. State and religion lie in the economic conditions of a society determined by private property. Religious alienation will get uprooted only when relations between human beings again become intelligible and reasonable as a result of new

modes of production.

Marx's former friend Bruno Bauer proposed that the emancipation of man requires a secular state which recognizes no religion. Existence of religion always indicates an incomplete emancipation. However, Marx saw that even though the American state is entirely separated from the church, still instead of being fully emancipated America continues to be a religious country par excellence. Religion is not only an expression of alienation, but also a protest against it. Religion is an inverted world consciousness; for an inverted, unjust, inhuman society produces man's religious consciousness. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed. It is the heart of the heartless people. It is the spirit of the spiritless situation. Religion is the opium of the people. Religion offers illusory happiness. For real happiness the abolition of religion is a must. Religion is a symptom of social disease.

Atheism alone is insufficient to cure the ills of the human situation. It only attempts to cure the symptoms without eradicating the disease. The disease is man's social-economic condition in a capitalist society. The social structure of private property produces the need for God, and so, it has to be eradicated. To the orthodox Marxist, atheism is very important. Atheism is the annulment of God. It is the theoretical humanism. Annulment of private property is communism. It vindicates real human life. It is practical humanism.

Atheism and communism re-establish the true relationship between man and nature. This relationship is an ever active one - a praxis. To be human is not to be something, but to do something. Work and material production constitutes man's fulfillment, not leisure. Re-establishing the true relationship between man and nature is attained through praxis. Praxis establishes a relationship between nature and consciousness - the two poles of human reality. The only true philosophy, therefore, is a theory of action. The truth of man is in what he does, not in what he knows or claims to know without his active relation to nature.

From a Marxist point of view religious belief always conflict with a truly humanistic attitude because religion always projects beyond the human. Man becomes independent only if he is his master. Man is his master when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the favors of another is a dependent being. Marx's atheism is humanism, mediated through the suppression of religion, and communism is humanism mediated through the suppression of private property. Humanism does not consist of abstract postulates. It is to be realized historically in a human society whereby truly human conditions are created. There must no longer be a society where great number of human beings are degraded, despised and exploited.

Marx remained an atheist because he thought the myth of the deity was an obstacle to the rehabilitation of the poor and an impediment to complete happiness, for it stressed upon the joy of the beyond and diverted attention from the suffering here on earth. Thus, religious beliefs seem to be strikingly incompatible with the philosophy of Marx.

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. Why are the religious beliefs totally incompatible with the philosophy of Marx?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2.7 CRITICAL EXPOSITION

The naturalists, anthropologists and psychologists whom we have considered do have something to suggest in their interpretation of religion. The strength of their argument rests on the claim that their assertions are based on verifiable facts brought to light by scientific investigation. However, a thorough examination of this claim reveals that they are noticeably unfounded. The given facts must be interpreted and that almost all the thinkers whom we have considered were scientists of one kind or another by training. In so far as they move from the findings of their particular sciences into the sphere of philosophical interpretation, they tend to bring along presuppositions, speculations and even prejudices which need to be brought out and reasonably examined.

The most obvious problem with naturalism is that it involves us in a gigantic one-sided abstraction. It takes one aspect of reality and presents it as the entire reality. Just as the naturalists isolate the cognitive aspect of our experience of the world, similarly they concentrate on the element of belief in religion. They even seem to think of religious beliefs

as offering an explanation of the world, however these beliefs can only be properly understood from within the setting of the religious life as a whole, which involves conative and affective elements as well. Some of the thinkers' idea of God illustrates their own misunderstanding of the nature of God. The abstract idea presented by the naturalists as the whole reality ignores some facts and exaggerates others, thereby merely giving a distorted picture.

What needs to be kept in mind is that the origin of a particular belief or practice does not determine the question of its validity in its present form. Any human activity goes back to humble beginnings. But this point is not remembered in the case of religion. We must judge things by what they are today, not by what they have grown out of. Something derived from a cruder origin may have acquired quite a new status and meaning.

Though psychology is indeed a valuable study, but it does not and indeed cannot be determinative for the validity of religion. We tend to believe what we want to believe. Yet the psychological criticism of belief can be carried only so far, or else it ends up in skepticism which engulfs the psychologist himself, and makes rational arguments impossible. By tracing the history of the idea of God in the projecting of the father figure, Freud discredits the very belief in God. But his theory is not applicable to religion in general, rather it only applies to those religions which recognize some kind of 'Father God'. Even if men think of God in terms of father figure, they tend to do so in the analogical language. The question of whether or not this analogue indeed presents a true representation of the reality, is one which the psychoanalysts fail answer.

Freud's ideas of religion hardly had any considerable degree of acceptance. Usually, neurosis is defined as a condition leading to difficulties in adjusting satisfactorily to one's environment, thereby leading to a noticeably negative outcome. Jung however pointed out that religion is a healthy outcome. Religious practices seem to be a desirable, justifiable, and realistic mode of activity. Freud says religion is a form of neurosis. All this suggests that there can be good neurosis and bad neurosis. The fact that religion relieves individuals from unconscious conflict, does not present a sufficient reason for labelling it as the universal obsessional neurosis of mankind. None of the thinkers discussed thus far have been able to coherently establish that in general religious believers are less able to form satisfying personal relations and are less able to get ahead in their work than non-believers.

Freud even ends up committing the fallacy of psycho-mechanistic parallelism. This is the fallacy of assuming that because two behavioral patterns are observed to exhibit that same

constituents or are reducible to the same component elements, they are to be attributed to the same psychological mechanism. Religious beliefs display some marks of infantile regression. From this one cannot conclusively derive that religion is reducible to infantile regression. Similarity is not sameness. Moreover, there is no conclusive proof for the idea of the Oedipus complex itself. The word “illusion” does not mean absence of an objective reality. Illusion is only a perceptual error. Illusion is resulted from a presence not from an absence. It cannot be taken to mean that God does not exist.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

The sociological and sociopolitical theories make it evident that religion is deeply intertwined with numerous social factors, and that no account of religion which omits the sociological aspect could be complete. But apart from this rather obvious truth, we get no clear guidance, for there are many serious conflicts among the views we have seen. We have not been given any single convincing answer to the question of what precisely is the relation of religion to the society in which it is practiced. Can religious beliefs play a major role in giving rise to an economic system? Does the economic system give rise to religion as a kind of by-product?

Durkheim recognizes religion as a social activity. In doing so he supplements a deficiency in some of the earlier anthropological accounts, which had concentrated on religious beliefs. But his general thesis relies too exclusively on identifying totemism as a type of religion. However, totemism simply fails to fulfil this role, for the following reasons: (1) totemism is not really primitive. Rather it has, as Freud recognized, a history of more primitive ideas behind it. (2) Totemism is much less universal than religion, and cannot serve as a larger category under which other types of religions get subsumed. Notably, it is precisely among some of the most backward people that totemism is absent. (3) Most researchers now recognize totemism as being primarily not a religious phenomenon but a social one. When the foundation stone of totemism is withdrawn, Durkheim’s argument for the identity between the ideas of divinity and society collapses.

Feuerbach says that religion is consciousness of the infinite, and that it is therefore nothing else than the consciousness which man has of his own limited but infinite nature. Here he implies only the orientation of human consciousness toward an infinite, but does not provide any evidence of the existence or the non-existence of an infinite reality, independent of consciousness. It may be noted that Feuerbach’s universal human being is itself a projection

as well as an abstraction, who projects something out of his existence that does not exist in reality.

Marx's praxis has primarily an economic character. For Marx, man is autonomous only in his material life process. Thus, Marx's praxis is restrictive. If religion indeed emerges out of the social conditions in which man is an enslaved being, then religion must die out automatically, when the ideal conditions are created, in which all human can be happy.

2.9 KEY WORDS

Praxis: Praxis is the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is practiced. It is a practical knowledge applied into one's actions.

Totemism: Totemism is a religious belief that is frequently associated with shamanistic religions. The totem is usually an animal or other natural figure that spiritually represents a group of related people such as a clan.

2.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Allen N.J., Pickering W.S.F. & Miller Watts, eds. *Watts On Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life. Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought, 10.* London: Routledge, 1998.

Gay, Peter, ed. *The Freud: Reader. United States of America.* W. W. Norton & com. 1989.

Hick, John. *Philosophy of Religion.* Second edition. New Jersey: Prentice-hall, 1973.

James, Henry Leuba. *A Psychological Study of Religion: Its Origin, Function and Future.* New York: HarperCollins, 2007

Lodge, Oliver, Sir. *Life and Matter: A Criticism of Prof. Haeckel's Riddle of the Universe.* New York: The Knickerbockers Press, 2006.

Stark, Rodney. *Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief.* Norwood, Mass: Berwick & Smith, 1912.

2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The three stages in the mental development of mankind are magic, religion and science and each of these do not follow one another in a clear-cut succession. At the magical level man depends on his own strength to overcome the difficulties that trouble him in his attempt to gain the ends. He believes that there exists a certain order of nature which he thinks he can learn and manipulate by occult means. But experience teaches him that he is mistaken and there he turns to religion. In religion man no longer relies on himself but seeks the help of invisible beings. He believes that these beings possess that power to control natural events which magic failed to gain. The religious attitude supposes that there is some elasticity in the course of nature, but experience teaches man that man is mistaken again. The rigid uniformity of nature is discovered, and religion, regarded as an explanation of nature, is displaced by science. In science man reverts to the self-reliance but not through occult means but by through the rational methods.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. In Durkheim's philosophy the idea of society occupies the center position and functions as the key for understanding philosophical problems. Truth and falsehood are regarded as being objective in so far as they express collective and not individual thought. Even the laws of logic reflect the needs of civilized society. Society is not just the sum of the individuals included in it, but a peculiar kind of entity which is the source of constraints governing the thought and behavior of its members. In his social philosophy, Durkheim devoted special attention to the subject of religion. According to him the character of primitive religion is best seen not in animism but totemism, which he considers as a more fundamental and primitive form of religion. The totem stands in a peculiar relationship to a particular social group, normally a tribe or clan. The totem is for this group the type of the sacred and the basis for the distinction of sacred and profane and this he takes to be essence of religion.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. For Marx religion is an inverted world consciousness. An inverted, unjust, inhuman society produces man's religious consciousness. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed. It is the heart

of the heartless people. It is the spirit of the spiritless situation. Religion is the opium of the people. Religion offers illusory happiness. For real happiness the abolition of religion is a must. Religion is a symptom of social disease. From a Marxist point of view religious belief always conflicts with a truly humanistic attitude because religion always projects beyond the human. Man becomes independent only if he is his master. Man is his master when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the favor of another becomes a dependent being. Marx's atheism is humanism, mediated with itself through the suppression of religion; and communism is humanism mediated with itself through the suppression of private property. Humanism does not consist of abstract postulates. It is to be realized historically in a human society; truly human conditions are to be created. There must be no longer a society where great number of human beings are degraded, despised and exploited. Marx remained an atheist because he thought the myth of the deity was an obstacle to the rehabilitation of the poor and an impediment to complete happiness, by stressing the joy of the beyond and diverting attention from the suffering here on earth. Thus, religious beliefs are totally incompatible with the philosophy of Marx.