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Sociology of Religion

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By: Taruna Jain



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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(Solved)

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

M.S.O.E.-3

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: (i) Answer any five questions. (ii) Select at least two questions from each section.

SECTION-I

Q. 1. Explain the relationship between protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-7, Page No. 33, 'Ascetic Protestantism and Capitalism' and Page No. 35, Q. No. 2.

Q. 2. Discuss Freud's approach to the study of religion.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 17, 'Introduction' and 'Freud's Reformulation'.

Q. 3. What is 'non-renunciation'? Discuss with reference to auspiciousness and purity.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 42, 'Introduction', 'Domesticity and Detachment', Page No. 43, 'Life Cycle Rituals' and 'Concepts of Auspiciousness and Purity'.

Q. 4. Discuss the mystical traditions of the Lama of McLeodganj.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 48, 'The Lamas of McLeod Ganj'.

Also Add: Historically, the term was used for venerated spiritual masters or heads of monasteries. Today the title can be used as an honorific title conferred on a monk, nun or a lay person (especially in the Nyingma, Kagyu and Sakya schools) advanced tantric practitioner to designate a level of spiritual attainment and authority to teach, or may be part of a title such as Dalai Lama or Panchen Lama applied to a lineage of reincarnate lamas (Tulkus). Perhaps due to misunderstandings by early western scholars attempting to understand Tibetan Buddhism, the term lama has historically been erroneously applied to Tibetan monks in general. Similarly, Tibetan Buddhism was referred to as "Lamaism" by early western scholars and travellers who perhaps did not understand that what they were witnessing was a form of Buddhism; they may also have been unaware of the distinction between Tibetan Buddhism and Bön. The term Lamaism is now considered by some to be derogatory.

Q. 5. Describe the features of the 'Okka' in Coorg settlements.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 36, 'Introduction' and Page No. 37, 'The Okka'.

SECTION-II

Q. 6. How is religious pluralism significant in the Indian society? Discuss.

Ans. Religious pluralism, to paraphrase the title of a recent academic work, goes beyond mere toleration. Chris Beneke, in *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism*, explains the difference between religious tolerance and religious pluralism by pointing to the situation in the late 18th century United States. By the 1730s, in most colonies religious minorities had obtained what contemporaries called religious toleration: "The policy of toleration relieved religious minorities of some physical punishments and some financial burdens, but it did not make them free from the indignities of prejudice and exclusion. Nor did it make them equal. Those 'tolerated' could still be barred from civil offices, military positions, and university posts." In short, religious toleration is only the absence of religious persecution, and does not necessarily preclude religious discrimination. However, in the following decades something extraordinary happened in the Thirteen Colonies, at least if one views the events from "a late 18th-century perspective." Gradually, the colonial governments expanded the policy of religious toleration, but then, between the 1760s and the 1780s, they replaced it with "something that is usually called religious liberty." Mark Silka, in "Defining Religious Pluralism in America: A Regional Analysis", states that Religious pluralism "enables a country made up of people of different faiths to exist without sectarian warfare or the persecution of religious minorities. Understood differently in different times and places, it is a cultural construct that embodies some shared conception of how a country's various religious

QUESTION PAPER

December – 2023

(Solved)

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

M.S.O.E.-3

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: (i) Answer any five questions. (ii) Select at least two questions from each section.

Section-I

Q. 1. Discuss the viewpoint of Clifford-Geertz's understanding of religion.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 7, 'Religion as a Cultural System'.

Q. 2. What is a Myth? Discuss its social significance.

Ans. Myth, a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual) and symbolic places or objects (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of Gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience. The term mythology denotes both the study of myth and the body of myths belonging to a particular religious tradition. As with all religious symbolism, there is no attempt to justify mythic narratives or even to render them plausible. Every myth presents itself as an authoritative, factual account, no matter how much the narrated events are at variance with natural law or ordinary experience. By extension from this primary religious meaning, the word myth may also be used more loosely to refer to an ideological belief when that belief is the object of a quasi-religious faith; an example would be the Marxist eschatological myth of the withering away of the state.

While the outline of myths from a past period or from a society other than one's own can usually be seen quite clearly, to recognize the myths that are dominant in one's own time and society is always difficult. This is hardly surprising, because a myth has its authority not by proving itself, but by presenting itself. In this sense the authority of a myth indeed "goes without saying", and the myth can be outlined in detail only when its authority is no longer unquestioned, but has been rejected or overcome in some manner by another, more compre-

hensive myth. The word myth derives from the Greek mythos, which has a range of meanings from "word", through "saying" and "story", to "fiction", the unquestioned validity of mythos can be contrasted with logos, the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated. Because myths narrate fantastic events with no attempt at proof, it is sometimes assumed that they are simply stories with no factual basis, and the word has become a synonym for falsehood or, at best, misconception. In the study of religion, however, it is important to distinguish between myths and stories that are merely untrue.

For example, Roman and Greek myths, though originally not available in English, have deeply influenced English works. During the times of the ancient Greeks, they had a belief that some invisible Gods, such as Zeus, had created this world. We read in such Greek stories that passions for humans controlled the Gods, and hence Gods fought for them. Likewise, Romans had beliefs in such deities.

Due to mythological influences, many literary authors refer to the Greek and Roman myths in order to add meanings to their works. For instance, Shakespeare, in his play Romeo and Juliet, uses Greek mythology. In Greek mythology, Phoebus was God of the sun, and here Juliet urges that god to bring him home quickly, so that night could come, and she may meet her lover Romeo.

Q. 3. Discuss the relationship between religion and social structure with reference to M.N. Srinivas.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 38, 'Aspects of Hinduism' and Page No. 37, 'Tribes and Caste in Coorg'.

Q. 4. What is the concept of 'Cuong' amongst the Nuer of Sudan? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 39, 'Introduction', 'Concept of Cuong' and 'The Notion of Spirit'.

Sample Preview of The Chapter

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SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES



Religion - Sociological Perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Religion is one of the most powerful and influential force which helps in shaping the relationship of human beings with each other. The concept of sociology has emerged lately in the first half of the nineteenth century. Sociologists are working hard to study the concept of religion mainly for two reasons. First, it is of great importance to many people as it directly or indirectly affects an individual's life. People's actions are governed by the way they practice religion. Secondly, religion leaves an influential impact on the society. Therefore it becomes essential to study the interdependence of the society and the religion. The sociology of the religion covers the conflicts and cooperation generated out of practice of the religion in the society. Various sociologists have worked towards understanding the larger society through examining religion and its influence. India is a country where multiplicity of religion is followed and therefore the scope of the study of religion is vast, but other countries provide their contribution to make this study successful. Different theories have been developed to understand the interdependence of the society and the religion.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

THE SCOPE OF RELIGION

Religion is a significant aspect of social life, and the social dimension is an important part of religion. Religion is practiced both in the literate and illiterate society. Different modes of practicing religion include

hymns and poetic expressions, which was followed mainly to make it more attractive and easy to remember. Different languages, gestures and idioms are used to celebrate various aspects of religion. References were made from nature like sun, moon, and fire and from different animals like crow, eagle, snake, lion, deer, etc. to make connections with religion. Also river like Ganga and hills and mountains like Kailash Parvat became a part of this tradition. As mentioned earlier, to make religion more attractive and easy to remember, different songs and stories were developed to make people understand the difference between good and evil and gentleness and cruelty. Stories and chapters of religion are described in various forms in the schools so that the concept of religion and the ways of practicing it can be passed on from one generation to another.

Numbers of institutions are working hard to develop different languages, styles and expressions to pass on the concept of religion. Therefore this group solidarity and the participation of society in collective activities are helping a lot to the sociologists to understand the relation of the society and the religion.

PROCESS OF KNOWLEDGE

With the increasing division of labour and specialisation, the process of knowledge also developed Religion, its teachings and practices have become a specialised activity. Scientific development led to the growth of the study of religion. The thrust for knowledge of religion led the man discover the new sources of knowledge beyond the original ones like seminars and

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institutions. Scientific growth got a fresh start with a series of discoveries by various scientists. Assertion of ideas and growth of specialisation and religious theories encompassed knowledge.

STUDY OF TOTEMS

An important strand of classical sociology of religion has a prophetic ring. Number of theorists made their contribution in sociology of religion as a part of the larger examination of the nature of modern society. One of the theorists, Emile Durkheim observed that a tribal group of Australia was relating the religion to the spirits of plants and animals. This group was totemic in nature i.e. they were respecting the totem animal and were organising functions in its honour by painting their faces and bodies, by dancing and by celebrating a public function in their honour.

The belief in the common totem brought a sense of belonging in the group. Durkheim observed solidarity in the group and could smell an essence a religion in the group. The belief in the religion was simple and pure amongst the group. After all these observations Durkheim concluded that it is not necessary to have God as an important element of religion. Durkheim said that religion was the soul of the society. With the development in science, number of schools and universities opened up to understand the scope of religion.

A totem is a stipulated ancestor of a group of people, such as a family, clan, lineage, or tribe.

Totems support larger groups than the individual person. In kinship and descent, if the apical ancestor of a clan is non-human, it is called a totem. Normally this belief is accompanied by a totemic myth.

In modern times, some single individuals, not otherwise involved in the practice of a tribal religion, have chosen to adopt a personal spirit animal helper, which has special meaning to them, and may refer to this as a totem. This non-traditional usage of the term is prevalent in the New Age movement, and the mytho poetic men's movement.

THE SECULAR APPROACHES

In Germany, people started getting converted into Christianity. Some scholars like Max Weber, Karl Marx and Durkheim also belong to that category. Because of some personal reasons, Durkheim moved to Paris and did not practice any faith. The faith on religion became more significant to him. The defeat of France in the war led to the end of rule of Napoleon-II and the establishment of the third republic in France which was against the interests of the group of monarch, their families, the nobility and the Church. The secular aspect of education was then improved by Durkheim who took

over as professor of education and trained qualified teachers and promoted scientific studies of social phenomena.

Another writer, Merton focused on the life of tribal people as their practices appeared non-rational. He also worked upon finding the functional alternatives for religion and on some aspects of communism.

Some disputes about religion occurred in the society and the resolution of these disputes helped in achieving the common goals of the society and this in turn helped in organising the economy of the society and making best use of the natural resources. Many other writers also worked towards finding the relation of religion with economy, polity and legal arrangements.

ECONOMY AND RELIGION

Economy and Religion are interrelated in the following two ways:

- When a person gets connected with the material welfare, it leads to lack of interest in the matters that the religion seem to promote. Religion in that case act as a hinderance to the path of growth. In some religions like Islam, the idea of making gifts forbids taking interests on loan but allows profit sharing. These ideas are not conducive to the growth of capital and its results.
- Second view states that when a man gets connected with the religion, it encourages a man to work harder, earn more money, work for a longer duration, save the earned money and convert it into capital. Therefore the hard earned money provide the pleasures in this world and this life itself.

During the 19th century the protestants experimented in the field of Technology and science and Catholics were satisfied in the field of humanities and art. According to Max Weber such attitudes paved the way towards development.

THE RISE OF CAPITALISM

Some famous economists like Marx and Weber focused on the rise of capitalism. Marx made a distinction between the basic structure and super structure of society. According to Marx, religion is not responsible for guiding rational human activity, whereas according to Max Weber, human efforts in the rational organisation of economy are mainly governed by a particular form of religion.

The word capitalism is now quite commonly used to describe the social system in which we now live. It is also often assumed that it has existed, if not forever, then for most of human history. In fact, capitalism is a relatively new social system.

But what exactly does 'capitalism' mean?

Class division

Capitalism is the social system which now exists in all countries of the world. Under this system, the means for producing and distributing goods (the land, factories, technology, transport system etc.) are owned by a small minority of people. We refer to this group of people as the capitalist class. The majority of people must sell their ability to work in return for a wage or salary (who we refer to as the working class).

The working class are paid to produce goods and services which are then sold for a profit. The profit is gained by the capitalist class because they can make more money selling what we have produced than we cost to buy on the labour market. In this sense, the working class are exploited by the capitalist class. The capitalists live off the profits they obtain from exploiting the working class whilst reinvesting some of their profits for the further accumulation of wealth.

This is what we mean when we say there are two classes in society. It is a claim based upon simple facts about the society we live in today. This class division is the essential feature of capitalism. It may be popular to talk (usually vaguely) about various other 'classes' existing such as the 'middle class', but it is the two classes defined here that are the key to understanding capitalism.

It may not be exactly clear which class some relatively wealthy people are in. But there is no ambiguity about the status of the vast majority of the world's population. Members of the capitalist class certainly know who they are. And most members of the working class know that they need to work for a wage or salary in order to earn a living (or are dependent upon somebody who does, or depend on state benefits).

The profit motive

In capitalism, the motive for producing goods and services is to sell them for a profit, not to satisfy people's needs. The products of capitalist production have to find a buyer, of course, but this is only incidental to the main aim of making a profit, of ending up with more money than was originally invested. This is not a theory that we have thought up but a fact you can easily confirm for yourself by reading the financial press. Production is started not by what consumers are prepared to pay for to satisfy their needs but by what the capitalists calculate can be sold at a profit. Those goods may satisfy human needs but those needs will not be met if people do not have sufficient money.

The profit motive is not just the result of greed on behalf of individual capitalists. They do not have a choice about it. The need to make a profit is imposed on capitalists as a condition for not losing their

investments and their position as capitalists. Competition with other capitalists forces them to reinvest as much of their profits as they can afford to keep their means and methods of production up to date.

As you will see, we hold that it is the class division and profit motive of capitalism that is at the root of most of the world's problems today, from starvation to war, to alienation and crime. Every aspect of our lives is subordinated to the worst excesses of the drive to make profit. In capitalist society, our real needs will only ever come a poor second to the requirements of profit.

It is widely assumed that capitalism means a free market economy. But it is possible to have capitalism without a free market. The systems that existed in the U.S.S.R. and exist in China and Cuba demonstrate this. These class-divided societies are widely called 'socialist'. A cursory glance at what in fact existed there reveals that these countries were simply 'state capitalist'. In supposedly 'socialist' Russia, for example, there still existed wage slavery, commodity production, buying, selling and exchange, with production only taking place when it was viable to do so. 'Socialist' Russia continued to trade according to the dictates of international capital and, like every other capitalist, state, was prepared to go to war to defend its economic interests. The role of the Soviet state became simply to act as the functionary of capital in the exploitation of wage labour, setting targets for production and largely controlling what could or could not be produced. We therefore feel justified in asserting that such countries had nothing to do with socialism as we define it. In fact, socialism as we define it could not exist in one country alone-like capitalism it must be a global system of society.

It is also possible (at least in theory) to have a free market economy that is not capitalist. Such a 'market economy' would involve farmers, artisans and shopkeepers each producing a particular product that they would exchange via the medium of money. There would be no profit-making and no class division-just independent producers exchanging goods for their mutual benefit. But it is doubtful whether such an economy has ever existed. The nearest that may have come to it would have been in some of the early colonial settlements in North America. Some Greens wish to see a return to this kind of economy. We do not think that it is a viable alternative for modern society. Such a system would almost inevitably lead to capital accumulation and profit making-the definitive features of capitalism.

GODS AND GODDESSES

Gods and Goddesses have been depicted by many Indian Sociologists in different ways. Raja Ravi Verma of Thiruvananthpur depicted the images of different Gods

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like *Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva, Ganpati, Gouri, Kali*, etc. through oil colored paintings. Gods and Goddesses were depicted in various dignified postures. Some of the prints depicted the scenes from the epic stories. The pictures like *Krishna* dancing scenes of Heaven and Hell, etc. were used by the people during festivals for sacred purposes.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNTS

Sociologists attempted in numerous ways to study the details of epics like *Mahabharata*. One such study by Srinivas was named as 'Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India'. In this study various social groups like family, caste and village, their ceremonies and festivals were covered. The process of Sanskritisation of rituals and behaviour was adopted by lower group and the contextual references defined the practices adopted by priests. According to Srinivas, these medium of studies were adopted by lower groups to remain connected to pure activities and discard the impure ones.

Marriott introduced the concept universalisation to the process through which religion gets wider acceptance which incorporated greater civilisation. According to Poet Tulsidas, the subject refers to a classical combination according to the prescribed procedure.

Different groups are classified on the basis of festivals and duties. These are:

- The All India
- Peninsular or Regional
- The Local Spread

Some famous institutions and centres have gained people's attention. These are:

- Sai Baba
- Vaishno Devi
- Santoshi Mata
- Society for Krishna Consciousness
- Gayatri Peeth

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Q. 1. Do you think that complex religious like Hinduism have any place for totemic thinking?

Ans. In India, cows were treated as gods by the worship of this special status does have its historical evolution, its evolution with the Hindu in India is closely related to the status of the ups and downs; Not only that, the Indians love animal behaviour in human society There is also the history of the development track to

test, and its relationship with the primitive religion is not taboo random slaughter of animals are similar. By comparison with the original animal totems, you can see the idol worship of animals across time and space, it does not with the evolution of modern civilization and the development of market economy disappear, in today's society there are still a stage of its activities. After all, a few million years, animals and people to coexist in a planet, the future should also be the case, how humans and animals live in harmony this topic worth thinking about.

The totemic thinking of tribal groups is related to the spirits of plants and animals. Those who believe in totemism would respect totem animal, will not harm it, organize functions by painting their faces and bodies.

Hinduism on the other hand is a complex religion with its own set of myths and rules. Hinduism also believes in not harming an animal or plant. Totemic thinking is a belief of a primitive society and of the tribes who were illiterate.

Q. 2. Do many Gods and Goddesses indicate that the religion is polytheistic not monotheistic?

Ans. Hinduism is a decidedly theistic religion; the difficulty lies in determining whether it is a polytheistic, pantheistic, or perhaps even monotheistic religion. It should be noted at the outset, however, that this is chiefly a western difficulty: the Indian mind is much more inclined to regard divergent views as complementary rather than competing. The Hindu Gods Shiva, Parvati and Ganesh.

Supporting a view of Hinduism as a polytheistic religion is the great pantheon of Hindu gods. The oldest and most sacred texts, the Vedas, are chiefly concerned with mythologies and rituals related to a number of deities, most of which are identified with aspects of the natural world. The gods of modern Hinduism include the chief gods Shiva, Vishnu and the Mother Goddess Shakti as well as a myriad of local community Gods.

Some eastern religions, notably Vaishava, Saiva, Sikhism, and some Hindu sects, tend to promote the omnipotence of one particular god within the pantheon, and thus display some monotheistic characteristics. Monotheism arose in opposition to polytheism, the belief in many gods. Monism, or non-dualism between the physical and the spiritual, presupposes unity but deemphasizes personal monotheism.

