

BLOCK 1

The question of the origin of religion, perhaps, is as old as the question of the origin of human itself. The human mind by its very nature is reflective, no matter how undeveloped it might be. In the cultures of India and Greece matters of religion have been well-debated since the beginning of their history. The Upanishads and other literatures testify to this fact. Although a philosophical discussion on this notion is a later one, religion had its place in human life in its primitive and unorganized form. Etymologically, the word 'religion' is derived from the Latin root *religare* and it means 'to bind fast'. Then 'religion' has certainly a strong emphasis on community aspect. It is something that binds fast the members of religion together. But a general definition, which is accepted by all, is very difficult and involves a series of problems. Religion as a whole is looked at from various angles like: Historical, Psychological, Sociological, Ethical and Aesthetical perspectives.

This block, consisting of four units, will deliberate on the nature, the definition of religion and the theories that are put forward for the origin of religion.

Unit 1 studies the Meaning and Nature of Religion. The question of religion is a very complex one. Hence in this unit we will be looking at the etymological meaning and then at different meanings that are connoted by the term religion. The various stages of the development of religion are discussed.

Unit 2 studies the Problem of Defining Religion. Religion in recent times is undergoing change in its definition and meaning and therefore it is difficult to define it. This unit will look at some of the scholarly definitions put forward by theologians, sociologists, philosophers, Anthropologists and psychologists. Finally, we perceive the various paradoxes, complexities or problems that are involved in the definitions

Unit 3 looks at some of the Theories of the Origin of Religion from the secular world. This unit looks at the views given by Ernst Haeckel, anthropological origin of religion of Edward Burnett Tylor, James George Frazer and Salomon Reinach, views of Sigmund Freud and James Henry Leuba on religion and sociologist Emile Durkheim.

Unit 4 familiarizes us with the Theories of the Origin of Religion from the point of view of growing religious consciousness. Despite secularism that has influenced many people religious thought continues to be vigorous. In this unit we will know the growth of religious consciousness in the primitive age, the experience of the Holy and certain critical views.

The understanding and meaning of religion is a complex task faced by many scholars even to this day. But the phenomena continue to hover over most people. The ambiguity and plurality of views proposed on the origin of religion makes religion a much more complex phenomena.

BPYE-001 PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

COURSE INTRODUCTION (CREDITS 4)

One of the relevant fields of philosophy is “Philosophy of Religion.” It is the philosophical thinking *about* religion. In this sense, it differs from religious philosophy, which is the philosophical thinking that is inspired and directed by religion, such as Christian philosophy and Islamic philosophy. Its scope is not merely limited to questions related to the existence of God, but goes beyond all this and deals even with questions like, ‘Who is the God that one believes in?’, ‘What is the God that I believe like?’, and so on. The whole thrust of this discipline is looking at religion from a philosophical point of view, going into the rationality of religion. Philosophy of religion explores some social and personal practices as well. A vast number of people are affected in some way by the phenomenon of religion. Philosophy of religion, therefore, is existentially relevant; its subject matter is not all abstract theory. It has to do with our everyday practices in which we involve ourselves.

This Course consists of four blocks further subdivided into sixteen units.

Block 1 introduces the course that we are going to pursue by looking into the nature, the problems involved in defining religion and the various theories that are proposed regarding the origin of religion.

Block 2 deals with problems that arise when we affirm the existence of God like the problem of atheism and theism, various arguments that affirm the existence of God and finally study the reflections on the nature of God that one believes in.

Block 3 studies the role of language, the various ways that we express our belief or disbelief in God and our religious experience.

Block 4 familiarizes us with the modern trends in philosophy of religion like the plurality of religions, fundamentalism in religion and the inter-religious dialogue.

These units will clarify the notion of religion from a philosophical or critical perspective and in a way it may allow us to give a rational explanation to one’s religious stance.

UNIT 1 MEANING AND NATURE OF RELIGION

Contents

- 1.1. Objectives
- 1.2. Introduction
- 1.3. Meaning of Religion
- 1.4. Nature of Religion
- 1.5. Developmental Stages of Religion
- 1.6. Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7. Key Words
- 1.8. Further Readings and References
- 1.9. Answers to Check Your Progress

1.1. OBJECTIVES

In this paper we try to understand the very meaning of religion leaving the discussions on definitions and the theories of the origin of religion since those are the topics of the subsequent units. However, meaning and nature cannot be dealt-with without touching both those topics as well. So, we will refer to them without going into the details of them. After going through the **etymological meaning** of the word, we will make a search into the **different meanings** of religion from the background of various disciplines like phenomenology, sociology, psychology etc. Thereafter, we will look into the **nature** and **developing stages** of religions.

1.2. INTRODUCTION

What is religion? A very complex question! We know religion and we live religion. But, how do we explain or define religion? Religion is one of the most sensitive and vulnerable aspects of human life from the very beginning. Though it looks simple, it is not a simple reality to be easily defined or explained. There are many theories proposed regarding the origin of religion as a result of the development of speculative, intellectual and scientific mind. However, in spite of the differences in the understanding of this important element, it is confirmed that it is purely a human activity and it has become an inevitable aspect of human life. In the West, under the

influence of the inherited tradition of Judeo-Christian tradition, religion was understood more theistically while in the East, it was mostly a respond to the experience of the natural powers that are beyond human control and also the inner urge for an ethical and moral reference.

1.3. MEANING OF RELIGION

Etymologically, the word 'religion' is derived from the Latin root *religare* and it means 'to bind fast'. Then 'religion' has certainly a strong emphasis on community aspect. It is something that binds fast the members of it together.

When we start thinking seriously on religion, naturally we fall upon thoughts of the definition of religion. There are numberless definitions of religion. The meaning and definition of religion differs according to the socio-cultural and psychological background of the person who reflects upon it. Even the political settings insert its influence on the understanding of the meaning of religion. Some of the definitions are *phenomenological* and try to expose the common elements that we see in the acknowledged world religions. For example, the human recognition of a superhuman power entitled to obedience and worship. Some others are *interpretative* definitions. Under this we may group the *psychological* definitions – the feelings, acts and experiences of the individual men in so far as they consider themselves to stand in relations to what they may call the divine; *sociological* definitions – a set of beliefs, practices and institutions which men have evolved in various societies; *naturalistic* definitions – a body of scruples which impede the free exercise of our faculties; and *religious* definitions – religion is the recognition that everything in the world is the manifestation of a power that is beyond human intellect.

None of these definitions, nevertheless, are complete and exhaustive. The word religion is not an exclusive word rather it is inclusive. It includes manifold elements and aspects of life like beliefs, feelings, experiences, values, symbols, worship, rituals, festivals, cult and cultures, myth and mythology.

Studying the primitive religion, the anthropologist Sir E.B. Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture* gives a short definition of religion where he understands religion as "the belief in spiritual beings." There are many objections raised against such understanding of religion on the basis of its incompleteness. The critics argue that 'besides belief, practice also must be emphasised.

Another objection is that the faith and believes and the practices are not always towards spiritual beings. Or else, our scope of belief must be extended and widened to include even 'nothing'. However, there are also positive side in looking at religion from that perspective. It makes very clear about the religious attitude of the believers and also the object to which the believers refer to. According to another anthropologist Sir J.G. Frazer, as presented in his book *the Golden Bough*, religion is a 'propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life. This shows that powers referred to in this context are always of superior nature (superior to man). To cope with this supra-human powers, ancient religion made use of magic, sorcery, taboos, myth and mythological stories and so on.

1.4. NATURE OF RELIGION

The Primitive Forms of Religions

The religion is often spoken in relation to something sacred. There is no religion without having such a notion. Now the various aspects/concepts used to express the general characteristics of this 'sacred' in the primitive religion were very simple. The notions like 'unseen', 'unknown', 'infinite' 'immanence and transcendence' etc. are notions of advanced theology. The ancient notions used are rather quasi-negative. Scholars trace the following general characteristics of the 'sacred' which may explain the nature of it in the primitive thought.

i) *The sacred as the forbidden*: Polynesian term taboo in the primitive religion could be one that comes close and conveys the sense of 'sacred' – *scer* and *sanctus*. This point to the idea that something is 'marked off' as to be shunned. Thus enforced a sense of mystic sanction or penalty if avoided. Because of this aspect of sanction and punishment added, taboo comes to stand for un-cleanliness and sin on the one hand, and while it can also be interpreted as means of self protection on the part of the sacred against defying contact on the other hand.

ii) *The sacred as the mysterious*: This is another quasi-negative notion regarding the sacred. What was strange and new was treated in the primitive time as sacred having non-normal nature.

We cannot say it as abnormal rather it was non-normal nature. It was indeed a mystery, something beyond the human grasp, human understanding and control.

iii) *The sacred as the secret*: The sacred was understood having a mystic and mysterious power and therefore, it was something secret. This sense of secret was emphasised and projected strongly through the insistence of exoticism, initiation, exclusion of women etc. from the religious moments of rites and rituals.

iv) *The sacred as potent*: Perhaps one of the positive and most fundamental conception of the sacred is that the efficacy of the sacredness is identified with the magical and mystical power attributed to it. Everything is understood as having an indwelling potency, but whatever is sacred manifests this potency in an extra-ordinary degree.

v) *The sacred as the animate*: There are lots of evidences to show that the primitive gods were conceived as personified anthropomorphic characters dwelling somewhere apart.

vi) *The sacred as ancient*: another element found in the primitive religion is the practice of ancestor worship – the organized cult of ancestors marking a stage of development in the primitive way of thinking. The ancestor worship is found even in religions that are purely ethical like the Chinese primitive religions.

Higher Forms of Religion

The higher forms of religions have developed on a pre-existing basis through a process of selection and development. Certainly it must have been in response to the demands of modern advanced thinking, need of better expressions, harmony between past and present experiences; and also to reach a position which shall satisfy the demands of feeling and reflexion and give confidence for facing the future challenges. The motive forces that urged for a better presentation of religion could be:-

- i) The rapid progress on scientific knowledge and thought;
- ii) Changes in the Social order of man;
- iii) The enriched forms of ideas and expressions;
- iv) The deeper intellectual interest in the subject; and
- v) The modern tendencies to avoid superstitions and to substitute it with more rational and scientific thoughts

The higher forms of religions discuss reality in terms of transcendence, oneness, supremacy and absoluteness, and also about the ethical schemes in relation to social unity and harmony, justice, human destiny, human freedom, etc.

Ethical element is of fundamental importance in determining the quality of a religion. It is a powerful factor in elevating the object of worship, the religious relation, and the religious life. Another important aspect that the religion is concerned is the problem of eschatology. It is related to the ultimate destiny of man and the world. Eschatological motives may powerfully affect the working of religion. In the primitive religions, the eschatological ideas gather round the fate of the dead, and are unenlivened by ethical elements while in the higher religions, it was accelerated by the quickened moral consciousness and the sense of the value of the individual. The very often accepted world religions are Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Sikhism.

In history we see that there were different approaches to God and religion. From the negative perspective, we see the trend of *atheism*. It is the belief that there is no God of any kind. Another trend is *agnosticism* which literally means 'not-knowism'. That means, we are not able to affirm or deny the existence of God. This trend argues that our intellect is incapable of knowing God and making any kind of judgement on God. Still another stand is *scepticism*. This approach simply means doubting. That means, we cannot have certainty about anything, not even on material things. Then, of course, we cannot speak with surety about metaphysical and abstract realities. There is still another perspective, that is, *naturalism*. According to this theory, every aspect of human existence and experience including moral and religious life could be properly and adequately explained in terms of nature.

Coming to the positive approaches to God and religion, *deism* can refer to the trend of thought according to which this universe was created and set on motion by a God and left it alone to operate. The deists teach that natural theology is enough to explain the religious matters. Finally, perhaps not the last, the common stand, that is *theism*. Theism refers to a particular doctrine concerning the nature of a God and his relationship to the universe. It conceives of a God as personal and active in the governance and organization of the world and the universe.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What is the meaning of religion?

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2) What are the various ways of defining religion?

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1.5. DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF RELIGION

As we discuss on religion and its stages of development, certainly it is necessary to look at the beginnings of the thought. As it is mentioned already, transition to higher forms of religion was inevitable in the rapidly changing social situations. There was urgency for man to reconsider current and inherited beliefs and practices to gain some harmony between past and the present experiences. As a result we see the developments from the very basic worship patterns of the primitive man to that of the present age. The developmental stages of the evolution of religion could be enumerated as Totemism, Animism, Pantheism, Polytheism, Monotheism, Monism.

The terms of totemism and animism are used to explain the set of religious beliefs of the lower caste. The essential feature of **totemism** is the belief in a supernatural connection between a group of people and a group of objects like certain animal species, sometimes plants, or more rarely other objects. Usually there is a taboo on killing or eating an animal totem. In totemism we find that plant species may be totems just as animal species or rocks are. **Animism** denotes the collection of beliefs possessed by the Dravidian tribes who have not even nominally been admitted to the caste system. The general nature of animism may perhaps be explained as the belief that everything which has life or motion has also a soul or spirit, and all natural phenomena are caused by direct personal agency.

The theistic tradition recognizes and accepts the existence of God, more specifically a personal God. Therefore, theism is often understood as synonym for monotheism. It is a belief in a personal god. **Pantheism** is 'God-is-all-ism'. According to this view all is God and God is all. God is identical with the world and nature. In other words, God and universe are one. God is not a reality separate from the world and remote from it. The particular individual objects have no absolute existence of their own, rather they are either the different modes of the universal substance or parts of the divine whole. **Polytheism**, according to the German Sociologist Max Müller, was the form of worship of God during the ancient times. Polytheism is the stage of development in the religious thought when the belief in and worship of many individual Gods existed. Indeed, it was the result of the anthropomorphic personification of the natural powers that was beyond the control of human. In other words, such natural powers were personified and attributed to them of the human powers and qualities but with maximum nature. The socio-political and cultural conditions and circumstances affected the forms assumed by the beliefs and worships of these many Gods. **Monotheism** is the beginning of believing in one Supreme God even in the polytheistic situation. In the monotheistic tradition we see that there is a demand to abandon many older beliefs, hopes, fears and customs relating to many gods. Even though they have the concept of many gods, they believe in one Supreme God and other gods are only subordinate. Or they believed, as Max Müller observes, that the multiple gods are only the manifestations of the one supreme. **Monism** is the belief in one reality. The word was coined by Christian Wolf in the west though it was existed from the ancient times.

1.6. LET US SUM UP

Religion being an undeniable aspect of human life, any study on human life will remain half done if this particular aspect is not taken into consideration. Religion is being studied from different perspectives and it could be investigated from Sociological, Anthropological, Phenomenological, Philosophical, Ethical and Aesthetical perspectives. Today there is an added scope, that is, the field of comparative religion. It is an urgent need and demand of the present world community to promote mutual, mature and unprejudiced understanding of others and their religiousness.

We are living in a postmodern world. And our world is becoming a global village in every aspect. So, none can live in an isolated world of one's own. This postmodern existential predicament in a way compels every person to learn more about oneself and also about others. It will certainly enhance one's life and it will certainly facilitate the peaceful co-existence of human as a whole, promote mature and unprejudiced relations, and without doubt, it will help everyone develop an integral vision of life and to work for the welfare of the whole world.

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) Which are the developmental stages of the evolution of religion?

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2) Why is the study of religion, especially the comparative study of religion relevant and urgently needed today?

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1.7. KEY WORDS

Atheism – it is the belief that there is no God of any kind.

Agnosticism – it means ‘not-knowism’ which implies that we are not able to affirm or deny the existence of God.

Scepticism – it means doubting. That means, we cannot have certainty about anything, either of material or of spiritual things.

Naturalism – it means every aspect of human existence and experience including moral and religious life could be properly and adequately explained in terms of nature.

Deism – it means this universe was created and set on motion by a God and left it alone to operate.

Totemism – it is the belief in a supernatural connection between a group of people and a group of objects like certain animal species, sometimes plants, or more rarely other objects.

Animism – it the belief that everything which has life or motion has also a soul or spirit, and all natural phenomena are caused by direct personal agency.

Pantheism – it is ‘God-is-all-ism’, which all is God and God is all and God is not a reality separate from the world and remote from it.

Polytheism – it is the belief in and worship of many individual Gods.

Monotheism - it is belief in one Supreme God and considers other gods as subordinate.

Monism – it is the belief in the existence of only one reality.

1.8. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.9. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The word 'religion' is derived from the Latin root *religare* and it means 'to bind fast'. Then 'religion' has certainly a strong emphasis on community aspect. It is something that binds fast the members of it together. What we call religion is very complex and inclusive. It includes manifold elements and aspects of life like beliefs, feelings, experiences, values, symbols, worship, rituals, festivals, cult and cultures, myth and mythology.
2. The different ways of defining religion are *phenomenological, psychological, sociological, naturalistic, and religious*.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The developmental stages of the evolution of religion are - ***Totemism, Animism, Pantheism, Polytheism, Monotheism, Monism.***

2. The postmodern world in which we live is becoming a global village in every aspect. At the same time we encounter elements of social unrest and atrocities on the basis of religion in every part of the world. It is due to the fanatic thoughts that creep into the mind of people due to sheer ignorance about the true teachings of both one's own religion and of other religions. This compels every person to learn more about oneself and also about others. And the study of religions both of one's own and of others will certainly enhance one's life and it will certainly facilitate the peaceful co-existence of human as a whole, promote mature and unprejudiced relations, and without doubt, it will help everyone develop an integral vision of life and to work for the welfare of the whole world. Hence it is relevant and much needed in the modern world.



UNIT 2 PROBLEMS OF DEFINING RELIGION

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Etymology
- 2.3 Definitions of the word Religion
- 2.4 Problems of Defining Religion
- 2.5 Complexities in the Definitions of Religion
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Key Words
- 2.8 Further Readings and References
- 2.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In a multi-ethnic and philosophically diverse global culture not only religion is undergoing radical changes but also its very meanings and definitions. Therefore the main objective of this unit is to show to students the series of problems that are present in defining religion. In order to do that we will first look at what religion is, its etymological meanings and scholarly definitions of theologians, philosophers, socialists, anthropologist and psychologist. Then we will also briefly discuss the various problems and complexities that are present in these definitions and finally with a comprehensive conclusion. thus it will enable a student ...

- To know the essence of religion
- To understand its evolutions in the Branches of philosophy
- To see the various paradoxes, complexities or problems that are involved in the definitions
- To have comprehensive outlook towards meaning and definition of religion

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Religion has continued to play a vital role in the lives of individuals worldwide. Its hold remains as strong as ever among both the under-privileged, as well as the economically and intellectually advanced people. We do well remember that the last but previous American presidential election was also fought on religion, more precisely on Christian religious sentiments and convictions. In Japan in spite of the apparent materialistic culture with the bullet trains, camera cell-phones and pocket-sized supercomputers, it is recognizable that there co-exists a thoroughly deified conception of nature. In America, for example, church attendance has remained relatively stable in the past 40 years. In Africa the emergence of Christianity has occurred at a startling rate. While Africa could claim roughly 10 million Christians in 1900, recent estimates put that number closer to 200 million. The rise of Islam as a major world religion, especially its new-found influence in the West, is another significant development. The day-by-day additions of commoners and the celebrities to Buddhism, the increasing influence of the 'gurus' and yoga-centres, speak of the vitality of Buddhism and Hinduism beyond Asia. Unfortunately, the only exception to the renewed religious vitality seems to be the Western Europe. (For in Europe 13% of the people declare that they have no religion, 5% are militantly anti-religious, and a much larger percentage than the mentioned here are indifferent to religion although officially said to be belonging to the church). But it cannot refute the spirit of the vitality of religion that is seen today. The question of our discussion here is not over the religious vitality but over the very concept or definition of religion. Does the definition of religion bring us to the whole truth of what religion is? Or what are the problems and complexities that are seriously concerned in defining religion? It would be impossible for one to enter into this realm without going to the etymological meanings and the various scholarly definitions of religion.

2.2 ETYMOLOGY

The etymology of the English word '*religion*' is said to have possibly emerged from its root '*religio*' in Latin; '*Religio*' literally means obligation, bond or reverence. It is also said to be connected with the other following Latin terms: *religare*, *relegere*, *relinquere*. The original '*re-ligare*' would mean - to bind back, to tie tight/again and it indicates "a bond between man and the gods"; '*re-legere*' - to read again, or to remove/reduce, (say for example doubts) may express "the scrupulous attention to all the signs and manifestations (omens) of invisible powers shown

in the early Roman religion”; and ‘*re-linquere*’ (to leave again/fully, to give up fully) might mean the monastic life or the aspect of surrender, dependence, and faith expressed in religious worship/life. But it is to the term (*religare*) that the etymology of the word religion is often connected with perhaps to emphasize the ritualistic nature of religion.

Some scholars like Jonathan Z. Smith argue that religion doesn’t really exist — there is only culture. He in his book *Imagining Religion* writes: “while there is a staggering amount of data, phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religion — there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no existence apart from the academy.”

It is true that many societies do not draw a clear line between their culture and what scholars would call “religion.” This does not mean that religion doesn’t exist. Religion does exist, for it is claimed that no human society has ever existed without religion, and would probably never exist without it, and that the aesthetic experience in modernity is nothing but “the secularized rest of and substitute for” an original religious experience. Rudolf Brandner also implies that religion, being fundamental to human existence, will always exist in the human society in spite of all the scientific-technological progress. But in defining the word religion/what religion is one may be fraught with difficult. Why there are difficulties in defining religion. What are problems and complexities that are involved in defining them should be our serious concern. To enter into this reality one needs to study the various definitions and descriptions of religion.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What is the etymology of the word religion?

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2) Existence of religion becomes important why?
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2.3 DEFINITIONS OF THE WORD “RELIGION”

"Religion" is a difficult word to define. This commonly used word seems to have arrived at entire ambiguity in modern times, apparently reflecting the multi-ethnic and philosophically diverse global culture that we currently find ourselves in. Therefore the task of definition finds itself in troubled times, having feet planted firmly in mid-air. Yet this word is not without reference or meaning, and is employed quite often in every day conversation. When we speak of "a Religion", we are using the term to classify something, and when we speak of "the Religious", we are seeking to capture those with some distinguishable characteristics. So what do we actually mean when we use the word "Religion"? Or better put: "How do we define Religion?" This leads us to back to where we started: the task of definition.

DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS

Dictionaries have made many attempts to define the word *religion*:
The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990): defines religion as “Human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience”

Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary: "Religion - belief in the existence of god or gods who has / have created the universe and given man a spiritual nature which continues to exist after the death of the body... particular, system of faith and worship based on such a belief...controlling influence on one life; something one is devoted or committed to."

Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary: “a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith."

Webster's New World Dictionary (Third College Edition): says "any specific system of belief and worship, often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy" is religion. This definition would exclude religions that do not engage in worship. It implies that there are two important components to religion.

One's belief and worship in a deity or deities. One's ethical behavior towards other persons. This dual nature of religion is expressed clearly in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) in Matthew 22:36-39:

"Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with thy entire mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Wikipedia defines religion as: "... a system of social coherence based on a common group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, traditions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought."

The Encyclopedia of Philosophy: lists the traits of religions as:

- Belief in supernatural beings (gods).
- A distinction between sacred and profane objects.
- Ritual acts focused on sacred objects.
- A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods.
- Characteristically religious feelings (awe, sense of mystery, sense of guilt, adoration), which tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects and during the practice of ritual, and which are connected in idea with the gods.
- Prayer and other forms of communication with gods.
- A worldview or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein. This picture contains some specification of an over-all purpose or point of the world and an indication of how the individual fits into it.
- A more or less total organization of one's life based on the worldview.
- A social group bound together by the above.

This definition captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures.

SOME SCHOLARLY DEFINITIONS THEOLOGIAN'S ON RELIGION

The famous author **William James** in his book "Religious Experience" gives a famous tentative definition of personal religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine". Through this he gives prime emphasis to the personal dimension of religion. He further states "... the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves there to."

For **Schleiermacher** the *sine qua non* of religion was experience; a vibrant, deep, and transcendent feeling of the divine which caused him to define religion as "absolute dependence". This feeling of dependence is what Schleiermacher sees in all of the world religions as the tremendous sensation invoked at the thought of standing before what is Supreme in the universe. This experiential definition finds a central place in Schleiermacher's religion. The most appealing thought about his definition is that it captures the meaning and purpose conveyed through religious experience. To stand beneath and up against the Ultimate is to find one's self shadowed by its presence, and this experience creates an ardent sense of meaning in discovering where it is that you stand and who it is that you are.

Apart from this pragmatic and existential ways of defining religion some prominent **theologians'** have defined religion in terms of God's mystery, power, transcendence, majesty, and wonder, and religion as the response to these concepts. Such prominent theologians are Augustine, John Calvin, Karl Barth Rudolf Otto etc. But I would like to state the most famous and often quoted definition of religion of **Rudolf Otto**. He defines religion in terms of "the Holy" (*heilige*), that is, the mysterious dread and wonder conveyed by the idea of the Ultimate. "The Holy" to Otto is a way in which we understand the aesthetic elements within religion, which emphasize beauty, truth, and goodness. This category of interpretation stresses the great wonder and awe brought about through religion, as well as the earnest moral desire to know and do the good. The another word that Otto coined to categorize and understand religion is called the *numinous*. The *numinous*, refers to an intangible, unseen, but compelling reality that inspires both fascination and dread". For Otto, the *numinous* is a lens through which we can understand

the irrational aspects of religion, for the tremendous mystery (*mysterium tremendum*) of reality is beyond us and therefore cannot be truly understood in rational categories of thought.

The another great historian, novelist, theologian and philosopher **Mircea Eliade** in his “The Sacred and the Profane” partially builds on Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* to show how religion emerges from the experience of the sacred, and myths of time and nature. His understanding of religion centers on his concept of hierophany (manifestation of the Sacred) —a concept that includes, but is not limited to, the older and more restrictive concept of theophany (manifestation of a God). From the perspective of religious thought, Eliade argues, hierophanies give structure and orientation to the world, establishing a sacred order. The "profane" space of nonreligious experience can only be divided up geometrically: it has no "qualitative differentiation and, hence, no orientation [is] given by virtue of its inherent structure".

Thus, profane space gives man no pattern for his behavior. In contrast to profane space, the site of a hierophany has a sacred structure to which religious man conforms himself. A hierophany amounts to a "revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the non-reality of the vast surrounding expanse". As an example of "sacred space" demanding a certain response from man, Eliade gives the story of Moses halting before Yahweh's manifestation at the burning bush (Exodus 3: 5) and taking off his shoes. He says religious behavior is not only an imitation of, but also a participation in, sacred events, and thus restores the mythical time of origins. Eliade argues that religious thought in general rests on a sharp distinction between the Sacred and the profane; whether it takes the form of God, gods, or mythical Ancestors, the Sacred contains all "reality", or value, and other things acquire "reality" only to the extent that they participate in the sacred.

Paul Connelly another theologian defines religion in terms of the sacred and the spiritual. He says, "Religion originates in an attempt to represent and order beliefs, feelings, imaginings and actions that arise in response to direct experience of the sacred and the spiritual. As this attempt expands in its formulation and elaboration, it becomes a process that creates meaning for itself on a sustaining basis, in terms of both its originating experiences and its own continuing responses."

He defines the sacred as: "The sacred as a mysterious manifestation of power and presence that is experienced as both primordial and transformative, inspiring awe and rapt attention. And the spiritual as" a perception of the commonality of mindfulness in the world that shifts the boundaries between self and other, producing a sense of the union of purposes of self and other in confronting the existential questions of life, and providing a mediation of the challenge-response interaction between self and other, one and many, that underlies existential questions."

Another famous protestant theologian **Paul Tillich** says - Religion is not a special function of human spiritual life, but it is the dimension of depth in all of its functions... Religion is ultimate concern." God, he says, is human's ultimate concern. The divine is a matter of passion and interest for human being, avoidable only by being completely indifferent. What follows in this definition of religion is that worldviews such as Atheism, Agnosticism, Secular Humanism, Scientism, and Buddhism can be thoroughly held to be religions. This broad definition focuses more on the subject, or the one who believes, then on the actual content or propositional doctrine that is adhered to.

PHILOSOPHERS ON RELIGION

Kant who brought in a Copernican revolution in the modern philosophy, while discussing on concept of God do not focus primarily upon on what *religious* content and function this concept may have for humans and their activity — e.g., how God may be an object of worship etc., Their focus is more upon properly locating the concept of God within a systematically ordered set of basic philosophical principles that account for the order and structure of world. External ritual, superstition and hierarchical church order he sees all of these as efforts to make oneself pleasing to God in ways other than conscientious adherence to the principle of moral rightness in the choice of one's actions. The idea of God for Kant is totally immanent within human moral consciousness .For him religion is more intimately affiliated to the social moral order. Religion is well knit within the ethical commonworld. This linking of morality and religious belief will have positive value for a believer's reflective appropriation and practice of faith.

J. S. Mill, the English philosopher and economist says: "The essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the conditions and desires towards an ideal object recognized as of the highest excellence, and as rightly paramount over all selfish objects of desire."

Hegel defined religion as "the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature as absolute mind."

Alfred North whitehead, the English mathematician and process philosopher defines "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitude. If you are never solitary, you are never religious."

Thomas Paine, American political philosopher at the last moment of his life said: "The world is my country, mankind are my brotherhood and to do good is my religion."

SOCIOLOGIST'S ON RELIGION

The classical, seminal sociological theorists of the late 19th and early 20th century were greatly interested in religion and its effects on society. They attempt to explain the dialectical relationship i.e. The effects of society on religion and the effects of religion on society.

Karl Marx: For, "Marx did not believe in science for science's sake...he believed that he was also advancing a theory that would...be a useful tool...[in] effecting a revolutionary upheaval of the capitalist system in favor of socialism". As such, the crux of his arguments was that humans are best guided by reason. Religion, Marx held, was a significant hindrance to reason, inherently masking the truth and misleading followers. He said, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." It soothes them and dulls their senses to the pain of oppression than for a reform. But later when he proposed an antithesis (freedom as response) to alienation he never suggested that religion ought to be prohibited.

Émile Durkheim: Durkheim, a Frenchman, placed himself in the positivist tradition, meaning that he thought of his study of society as dispassionate and scientific. Religion, he argued, was an expression of social cohesion. In his book 'Elementary Forms Of Religious Life' while studying the anthropological data of indigenous Australians especially the totems the

aborigines venerate he said they are actually expressions of their own conceptions of society itself. This is true not only for the aborigines, he argues, but for all societies. Therefore Religion, for Durkheim, is not "imaginary, Religion is very real; it is an expression of society itself, and indeed, there is no society that does not have religion. We perceive as individuals a force greater than ourselves, which is our social life, and give that perception a supernatural face. Religion is an expression of our collective consciousness, which is the fusion of all of our individual consciousnesses which then creates a reality of its own.

Durkheim's definition of religion, from *Elementary Forms*, is as follows: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." This is a functional definition of religion, meaning that it explains what religion does in social life: essentially, it unites societies.

Max Weber: Weber differed from Marx and Emile Durkheim in that he focused his work on the effects of religious action and inaction. Instead of discussing religion as a kind of misapprehension (an "opiate of the people,") or as social cohesion, Weber did not attempt to reduce religion to its essence. Instead, he examines how religious ideas and groups interacted with other aspects of social life. In doing so, Weber gives religion credit for shaping a person's image of the world, and this image of the world can affect their view of their interests, and ultimately how they decide to take action.

For Weber, religion is best understood as it responds to the human need for theodicy and soteriology. Human beings are troubled, he says, with the question of theodicy – the question of how the extraordinary power of a divine God may be reconciled with the imperfection of the world that he has created and rules over. People need to know, for example, why there is undeserved good fortune and suffering in the world. Religion offers people soteriological answers, or answers that provide opportunities for salvation– relief from suffering, and reassuring meaning.

Friedrich Engels, the German socialist "Religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their early life."

David Barrett, in 'The New Believers', defines religion as 'a social construct encompassing beliefs and practices which enable people, individually and collectively, to make some sense of the Great Questions of life and death'. **B. Malinowski** says religion “relieves anxiety and enhances social integration.

ANTHROPOLOGISTS ON RELIGION

Anthropologists tend to see religion as an abstract set of ideas, values, or experiences developed as part of a cultural matrix. For example, in **Lindbeck's** *Nature of Doctrine*, religion does not refer to belief in "God" or a transcendent Absolute. Instead, Lindbeck defines religion as, "a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought... it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments.” According to this definition, religion refers to one's primary worldview, and how this dictates one's thoughts and actions. Thus religion is considered by some sources to extend to causes, principles, or activities believed in with zeal or conscientious devotion concerning points or matters of ethics or conscience, and not necessarily including belief in the supernatural.

PSYCHOLOGISTS ON RELIGION

With the dawn of psychology religion or defining of religion took a different strand. The psychologists like Freud, Feuerbach, and Carl Jung started to perceive religion as something psychologically produced within human beings and transferred or projected as something outside of themselves.

For instance **Jung** defines religion as “a peculiar attitude of the mind which could be formulated in accordance with the original use of the word *religio*, which means a careful consideration and observation of certain dynamic factors that are conceived as "powers": spirits, demons, gods, laws, ideas, ideals, or whatever name man has given to such factors in his world as he has found powerful, dangerous, or helpful enough to be taken into careful consideration, or grand, beautiful, and meaningful enough to be devoutly worshiped and loved.

For Jung religion has its origination in the mind of man. Religion is that mental process by which we adapt ourselves to our concepts of external "powers" and seek to please them by ritual action and contemplation. The mind must play a central role in religious phenomenology and must be given its due place as the determining factor. This will find a very naïve interaction between human and divine.

Clifford Geertz defined religion as a cultural system: "A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."

In short religion is the belief in and worship of an ultimate reality. A particular system of faith and worship based on such a belief; and an interest or pursuit followed with devotion and attachment, and which has a controlling influence on one's life. It is a multifarious phenomenon, which includes various distinct dimensions such as ritual, mythological or narrative, doctrinal, ethical, social or institutional, experiential, and material dimensions. In other words, a religion includes distinctive worldviews, kinds of experience, social patterns, and material forms such as buildings, sacred sites, works of art, and so on. But what actually are the problems these definitions of religion have.

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) Which among the dictionary definitions captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures?

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2) How do you understand the term 'Holy' used by Rudolf Otto in defining religion?

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3) What is the idea of God/Religion according Immanuel Kant?

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4) Why does Karl Marx call religion as the 'opium of the people'?

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5) How does Max Weber differ from Durkheim and Marx on the concept of religion?

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2.4 PROBLEMS OF DEFINING RELIGION

Though we have studied definition given by various dictionaries, academic scholars, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and others still none of the definition is totally satisfying. For either they are intellectual, affective or functional definitions. Taking one and

leaving out the other. The various authors keep redefining religion in the light of their own thus making the meaning of 'religion' ambiguous and problematic. Mariasusai Dhavamony, speaking of the complications with regard to the concept of religion, says, the term 'religion' brings to mind different ideas for different people. Some consider it belief in God or the act of praying or of participating in the ritual. Others understand it to be the act of meditating on something divine, sacred, spiritual. Still others think that it has to do with emotional and individual attitude to something beyond this world. There are some who simply identify religion with morality. The way of studying the religious life of humanity depends to a large extent on one's experience with what one calls religious. Therefore it does not seem possible to define religion comprehensively in a precise logical way. Concerning the enormous diversity relating to the concept of religion, Winston L. King says: "So many definitions of religion have been framed in the West over the years that even a partial listing would be impractical." So let us now turn towards the problems and complexities that are present in the definitions that we have discussed.

2.5 COMPLEXITIES IN THE DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

One of the primary causes for the problem of defining religion is its very complexity of nature. No moment a person can say that he has attained the whole truth of religion or defined the unique essence of religion. This is reason no particular distinctive essence of religion is possible all that one can look for is some common characteristics that would enable one to identify religion. As a result today many scholars of philosophy of religion see the definitions of religion tend to suffer from one of two problems: they are either too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most agree as religious, or they are too vague, wide, generic and ambiguous, suggesting that just about any and everything is a religion.

A good example of a narrow definition is the common attempt to define "religion" as "belief in God /supernatural. It is effectively excluding polytheistic religions and atheistic religions while including theists who have no religious belief system. Some religion doesn't accept the idea of the supernatural. For these traditions, religion is entirely natural for example the old religion of Europe and the Scandinavian Myth don't have a supernatural aspect. Their gods and giants are as much a part of the natural world as humans, they are just other races that exist along with us. Another obvious exception to our definitions is Buddhism. It has no central

deity and is not even superficially similar to any Western or mid-Eastern-religion. Therefore members of these religions will be rather offended by our claims that what they practice is not religion at all.

A good example of a vague definition is the tendency to define religion as a “worldview” — but how can every worldview qualifies as a religion? For instance Edward Caird’s definition of religion as “the expression of man’s ultimate attitude to the universe” or of Vergilius Ferm’s “To be religious is to effect in some way and in some measure a vital adjustment to whatever is reacted to or regarded implicitly or explicitly as worthy of serious and ulterior concern” are below the sufficient mark as they are too wide definitions to let in even non-religious ideologies within the class of religion.

Some of the definitions we have discussed for instance, the definition of William James though he emphasizes on personal spiritual solitude and the term "divine" still we see that he deemphasizes ritual and communal aspects of religion. Etymologically, the word itself, 'religion' comes from the Latin term '*religares*', meaning binding together. Community, social groupings of people with similar ideas are important for religion. The Actions, patterns, and practices that are done as a result of individual’s beliefs about what is most crucial in life. This could be going to Church, partaking of the Eucharist, going to Synagogue, practicing group meditation, or participating in religious and philosophical group discussion; all of these construct a framework and therefore cannot be underestimated in the role it plays within religion. Similarly, when James uses the term "divine", this excludes Atheists and Dialectic Materialists from being under the banner of religion, which I find problematic in many ways.

The definition of Schleiermacher though broad and experiential definition finds itself as one of the central elements in religion, but like all definitions does not exhaust religion’s entirety. It tends to deemphasize corporate religious experience and relegates his definition to individual existential interaction with the divine. Likewise Schleiermacher’s definition leaves out the ritual cultic actions of religious persons and their impact. Schleiermacher needed to dialogue with Durkheim and Weber to find more of a balance between the personal and social elements, which make up religion.

The definitions of the prominent theologian like Rudolf Otto are not without deficiency. What we see in Otto's thought is the Kantian abandonment of the reaches and use of logic in understanding theology. All of the concepts that Otto uses are employed to understand and systematize some rational process in the minds of religious devotees, and so to deny the uses of logic and rationality as a way of understanding religion is to miss one side of the coin. But at the same time the Kant-Hegelian understanding of God keeping it too rational, beyond and a kind of principle of order is also one sided. The definitions of the psychologists like Jungian though we see a psychological processes within religion still some of his presuppositions and reductive conclusions about the genesis of religion is not much satisfactory.

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 does defining religion become a problem?

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2) According to scholars of philosophy of religion what are the two problems from which definitions of religion suffer from?

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3) What should be our outlook towards religion in our contemporary times?

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

Therefore where is the wrong? Is it in the very defining of religion itself or in its reality? Is it possible for any student of philosophy of religion to grasp the essence and characteristics of religion without focusing in the paradigms of its definitions? So the conclusion that I would draw is that, we have seen both the immense difficulty in defining religion as well as the intense efforts of various scholars to do so. Although the task may seem to be in disarray, under further investigation we come to discover the richness of understanding, the enormous amount of religious vitality brought about through this task of definition. Though Religious scholars have a keen way of disagreeing with definitions other than their own; they forget that the disagreement lies within *emphasis* not within *substance*. Each definition is a piece of the whole, limited by individual's presuppositions and perspective fields of study. Yet when we analyze the definitions throughout religious studies we can come to some sort of consensus of what religion truly is about. It is apparent that religion can be seen as a theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological phenomenon of human kind. To limit religion to only one of these categories is to miss its multifaceted nature and lose out on the complete definition.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Numinous - refers to an intangible, unseen, but compelling reality that inspires both fascination and dread.

Mysterium Tremendum - Tremendous Mystery

Worldview - A worldview is a set of basic, foundational beliefs concerning deity, humanity and the rest of the universe.

Religion/ Religious - When we speak of "a Religion", we are using the term to classify something, and when we speak of "the Religious", we are seeking to capture those with some distinguishable characteristics.

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2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The etymology of the English word '*religion*' is said to have possibly emerged from its root '*religio*' in Latin; '*Religio*' literally means obligation, bond or reverence. It is also said to be

connected with the other following Latin terms: *religare*, *relegere*, *relinquere*. The original '*re-ligare*' would mean - to bind back, to tie tight/again and it indicates "a bond between man and the gods"; '*re-legere*' - to read again, or to remove/reduce, (say for example doubts) may express "the scrupulous attention to all the signs and manifestations (omens) of invisible powers shown in the early Roman religion"; and '*re-linquere*' (to leave again/fully, to give up fully) might mean the monastic life or the aspect of surrender, dependence, and faith expressed in religious worship/life. But it is to the term (*religare*) that the etymology of the word religion is often connected with perhaps to emphasize the ritualistic nature of religion.

2. It is true that many societies do not draw a clear line between their culture and what scholars would call "religion." This does not mean that religion doesn't exist. Religion does exist, for it is claimed that no human society has ever existed without religion, and would probably never exist without it, and that the aesthetic experience in modernity is nothing but "the secularized rest of and substitute for" an original religious experience.

Answers to Check your Progress II

1. The definition given in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures of the its comprehensive traits such as: Belief in supernatural beings (gods) - A distinction between sacred and profane objects - Ritual acts focused on sacred objects - A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods - Characteristically religious feelings (awe, sense of mystery, sense of guilt, adoration), which tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects and during the practice of ritual, and which are connected in idea with the gods - Prayer and other forms of communication with gods - A worldview or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein. This picture contains some specification of an over-all purpose or point of the world and an indication of how the individual fits into it - A more or less total organization of one's life based on the worldview - A social group bound together by the above.

2. He defines religion in terms of "the Holy" (*heilige*), that is, the mysterious dread and wonder conveyed by the idea of the Ultimate. "The Holy" to Otto is a way in which we understand the aesthetic elements within religion, which emphasize beauty, truth, and goodness. This category

of interpretation stresses the great wonder and awe brought about through religion, as well as the earnest moral desire to know and do the good.

3. For Kant, God does not focus primarily upon on what *religious* content and function this concept may have for humans and their activity — e.g., how God may be an object of worship etc., Their focus is more upon properly locating the concept of God within a systematically ordered set of basic philosophical principles that account for the order and structure of world. External ritual, superstition and hierarchical church order he sees all of these as efforts to make oneself pleasing to God in ways other than conscientious adherence to the principle of moral rightness in the choice of one's actions. The idea of God for Kant is totally immanent within human moral consciousness .For him religion is more intimately affiliated to the social moral order.

4. Marx said, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." Because it soothes them and dulls their senses to the pain of oppression than for a reform.

5. Weber differed from Marx and Emile Durkheim in that he focused his work on the effects of religious action and inaction. Instead of discussing religion as a kind of misapprehension (an "opiate of the people,") or as social cohesion, Weber did not attempt to reduce religion to its essence. Instead, he examines how religious ideas and groups interacted with other aspects of social life. In doing so, Weber gives religion credit for shaping a person's image of the world, and this image of the world can affect their view of their interests, and ultimately how they decide to take action.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. The term 'religion' brings to mind different ideas for different people. Some consider it belief in God or the act of praying or of participating in the ritual. Others understand it to be the act of meditating on something divine, sacred, spiritual. Still others think that it has to do with emotional and individual attitude to something beyond this world. There are some who simply identify religion with morality. The way of studying the religious life of humanity depends to a

large extent on one's experience with what one calls religious. Therefore it does not seem possible to define religion comprehensively in a precise logical way.

2. The scholars of philosophy of religion see the definitions of religion tend to suffer from one of two problems: they are either too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most agree as religious, or they are too vague, wide, generic and ambiguous, suggesting that just about any and everything is a religion.

3. Our outlook needs to be total and comprehensive for it is apparent that religion can be seen as a theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological phenomenon of human kind. But to limit religion to only one of these categories is to miss its multifaceted nature and lose out on the complete definition.



UNIT 3 THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION -I

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Naturalistic Origin of Religion
- 3.3 Anthropological Origin of Religion
- 3.4 Psychological Origin of Religion
- 3.5 Criticism
- 3.6 Social Origin of Religion
- 3.7 Sociopolitical Origin of Religion
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Key Words
- 3.10 Further Readings and References
- 3.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to see the different theories the origin of Religion from a non-faith perspective. They all accept that people in almost all societies seem to believe in the existence of invisible supernatural beings or God. These beings/being may influence human life for good or ill and the people were advised to pray to these supernatural beings/being. Some of the thinkers come to the conclusion that religion or God is the result of human fear or were created to give people a feeling of security in an insecure world and the science has reached to a stage where it can explain everything. Once human beings become scientifically enlightened they no longer need a religion. Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of the view of Ernst Haeckel;

- to have an understanding of the anthropological origin of religion of Edward Burnett Tylor, James George Frazer and Salomon Reinach;
- to have an understanding of the views of Sigmund Freud and James Henry Leuba on religion;
- to have an understanding of the theory of the sociopolitical origin of religion;
- to have an understanding of the theory of Emile Durkheim

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In the secular-based theories of the origin of religion the thinkers consider religion as an empirical entity that can be traced historically and mapped geographically. All the religions are human creations whose history is part of the wider history of human culture. They trace the development of the concept of a religion as a clear and bounded historical phenomenon. There is speculation that the first religions were a response to human fear. They were created to give people a feeling of security in an insecure world, and a feeling of control over the environment where there was little control. Here we shall deal with naturalistic, anthropological, psychological, sociological and sociopolitical theories of the origin of religion.

3.2. NATURALISTIC ORIGIN OF RELIGION

From the Enlightenment onwards there have been attempts by skeptics to account for religion naturalistically. Why do 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, sometimes very elaborate and demanding in nature, in connection with such beliefs? In spite of much speculation no generally agreed answers to such questions have emerged.

The pioneer of naturalistic theory of the origin of religion is Ernst Haeckel (1834 – 1919), a scientist turned philosopher. He expressed his conviction that the discoveries of nineteenth century science bring the solution of the enigmas which have perplexed mankind through the centuries. He calls his system “monism” in opposition to all dualisms which differentiates God

and nature, soul and body, spirit and matter. 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 implies 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 it solves the riddles of existence. It gives negative answers to the traditional problems of God, freedom and immortality. The ideas of God, freedom and immortality are based on a mistaken dualism. There can be no God apart from the universe. An invisible God who thinks, speaks, and acts is an impossible conception. In the monistic deterministic cosmos there is no room for the immortality of the soul or the freedom of the will.

3.3. ANTHROPOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

The naturalistic interpretation of religion gained support from the developing science of anthropology. 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 makes two assumptions. (1) human culture – including knowledge, art, religion, customs and the like – has its laws which can be studied scientifically. Like in nature, in culture too we can find the uniform action of uniform causes. (2) the various grades of culture found in the human race can be exhibited as stages in a process of development or evolution. Another idea to which he draws our attention is the phenomenon of ‘survival’. An idea or a custom, once it has got established, tends to persist, and it may continue on into later stages of culture where it has become meaningless.

His main contribution was his theory of ‘animism’ i.e. the belief in spiritual beings. Confronted with the phenomena such as death, sleep, dreams etc., primitive man accounted for them in terms of a spirit separable from the body. He believed in other spirits throughout all nature, some of these spirits having the rank of powerful deities. Since these spirits were supposed to control

events and to affect human lives, it was natural that men should revere them and seek to propitiate them. According to him here we have the beginnings of religion, with the belief in spiritual beings as its minimal condition. The higher religions have developed out of the matrix of primitive animism. The superiority of the higher religions consists in their moral ideas, which are almost entirely lacking in primitive religion and these moral ideas have turned out to be the abiding fruit of animism.

According to James George Frazer we can distinguish three stages in the mental development of mankind 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.

Salomon Reinach, who was an archaeologist and an anthropologist largely devoted to the investigation of religion. For him this is the apt time for a science of religion. Every where, even in religion, secular reason must exercise its right to investigate. He wanted to show religion as a natural phenomenon. He defines religion as a sum of scruples which hinder the free exercise of our faculties. With this definition he wanted to eliminate from religion the concept of God, spiritual beings, and the infinite. These scruples have arisen from the irrational taboos of primitive societies where they were associated with an animistic view of the world. Those scruples which have proved useful have persisted, and have tended to be transformed into rational rules of conduct and those which have shown no such usefulness have sunk into the background. Thus human progress has taken place through the gradual secularizing of elements which were originally all enveloped in the sphere of animistic beliefs. This process has taken

place not only in the transformation of taboos into moral rules but also in the development of science out of magic. Religion was the very life of nascent societies, and out of it has come our civilizations. He visualizes further progress in the direction of education and the extension of the rational outlook.

Check your progress

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) Explain about the naturalistic theory of the origin of religion according to Ernst Haeckel

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2) What are the three stages described by George Frazer in the mental development of mankind?

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3.4. PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

The naturalistic interpretation of religion received further stimulus from the development of the psychology of religion. The main proponent of this theory is Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939). But

we shall also study the view of James Henry Leuba (1867 – 1946) since he is considered as the pioneer of this theory.

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 time theologians had put forward metaphysical arguments for the existence of such a God for example the argument from design. The progress of the physical sciences has destroyed the strength of such arguments. Now the theologians have changed their arguments: they appeal to inner experience. Here, thinks Leuba, they have to agree with psychology, which applies the scientific method into the inmost experiences of the soul. The inner experience instead of establishing the existence of a personal God show how belief in such a God has arisen from the gratification it provides for affective and moral needs. He pays special attention to mystical experience which is considered as the pinnacle of religious experience of God. He tries to explain it in psychological and physiological terms. It is like a sublimation of sexual passion in the ascetical life: it is a state of consciousness induced by certain drugs. It has 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. Human being can no longer endorse with intellectual honesty to a religion with its transcendent beliefs.

Sigmund Freud, the originator of psychoanalysis, regarded religious beliefs as illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest, and most insistent wishes of mankind. He considered religion as a mental defense against the more threatening aspects of nature – earthquake, flood storm, disease and inevitable death. With these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable. However, human imagination transforms these forces into mysterious personal powers. Impersonal forces remain eternally remote. But if the elements have 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. We are still defenseless but 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, exercises a further control by banning those activities which are socially undesirable. We come to know about the consciousness through the analysis of its disguised manifestations. It contains primal instincts or drives and repressed experiences. These repressed still live on in the unconscious and they manifest in many varied ways. These manifestations are neuroses and Freud thinks that religion is the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity which may be left behind when at last men learn to face the world relying no longer upon illusions but upon scientifically authenticated knowledge.

Freud applies the idea of Oedipus complex (the Greek tragic hero who murdered his father and married his mother) to the origin of religion. He supposes that the 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 excited 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 have developed moral inhibitions, totemism, and the other phenomena of religion. Having slain their father, the brothers are struck with remorse, at least of a prudential kind. They also find that they cannot all succeed to his position and that there is 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 guilt feelings which make men submit to such a phantasy. Religion is thus the return of the repressed. The idea of God is the 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, projected them, and demanded their obedience, becomes the God who is similarly creator, preserver, and lawgiver.

Through this what he wants to emphasize is 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 rigidly determined atheistic cosmos there is no Father God who reigns over it.

3.5. CRITICISM

The naturalists, anthropologists and psychologists whom we have considered do have something to suggest in their interpretation of religion. The strength of their claim rests on the claim that it is based on verifiable facts brought to light by scientific investigation. However a thorough examination of this claim shows us that these claims are extremely shaky one. The 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 introduced presuppositions, speculations and even prejudices which need to be brought into the open and examined.

The major criticism of naturalism is that it involves us in a gigantic one-sided abstraction. It takes a segment of reality and represents it as the entire reality. Just as they isolate the cognitive aspect of our experience of the world, so they concentrate on the element of belief in religion. They too seem to think of religious beliefs as offering an explanation of the world but these beliefs can be understood only in the setting on the whole religious life, which involves conative and affective elements as well. Some of the thinkers' idea of God illustrates their own misunderstanding of the idea of God. The abstract idea presented by the naturalists as the whole reality ignores some facts and exaggerates others, so giving a distorted picture.

We must remember that the origin of 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 it. Something derived from a cruder origin may have acquired quite a new status and meaning.

The psychology is a most 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 psychological criticism of belief can be carried only so far or it ends up in skepticism which engulfs the psychologists himself, and makes rational arguments impossible. Freud by tracing the history of the idea of God in the projecting of the father figure, he discredits belief in God. But his theory is not applicable to religion in general. But only to those religions which recognize some kind of 'Father God'. Even if men think of God in terms of father figure, they use it in the analogical language. The question whether this analogue stands for any reality, or if it does so, worthily represents it, is one which the psychoanalysis fails to give an answer.

Freud's ideas of religion never had any considerable degree of acceptance. Usually neurosis is defined as a condition leading to difficulty in adjusting satisfactorily to one's environment. Thus neurosis brings negative outcome. Jung says that religion is a healthy outcome as an alternative to neurosis. Religious practices seem to be a desirable, justifiable or realistic mode of activity. Freud says religion is a form of neurosis. It means there can be good neurosis and bad neurosis. The fact that religion relieves individual from unconscious conflict is not a sufficient reason to label religion as the universal obsessional neurosis of mankind.

No one has shown that in general religious believers are less able to establish satisfying personal relations and less able to get ahead in their work than non-believers.

Freud commits the fallacy of psycho-mechanistic parallelism. This is the fallacy of assuming that because two behaviour 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 conclude that religion is reducible to infantile regression similarity is not sameness.

There is no sure proof for Oedipus complex. There is no evidence that children before puberty have sexual desires.

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 amount to mean that God does not exist

3.6. 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 make not just a sociological theory but it is a complete philosophy, known as ‘sociological positivism’. In his philosophy the idea of society occupies the centre position and functions as the key for understanding philosophical problems. Truth and falsehood are 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 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 he 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; where as his own theory regards religion primarily from the point of view of action. So he can claim 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 that religion is regarded as the matrix out of which other human activities, including science, have grown. Religion is by no means discredited by science, but it must always be looking for more adequate symbols in order to express its realities. In modern times we have come to understand that the ideas of divinity and of society are at bottom the same. So far 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). How does Freud apply the idea of Oedipus complex to explain the origin of religion?

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2) Explain the sociological positivism of Emile Durkheim

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3.7. SOCIOPOLITICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

Here we shall see mainly 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: the theologian became a Hegelian. Oscillating between philosophy and theology and inwardly torn apart, longing for truth he came to Hegel's lectures. Hegel put him right in head and heart and made him see in a unique way what a teacher is. 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. The Hegelian becomes an atheist. He wants to follow Hegel's path consistently to the very end. The old split between here and hereafter must be removed, not only as with Hegel-in thought but in reality, so that humanity can again concentrate wholeheartedly on itself, on its world and on the present time. In his "Essence of Christianity" he 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 and selfish belief in immortality.

To Feuerbach, consciousness of God is self-consciousness and knowledge of God is self-knowledge. Religion is man's earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge. The universal man, the community and unity of man with man-the human species is the Supreme Being and the measure of all things. The consciousness of the infinite is 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. He projects it.

In short the notion of God is nothing but a projection of man. The absolute to man is his own nature. The power of the object over his is therefore, the power of 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 into the hereafter. The attributes of God are –love, wisdom, justice etc., in reality these are the attributes of man – of the human species.

The personal God of Christianity, 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 as eternal to himself. The attributes of God are really the attributes of objectified nature of man. It is not that God created man in his own image, but 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 is love also is a projection of human heart. God is nothing but the objectified universal nature of human love. God is not love but love is God. Human love is supreme, absolute power and truth. In prayer man worships his own nature, venerates the omnipotence of feelings. My own interest is declared as God's interest. My own will is God's will. My own ultimate purpose is God's purpose.

Marx maintained a negative attitude towards religion. The basis of it was not speculative arguments for the non-existence of god. He found religion incompatible with his theory of action. Therefore he rejected religion. Marx inherited speculative atheism from Feuerbach. Marx 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 are purely human. Therefore he said that the subject of these predicates should also be human. Thus man is his own god. 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. The reasons he said are individual's love of ease, sloth vanity and egoism. These are not very serious reasons to account for alienation.

According to Marx man exists as an alienated being. Marx points to the social and economic conditions of modern life as the cause of his alienation. Religion is only its expression. As a result of the division of labor, the means of production have become the private property of individuals; the workers in the modern industrialized and technicized process of production have nothing but their sheer labor – 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 of maintaining these frustrating conditions is not religion, but the political structure which legalizes and protects the social status quo. Yet neither the state nor the religion reveals the root of alienation. State and religion lie in the economic conditions of a society determined by private property. Religious alienation will be abolished 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 America state is entirely separated from the church, instead of fully emancipated, America is 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; 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 capital society. The social structure of private property produces the need for God. So it has to be eradicated. To the orthodox Marxism, 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-establishes true relationship between man and nature. This relationship is an 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 relates nature and consciousness - the two poles of human reality. The only true philosophy 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 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 favour of another considers himself 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 mass 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 diverting attention from the suffering here on earth. Thus religious beliefs are totally 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?

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3.8. LET US SUM UP

It is evident from these theories that religion is always deeply intertwined with numerous social factors, and that no account of religion which omitted 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 a religion to the society in which it is practised. Can religious beliefs play a major part 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 derives its plausibility from the key place which he gives to totemism as the type of religion, and totemism simply will not fulfill this role. The reasons are: (1) totemism is not really primitive – 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 the type of all religion. It is significant that 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 of the ideas of divinity and society collapses.

Feuerbach says that religion is consciousness of the infinite. Thus it is and can be nothing else than the consciousness which man has of his own not finite and limited but infinite nature. Here he implies something about the non-existence of an infinite, independent of our consciousness. Feuerbach continually asserted it but never proved it. Here he presents only our orientation of human consciousness toward an infinite. It does not provide any evidence of the existence or non-existence of an infinite reality, independent of consciousness.

His universal human being is itself a projection. It is an abstraction. He projects something out of his existence that does not exist in reality.

It is true that nothing exists merely because we wish it. But it is not true that something cannot exist, if we wish it.

Marx's praxis has only economic character. For Max, man is autonomous only in his material life process. Thus Marx's praxis is restricted.

Is religion opium of the people? We have to verify it in practice. We have to probe the history of communism to see whether religion or communism is the opium of the people.

If religion emerges out of social conditions in which man is a wretched and enslaved being, then religion must die out automatically, when the ideal conditions are created, in which all man can be happy. In this case the communist states need to go against any religion.

3.9 KEY WORDS

Praxis: *Praxis* is the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is practiced. It is a practical and applied knowledge to 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.

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3.11. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1). A scientist turned philosopher Ernst Haeckel expressed his conviction that the discoveries of nineteenth century science bring the solution of the enigmas which have perplexed mankind through the centuries. He calls his system “monism” in opposition to all dualisms which differentiates God and nature, soul and body, spirit and matter. 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 implies 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 it solves the riddles of existence. It gives negative answers to the traditional problems of God, freedom and immortality. The ideas of God, freedom and immortality are based on a mistaken dualism. There can be no God apart from the universe. An invisible God who thinks, speaks, and acts is an impossible conception. In the monistic deterministic cosmos there is no room for the immortality of the soul or the freedom of the will
- 2). The three stages in the mental development of mankind 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

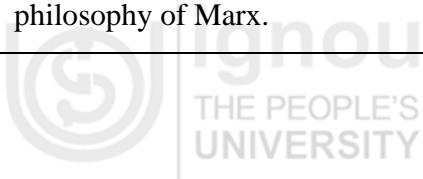
1) Freud applies the idea of Oedipus complex to the origin of religion. He supposes that the primitive times human beings lived in small groups, each under the domination of a father who possessed all the females. The sons were driven out or killed as they excited the father's jealousy. But they grouped 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 have developed moral inhibitions, totemism, and the other phenomena of religion. Having slain their father, the brothers are struck with remorse, at least of a prudential kind. They also find that they cannot all succeed to his position and that there is 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 guilt feelings which make men submit to such a phantasy. Religion is thus the return of the repressed. The idea of God is the 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, projected them, and demanded their obedience, becomes the God who is similarly creator, preserver, and lawgiver.

2) In his philosophy the idea of society occupies the centre position and functions as the key for understanding philosophical problems. Truth and falsehood are 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 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; 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 favour of another considers himself 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 mass 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 diverting attention

from the suffering here on earth. Thus religious beliefs are totally incompatible with the philosophy of Marx.



UNIT 4 THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION -II

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Primitive Religious Consciousness
- 4.3 The Experience of the Holy
- 4.4 Critical Remarks
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Further Readings and References
- 4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to describe the main features of the religious consciousness as found in the experience of the religious persons. In spite of the secularism that has influenced so many, religious thought continues to be vigorous. It gives every sign that it will not cease to be so. Very many thinkers consider man as an unfinished product. As an unfinished product continuously he is going out beyond himself. He is a being who carries within himself some clues to the meaning of transcendence and mystery. Here we will study about the primitive religious consciousness as found in the theory of Robert Ranulph Marett and the description of the experience of holy found in the thought of Schleiermacher and Otto. And finally, a critical evaluation of their thinking.

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

- to have a basic understanding of philosophy of Marett;
- to have an understanding of the phenomenological description of human beings' experience of holy according to the thought of Schleiermacher;

- to have an understanding of the theory of numinous feeling and its relation of the experience of holy.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The group of thinkers that we are going to see in this unit try to explore and describe the main features of the religious consciousness as found in the experience of the religious persons. It may look to be similar to the psychologies of religion we have already seen in the previous unit but it differs itself from them in leaving aside their naturalistic presuppositions and in interesting itself more in the description of religious attitudes than in the genesis of religious belief. This approach is differentiated by its contemplative attitude from the pragmatic and activist account of religion.

We shall begin by examining the description of the primitive religious consciousness as explained by R.R. Marett and then we shall turn to Rudolf Otto's classic exposition of man's experience of holy.

4.2. THE PRIMITIVE RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

Robert Ranulph Marett (1866 – 1943), an English anthropologist gives a new direction to the study of primitive religion. He declared his opposition to naturalism and speculative idealism. Hence what he offers us is neither naturalistic nor metaphysical explanation of the origin of religion. He tries not so much to explain but to describe. He concentrated his attention on the psychological analysis of rudimentary religion. His aim is to translate a type of religious experience remote from our own into such terms of our consciousness.

The idea of Mana is the central theme of his description. This word takes its origin in the Pacific region. But the idea for which it stands is said to be wide spread among primitive peoples. Generally this word has come to be applied to a certain type of religious experience. What do we mean by Mana? To explain the meaning of this word Marett obtains the help of an English Missionary, Bishop R.H. Codrington and he describes Mana as a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil. It is a kind of occult power. This occult force is supposed to attach to a wide range of natural objects and persons. To this

force is attributed the success in war, prosperity in agriculture, powers in hunting etc. Mana negatively seen is taboo. That which possesses mana is taboo. This means mana is not to be lightly approached or else its power break forth in a harmful and destructive manner.

He next searches into the mentality of the people among whom Mana is found. What lies behind mana is not so much an idea but an emotional attitude. It is true that such an attitude contain elements which may become eventually conceptualized. "Savage religion" is not always so much rationalized but always danced out. It develops under conditions which favour emotional and motor processes and the process of making it into ideas remains relatively in absence. It is on this point that Marett takes the issue with primitive animism. According to him the problems with some of the religious philosophers are, that they when interpreting primitive religion, gives too much emphasis to the intellectual matter. They treat primitive religion as if it were primarily a matter of belief. They set out to examine the intellectual side of primitive religion. But the belief aspect of the primitive religion is very closely associated with powerful affective states. This may be because there is a phase in which feeling predominates over thought or thought and reflection have not yet emerged from feeling.

Marett thinks that of all English words "awe" is the one that expresses the fundamental religious feelings most nearly. What constitutes the core of the primitive religious consciousness is nothing other than awe. He describes awe as human being's reaction to the hidden mysterious forces of its environment. It cannot be merely interpreted as fear of the unknown. It is much more than fear. Viewing from this point we can say that religion does not originate just in fear of the unknown. The essential constituents of awe are wonder, admiration, respect, even love.

Mana is in itself non-moral but it can act for good and evil. It is a kind of undifferentiated magico-religious matrix, from which both religion and magic take their rise. The religious development takes place in the moralizing and spiritualizing of the primitive experience which already contains in itself the seeds of more refined feelings, reverence, love, humility and the like. It also includes the possibility for intellectual development through reflection. Religion is a permanent possibility of the human spirit. The religion in all its variations will retain as its basic structure something similar to that attitude of awe.

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 does Marett mean by Mana?

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2) What constitutes the core of primitive religious consciousness?

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4.3. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY

In this section we are going to deal with thought of Rudolf Otto (1869 – 1937) who gives a masterly phenomenological analysis of the religious consciousness. Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, himself praised Otto for applying phenomenological method in the analysis of the religious consciousness. He was a great admirer of Schleiermacher (1768 –1834) for the rediscovery of religion.

FRIEDRICH DANIEL ERNST SCHLEIERMACHER AND THE THEORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

He is considered as the greatest theologian/philosopher of the nineteenth century and found the essence of religion in a sense and taste for the infinite or in the feeling of the absolute dependence. The words like feeling, sense, and taste should not be understood in the sense of a just a blind stirring. But it is an emotionally coloured attitude or state of mind which carries in

itself some kind of implicit understanding. He makes a distinction between doctrine and religion. Doctrine is not the same as the religion. Through the doctrine what is implicit in the religious affections is made explicit through reflection. His theory is often called as the theory of consciousness.

A human person is composed of mind and body and individuated by time and space. But according to him the person as the subject of the activities of thinking/knowing and of willing/doing is more than a being composed of mind and body. A person is differentiated from others by nature and history. He inwardly differentiates himself and acknowledges such an inward differentiation in all other human beings. That by virtue of which the human person makes this inward differentiation is the particular property of the person. It is this property in each man that equips him with a life unity, an inalienable identity. He describes this property as the peculiar organization that reason assumes for itself in each man. But the life unity, or identity, of the individual person can never come to direct and full expression either in thinking/knowing or in willing/doing, although it accompanies and informs each of these rational activities. The self-consciousness that this sense of identity requires is a self-consciousness to be distinguished from the forms of self-consciousness in which the subject is responding to or acting upon external objects. He appropriates the word feeling for this form of self-consciousness. The content of which is the given identity and unity of the self. Feeling, thinking, and doing make up the three forms of consciousness that constitute the self-consciousness which distinguishes persons. Every person must be seen as a participant in the life of society in both his practical and theoretical functions but at the same time he is also one whose particular property is wholly original. A person in whom feeling of self-consciousness remains latent, personal identity is deficient and personal consciousness is confused or immature. Such a person fails to contribute to the common or highest good. He is a person in the formal sense but is destitute of spiritual life. For him religion is the most highly and fully developed mode of the feeling form of self-consciousness.

For him religion is a determination of feeling. It is a feeling of being absolutely dependent. This feeling is one and the same thing with consciousness of being in relation with God. To understand his point of view, we need to distinguish the following elements.

01. The feeling of being absolutely dependent is also the feeling of identity through which the individual is conscious of his inner uniqueness. In describing this feeling as one of being absolutely dependent he was calling attention to the fact that the identity, or life unity of the individual is an endowment which cannot be derived from any of the intellectual or volitional relations in which the self stands to other persons and forces either alone or together. In this sense the individual is utterly dependent for the particular constitution of his existence on a “power” that cannot be fully explained conceptually. The feeling of absolute dependence is not because of any felt deficiency.
02. The feeling of being absolutely dependent on God consciousness, as he calls it, is discernible only because self-consciousness also involves thinking and willing, which are forms of rational relation between the person and his world, forms involving consciousness of relative dependence and relative freedom. He distinguishes the feeling of being absolutely dependent from the feeling of relative dependence. In the latter a person stands in the relations of community and reciprocity with nature and society while in the former there is no reciprocity present. Therefore there can be no consciousness of being in relation to God apart from consciousness of being in relation to the world.
03. The original meaning of the word “God” is not a concept of perfect being but the felt relation of absolute dependence. Therefore religion arises not in ideas, in willing, but in the immediate consciousness of an immediate existence-relationship. Religion is more than a determination of feeling. It is the name given to the personal self-consciousness in which the feeling of absolute dependence and consciousness of the world coexist and must achieve a living, stable order.

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

01. What is the source of religion according to the philosophy of Schleiermacher?

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RUDOLF OTTO AND THE EXPERIENCE OF HOLY

Otto in his book *The Idea of Holy* gives a classical exposition of the experience of Holy. In this exposition he makes use of the phenomenological method which is developed by Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). Husserl praises Otto for having made a masterly phenomenological analysis of the religious consciousness. Though he and Husserl were colleagues at Gottingen, Otto seems to have worked independently, and makes no explicit reference to Husserl's method. Hence Otto is in his own right a religious thinker of first-class importance and he is stated to be the most illuminating religious thinker of modern times.

RELIGIOUS FEELING AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

His most significant contribution is to be found in his discussion of religious feeling and religious knowledge. He discusses the relation of religion to a naturalism which demands that everything be explained on the basis of mathematical-mechanical laws. But when explained on the basis of mathematical-mechanical laws the beyond, purpose and mystery which are essential to religion will be excluded. Religion makes certain claims such as that the world is conditioned and dependent, that there is a providence, that there is a side other than which appears to us. These claims are proposed not as poetry or mystical statements but as truths. At the same time these cannot be justified by, or derived from a consideration of nature in any straightforward sense. What the reason can do is just to show that science does not conflict with these claims. The reason faces the inability to consider the truth value of the religious claims. The reason may point out hints in nature which suggest that these claims are true. But reason cannot justify them.

These truths differ in kind from those of science and common sense and have their own grounds such as heart and conscience, feeling and intuition. It is possible to make, on the one hand, correlations between various feelings, and religious claims on the other. Corresponding to the claim that the world is conditioned and dependent there is the feeling of the dependence and conditionality of all things. The claim that there is a providence, or teleological order, in things implies that certain value judgments are true and these value judgments rest on feeling and intuition. Corresponding to the claim that there is a beyond is piety, that is, a feeling and intuition, which is bound up with our experience of the beautiful and the mysterious, that there is a reality behind appearances.

However when applied to religion there is an ambiguity with regard to the full meaning and sense of feeling and intuition. In the beginning stages of his philosophical thinking Otto talks of them at least in three ways. He sometimes talks of them as if they were feelings in a straightforward sense. At other times he talks of them as if they were half-formulated judgments which carry with them an inescapable sense of conviction and still other times he talks of them as if they were cognitive experiences in somewhat the same way that visual experiences are cognitive.

But later on the notion of religious feelings and intuitions receive a more complete treatment. We have an immediate knowledge of reality, the noumenal world which shows itself in feelings of truth. These feelings can be brought to full consciousness as ideas. An idea is a concept which can be applied to reality. When temporally schematized the categories of theoretical reason can be applied to appearances and can also, when schematized by the principle of completeness be applied to reality itself. A category thus schematized is an idea. These ideas are essentially negative. They exclude certain characteristics such as temporality, contingency from reality. He very clearly makes a distinction between the feeling of beauty and of the sublime on the one hand and religious feeling on the other hand and all the three of these feelings either directly or indirectly disclose the reality.

RELIGIOUS FEELING AND THE FEELING OF THE SUBLIME

In his book *The Idea of Holy* he tries to make a clear distinction between numinous or religious feeling and the feeling of the sublime. Numinous feelings have two primary aspects (i) a feeling of religious dread (ii) a feeling of religious fascination. The closest analogue to religious dread or awe is the feeling of uncanniness – the feeling one has when the hair on the back of one's neck rises, the shudder or terror on hearing a ghost story, the dread of haunted places. The feeling of fascination by, attraction to, and prizing of the object which arouses the feeling in question creates both the desire to approach the object and the feeling that one possesses no value when considered in relation to the fascinating and prized object.

His attempt to conceptualize and describe the various feelings must be clearly distinguished from his theory about numinous. According to him numinous feelings are, first of all, unique and it cannot be analyzed as a complex of non-numinous feeling such as love, fear, horror, a feeling of sublimity, and so on. Secondly the capacity for numinous feeling is unexplainable. Although the capacity may appear in the world only when certain conditions are fulfilled, the conditions do not constitute an adequate explanation of the capacity in question. Thirdly numinous feelings are also cognitive. The feelings are the source of the concept of the numinous – the concept of something which is both a value and an objective reality. It is cognitive in the sense that they are like visual experiences. They have immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self i.e., the numinous quality or object, which is an object of numinous feelings in somewhat the same way that visible objects and qualities might be said to be the object of visual experiences.

However the relation between these two is not clear. There could be two interpretations. In the first interpretation it is claimed that numinous feelings disclose the numinous object. The encounter with the numinous object through numinous experiences gives rise to the concept of the numinous in much the same way that encounters with objects and qualities through visual experiences are thought to give rise to the concepts of those objects and qualities. The concept of the numinous is both a priori and a posteriori. It is a posteriori since it is not derived from the experience of an object or quality and it is a priori because it is not derived from any sense experience. The feeling is the source of the concept only in the sense that it discloses the object of the concept. It is the encounter with the object that produces the concept of the object. According to the second interpretation the feeling gives rise to both the concept and the

disclosure of the numinous object. However it is not the encounter with the numinous which gives rise to the concept of the numinous rather it is feeling that furnishes the concept. The feeling which furnishes the concept also discloses the object to which the concept applies. Now the problem is how are these two functions of numinous feelings related, since neither the concept nor the object is given in isolation. The two are given together although one is not derived from the other.

In both these interpretations he claims that feeling puts us in contact with, discloses, something outside of ourselves. Feeling becomes like visual and auditory experiences. It has an objective referent whether this is structured by an a priori concept or whether it simply gives rise to a concept. The object of numinous feeling, according to him, is numen. Numen is both value and object and can be only indirectly characterized. For example the encounter with the numen evokes religious dread. This is analogous to fear. So it is the property of the numen which arouses religious dread. However, we can schematize the numen by means of such rational concepts as goodness, completeness, necessity and substantiality. It means that concepts of this kind can be predicated of the numen.

THE CATEGORY OF THE HOLY

When the concept of the numinous and the schematizing concepts are brought together we have the complex category of the holy itself. His analysis of the structure of the religious consciousness is based on a clarification of the key-word of all religions namely 'Holy'. The word holy can have varied forms of characteristics. One of the characteristics can be that it is rational in its nature in the sense that it can be thought conceptually. Thus for example by holiness we can mean moral goodness and it is possible to have some kind of understanding of what goodness is. But the rational characteristics do not explain completely the meaning of the word holy. For Otto the rational meaning is only derivative. In its fundamental sense the word holy stands for a non-rational character. By it we mean that it is something which cannot be thought conceptually.

From this preliminary examination we can say religion is compounded of rational and non-rational elements. We think of God in terms of goodness, personality, purpose, and so on. These ideas are applied to God analogically. They are rational characteristics in the sense that we have definite concepts of them. This rational side of religion is something that cannot be dispensed with in religion. But sometimes it neglects the deeper non-rational core of religion. God is not exhausted in his rational attributes. He is the holy God and the adjective points to his deeper, inconceivable, super rational nature. Otto wishes to stress this non-rational side of religion since traditional philosophy and theology has lost sight of it and has given an excessively intellectualistic interpretation.

But the problem is if the numinous core of religion is inconceivable, how can we talk about it or explain it? According to him although it is inconceivable, it is somehow within our grasp. We apprehend it in feeling, in the *sensus numinus* and by feeling. The feeling is not mere an emotion but an affective state of mind which involves some kind of valuation and pre-conceptual cognition. The most valuable contribution of Otto consists of his careful analysis of the feeling-states which constitute the numinous experience. There is on the one side what is called 'creature-feeling' that is the feeling of nothingness of finite being. On the other side is the feeling of the presence of an overwhelming Being that is the numinous Being which strikes dumb with amazement. It is summarized in the expression "mysterium tremendum et fascinans" *Mysterium* points to what is called the 'wholly other' character of the numinous Being, which, as supra rational, utterly transcends the grasp of conceptual thought. The element of *tremendum* points to the awe or even the dread experience in face of the majesty, overpoweringness and dynamic energy of the numinous presence. The element of *fascinans* points to the captivating attraction of the numinous Being, evoking rapture and love.

The feeling revealed in the analysis of the numinous experience, while analogous to natural feelings, have a unique quality. The *sensus numinis* is something *sui generis*. It cannot be compounded out of merely natural feelings. It cannot even be regarded as evolved from natural feelings. For Otto it is connected with faculty of divination that is a faculty of genuinely cognizing and recognizing the holy in its appearance.

These speculations prepare the way for Otto's assertion that the holy is an a priori category. Its non-rational or numinous element is said to arise from the deepest foundation of cognitive apprehension that the soul possesses. The idea of a non-rational category may surprise us. Whatever we may think of the more speculative elements in Otto's thought we must acknowledge that in his analysis of the numinous he has led us into the innermost sanctuary of religion and has described it with extraordinary power.

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

01. What is the difference between religious feelings and the feeling of the sublime?

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02. Explain about the category of Holy?

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4.4. CRITICAL REMARKS

A descriptive approach to religion seems to have much to acclaim it. It plainly places before us what the basic elements in religious experience are, without distorting the picture by introducing doubtful speculations about the possible genesis or ultimate significance of such experience. One can aim at presenting the essence of the phenomenon which appears in the religious

consciousness. These thinkers whom we have seen seem to get the essence of the phenomenon, that which is genuinely religion. These thinkers have penetrated to the affective states of mind which lie at the heart of religion which are so often overlooked both in intellectualist accounts and in pragmatic accounts. The intellectualist accounts understand religion as a kind of world-view and pragmatic accounts tries to assimilate religion to morality.

An accurate description of the typical experiences of the religious person would seem to provide at least a firm starting-point for an investigation into religion. But the question is, is it enough? Do we need something more? The answer to this question depends on whether or not the religious experience can be regarded as *sui generis*, qualitatively unique and irreducible. Some thinkers take this view but Marett is more cautious. He suggests that the awe which he considers basic to religion may be compounded of natural feelings like fear, love, reverence and the like.

Otto and other thinkers think that it is important to maintain the unique quality of the religious experience. But when they try to do this by talking of a faculty of divination or of the theomorphic structure in man, they seem to have left the relatively firm ground of description and receded into a more speculative realm. For example Otto adopts Kantian terminology and speaks of the numinous as an a priori category which undergoes schematization into the idea of the holy.

However accurate the descriptions of religious experience that are offered to us may be, it seems that they cannot establish the validity of such experience. Yet on the other hand a clear description of religious experience must be the first step towards its assessment. Perhaps there is no way at all in which the validity of religious experience can be established. One can only be pointed to the kind of experience which Otto and the others describe and be left to decide about it in the light of the most honest discrimination of one's experience that can be made.

4.5. LET US SUM UP

Human not only lives but seeks power for one's life. Religion arises at the point where human's own power is met by another power, such as the mana of primitive religion. It is a strange,

wholly other power extends into life. The phenomenology cannot grasp this power in itself but only in the appearance in which it is experienced. It is possible to describe the types of religion in which man is encountered by this wholly other power. Though an unprejudiced or neutral attitude is the ideal, very often it is found as some thing impossible. Religions cannot be laid out on the table and examined like so many natural objects.

4.6. KEY WORDS

Matrix = A situation or surrounding substance within which something else originates, develops, or is contained.

Taboo = A prohibition, especially in Polynesia and other South Pacific islands, excluding something from use, approach, or mention because of its sacred and inviolable nature.

Phenomenology = It is a philosophical approach concentrating on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience. It is the description or study of appearances. This term was introduced by Lambert in 1764. It is philosophical method restricted to the careful analysis of the intellectual processes which we are introspectively aware of. Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are some the important philosophers who used this method in their philosophy.

Sui Generis = is a Latin expression, literally meaning of its own kind/genus or unique in its characteristics. The expression is often used in analytic philosophy to indicate an idea, an entity, or a reality which cannot be included in a wider concept.

4.7. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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4.8. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The idea of Mana is the central theme of his description. This word takes its origin in the Pacific region. But the idea for which it stands is said to be wide spread among primitive peoples. Generally this word has come to be applied to a certain type of religious experience. Mana as a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil. It is a kind of occult power. This occult force is supposed to attach to a wide range of natural objects and persons. To this force is attributed the success in war, prosperity in agriculture, powers in hunting etc. Mana negatively seen is taboo. That which possesses mana is taboo. This means mana is not to be lightly approached or else its power break forth in a harmful and destructive manner.
2. What constitutes the core of the primitive religious consciousness is nothing other than awe. He describes awe as human being's reaction to the hidden mysterious forces of its environment. It cannot be merely interpreted as fear of the unknown. It is much more than fear. Viewing from this point we can say that religion does not originate just in fear of the unknown. The essential constituents of awe are wonder, admiration, respect, even love

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Religion is a determination of feeling, a feeling of being absolutely dependent. This feeling is one and the same thing with consciousness of being in relation with God. The original meaning of the word “God” is not a concept of perfect being but the felt relation of absolute dependence. Therefore religion arises not in ideas, in willing, but in the immediate consciousness of an immediate existence-relationship. Religion is more than a determination of feeling. It is the name given to the personal self-consciousness in which the feeling of absolute dependence and consciousness of the world coexist and must achieve a living, stable order. The feeling of being absolutely dependent is also the feeling of identity through which the individual is conscious of his inner uniqueness. The feeling of absolute dependence is not because of any felt deficiency. The feeling of being absolutely dependent or God consciousness, as he calls it, is discernible only because self-consciousness also involves thinking and willing, which are forms of rational relation between the person and his world, forms involving consciousness of relative dependence and relative freedom. He distinguishes the feeling of being absolutely dependent from the feeling of relative dependence. In the latter a person stands in the relations of community and reciprocity with nature and society while in the former there is no reciprocity present. Therefore there can be no consciousness of being in relation to God apart from consciousness of being in relation to the world.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. In his book *The Idea of Holy* he tries to make a clear distinction between numinous or religious feeling and the feeling of the sublime. Numinous feelings have two primary aspects (i) a feeling of religious dread (ii) a feeling of religious fascination. The closest analogue to religious dread or awe is the feeling of uncanniness – the feeling one has when the hair on the back of one’s neck rises, the shudder or terror on hearing a ghost story, the dread of haunted places. The feeling of fascination by, attraction to, and prizing of the object which arouses the feeling in question creates both the desire to approach the object and the feeling that one possesses no value when considered in relation to the fascinating and prized object.

2. When the concept of the numinous and the schematizing concepts are brought together we have the complex category of the holy itself. The word holy can have varied forms of characteristics. One of the characteristics can be that it is rational in its nature in the sense that it can be thought conceptually. Thus for example by holiness we can mean moral goodness and it is possible to have some kind of understanding of what goodness is. But the rational characteristics do not explain completely the meaning of the word holy. For Otto the rational meaning is only derivative. In its fundamental sense the word holy stands for a non-rational character. By it we mean that it is something which cannot be thought conceptually.



BLOCK 2

The debate concerning God's existence has, of course, been going on for millenia. The believers have put forth some arguments that rationalize their faith to some extent, but the more one argues the more challenges they have to face from secular world. Atheism and agnosticism are two such positions that are posing challenges to religion. But religion has its own way of answering the challenges like the classical arguments: ontological argument, for instance, purports to prove the existence of a perfect being; the cosmological argument purports to prove the existence of a necessary or eternal Creator; the teleological argument purports to prove the existence of a Creator concerned with humanity. The whole discussion regarding the belief or disbelief in God takes another direction and asks the question, what is the God that I believe or not believe in? That is, what is the nature of the God that I believe or not believe in? This conflict between faith and religion has continued through the centuries even to this day. Modern day conflict has also erupted between science and religion.

This block includes four units, all dealing with the problems that one may encounter by affirming the existence of God, beginning with challenges by atheism and agnosticism and how faith defends itself.

Unit 1 familiarizes us with the Problem of Atheism and Agnosticism, the two positions that negate the existence of God. Beginning by defining atheism and agnosticism, we will know the different forms they take, the way the proponents of these positions favour the non-existence of God. We will also examine critically the positions of both atheists and agnostics by posing arguments against their views by showing some of the inherent contradictions and inconsistencies regarding the non-existence of God.

Unit 2 highlights Traditional Arguments for Gods existence, which have to some extent only rationalize one's belief in God. There is no attempt to prove the existence of God. The arguments include the Ontological argument, the Cosmological argument, the Teleological argument, the moral argument and the argument from religious experience. The views of Augustine, Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus are also briefly discussed.

Unit 3 studies some of the Modern Arguments for God's existence. This unit guides us to have a glimpse into how the modern philosophers understand God. Thinkers included in this unit are the Rationalists: Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, and the Empiricists: Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, and the Idealists: Kant and Hegel.

Unit 4 familiarizes us with the Nature and Attributes of God. The concept 'God' is used widely and understood differently. This concept raises a number of philosophical and religious problems according to the way it is understood and misunderstood. Some of the attributes that are discussed here in this unit are God as creator, eternal, omnipresent, omniscience, simple and good, and the necessity of God.

This block will enable us to understand how the problem of believing in God unfolds itself and the various challenges that the believers have to face in order to defend their faith. But the question that both the believer and the unbeliever raise is: 'What kind of God is that one believes or does not believe?'

UNIT 1 PROBLEM OF ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Definitions of Atheism and Agnosticism
- 1.3 Forms of Atheism and Agnosticism
- 1.4 Arguments for Atheism and Agnosticism
- 1.5 Arguments against Atheism and Agnosticism
- 1.6 Towards Affirming the Existence of God
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Key Words
- 1.9 Further Readings and References
- 1.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to discuss the problem of atheism and agnosticism, the two philosophical positions that negate the existence of God. After defining and differentiating both these theories, the unit discusses the different forms of atheism and agnosticism. The unit then goes on to elaborate how the proponents of these two positions argue in favour of non-existence of God and of our inability to have certain knowledge about the existence of God. In the next section, we examine critically the positions of both atheists and agnostics by posing arguments against their views – atheism by showing some of its inherent contradictions regarding the non-existence of God and agnosticism by pointing out the inconsistencies in maintaining the inability of the human mind to have certain knowledge. Having examined the inadmissibility of the positions of both atheism and agnosticism, section five arrives at possible ways of affirming the existence of God. The rest of the sections are meant to help the students to understand better the contents of the unit. All in all, the unit enables the student to take a plunge into the problem of

the existence of God from a philosophical perspective. Thus by the end of this Unit the student should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of both atheism and agnosticism;
- to know the different types of atheism and agnosticism;
- to understand the positions of both atheists and agnostics regarding the problem of affirming the existence of God;
- to appreciate the pitfalls of these theories; and,
- to arrive at a possible affirmation of the existence of God.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Philosophy of Religion is a philosophical thinking or reflection on religion by applying the philosophical method. It speculates about the origin, nature and function of religion. It also takes up the basic problems relating to the existence, nature and attributes of God. The problem of affirming the existence of God is one of most important issues in philosophy. Since time immemorial, traces of disbelief in the existence of the Supreme Being are noticed among philosophers. Every religion believes that the root reason for human dignity lies in human beings' ability to recognize the existence of one Supreme Being and their ability to commune with God. From the very circumstance of his/her origin human being is already invited to converse with God. For human beings would not exist were they not created by God's love and constantly preserved by it; and they cannot live fully according to truth unless human beings freely acknowledges that love and devotes themselves to their Creator. But still, sadly, many of our contemporaries have never recognized this intimate and vital link with God, or have explicitly rejected it. Thus both atheism and agnosticism must be accounted among the most serious problems that arise in Philosophy of Religion and hence, deserves a closer examination.

1.2. DEFINITIONS OF ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Atheism is that system of thought which is formally opposed to theism. It is the doctrine or belief that there is no God. An atheist is a person who does not believe that deities exist. The term atheism originated from the Greek 'atheos,' meaning 'without gods,' which was derogatorily applied to anyone thought to not believe in the accepted gods, or to believe in false gods, no

gods, or doctrines that stood in conflict with established religions. Since its first coming into use, the term atheism has been very vaguely employed, generally as an epithet of accusation against any system that called in question the popular gods of the day. Thus while Socrates was accused of atheism by the civil authorities in Athens and Diagoras called an atheist by Cicero, Democritus and Epicurus were styled in the same sense impious (without respect for the gods) on account of their new atomistic philosophy. In this sense too, the early Christians were known to the Romans as atheists, because they denied their gods; while, from time to time, various religious and philosophical systems have, for similar reasons, been deemed atheistic. However, today the word 'atheism' designates the negation of theism, the denial of the existence of God.

Agnosticism could be seen as an attitude of the mind towards human's knowledge of God; namely, that God is humanly unknowable. The word 'Agnosticism' comes from the Greek word 'Agnostos' which means 'unknowing' or 'a profession of ignorance.' The word was first used by T.H. Huxley in 1869 to designate anyone who denies human being knowledge of immaterial reality, and especially of the existence and nature of God. An agnostic is not an atheist. An atheist denies the existence of God; an agnostic professes ignorance about His existence.

Thinkers who belong to both atheistic and agnostic traditions hold that though we might not be able to prove the existence of God, we might be able to disprove it. Many philosophers hold that the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and good God can be empirically refuted by the existence of evil and suffering. Of course, the existence of a creator God would not be so refutable, and both atheism and agnosticism would have to depend on arguments other than that of the mere existence of evil.

1.3. FORMS OF ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Atheism takes different forms. The most trenchant form which atheism could take would be the positive and dogmatic denial of the existence of any spiritual and extra-mundane First Cause. This is sometimes known as dogmatic or positive theoretic atheism. It may be doubted whether such a system could ever possibly be seriously maintained. Still we can think of some advanced phases of materialistic philosophy which profess to find in matter its own cause and explanation and positively exclude the existence of any spiritual cause. A second form of atheism is based

either upon the lack of physical data for theism or upon the limited nature of the intelligence of human being. This second form may be described as a negative theoretic atheism.

A third form is positive moral atheism, in which human actions would neither be right nor wrong, good nor evil, with reference to God. Another form of negative practical or moral atheism maintains that human intelligence is incapable of relating to an extra-mundane, spiritual and personal lawgiver. Still a third form of moral atheism speaks of godlessness in conduct, quite irrespective of any theory of philosophy or morals or of religious faith. All these forms of atheism could be clubbed together under two heads: strong atheism and weak atheism.

Similarly, we can speak of different kinds of agnostics. There are those who deny that reason can know God and make any judgment concerning that existence. Bertrand Russell is an example of this kind of agnosticism. A second group of agnostics deny that reason can prove the existence of God but nonetheless profess a belief in God's existence. Immanuel Kant belongs to this form of agnosticism. There is a third group of agnostics who because of their philosophical commitments deny the possibility of knowing God. Some of these philosophical commitments include nominalism, empiricism, Kantianism, Logical Positivism and Existentialism. These philosophical positions have generated agnosticism of various forms and could be called as nominalists, empiricists, existentialists, etc.

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) Define both atheism and agnosticism.

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2) Briefly discuss the different forms of atheism and agnosticism

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1.4. ARGUMENTS FOR ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

When we discuss atheism, we think of the atheological arguments put forth by various philosophers. These arguments are meant to prove the non-existence of God. The argument from evil (sometimes referred to as 'the problem of evil') is by far the most famous of such arguments, but it is by no means the only such argument. Indeed, in the 1990s philosophers developed a flurry of atheological arguments.

There are two types of atheological arguments, namely, logical arguments and evidential arguments. Logical arguments attempt to show that the concept of God is self-contradictory or logically inconsistent with some known facts. These arguments attempt to demonstrate a contradiction in the concept of God. If an argument of this type were successful, it would mean that the existence of God is impossible; there is a 0% probability that God exists. Thus, for example, Dan Barker in 1997 introduced the Freewill Arguments for the Non-existence of God. He argues that two of the traditional divine attributes, namely, divine freedom and divine foreknowledge are incompatible with one another.

Evidential Arguments attempt to show that certain known facts that are consistent with theism nevertheless provide evidence against it. These types of arguments start with a known fact, such as the amount of suffering in the world. The arguments then attempt to show that the fact in question supports the hypothesis of atheism over the hypothesis of theism because we have more reason to expect the fact to obtain on the assumption that God does not exist than on the assumption that God does exist. Accordingly, the fact in question is more probable on the assumption that atheism is true than on the assumption that theism is true, and hence provides some evidence for atheism and against theism. By combining such facts, one can begin to construct a cumulative case for atheism.

With regard to agnosticism, taking recourse to different philosophical positions such as nominalism, empiricism, Kantianism, logical positivism and existentialism, the proponents

attempted to uphold their view, namely, we cannot have knowledge about the existence of God. Thus, nominalism erases universality from being and holds it to be mere signification of words. It holds that there is nothing in beings that allows the mind to transcend from them to God. Hence we cannot know God with certainty. William of Ockham is the main proponent of nominalism. Empiricism holds that all knowledge comes through experience, and as such, terms such as 'contingency' and 'necessity' are impossible. Human mind can never reason with certitude as human experiences are particulars in nature. Hence certain knowledge regarding the existence of God is impossible. David Hume subscribed to such a view. With regard to Kantianism, Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason, while tackling the problems of necessity and universality of human knowledge posed by David Hume, maintains that human knowledge requires both sensibility and understanding. The former is possible in both space and time while the latter requires the twelve categories. Since God cannot be subjected to sensibility as He does not come under the purview of space and time, Kant held that we cannot have any direct natural knowledge about God. However, on moral grounds, Kant postulates a belief in God, but such a belief in God has no cognitive content and does not guarantee His actual existence.

The central principle of Logical Positivists is the principle of verifiability, which states that a proposition is true if its language elements are reducible to or verifiable in terms of some direct or indirect sense experiences. Thus those propositions which belong to empirical sciences are factual and they are verifiable while formal propositions, such as those of logic and mathematics, are true if they are consistent with themselves. However, statements about God are neither factual nor formal. Hence they are not verifiable, neither are they true or false. They are merely meaningless and non-sensical statements.

Finally, existentialism holds that the only essence of a human being is that which he/she freely creates for himself/herself through the decisive realization of his/her human possibilities. Human being in his/her existence is a free tendency. He/she makes himself/herself what he/she is. To say that he/she possesses a stable and determined essence is to rob him/her of his/her freedom and to make his/her being a fixed and formalized unfolding of a pre-determined pattern. As a continual flux of existential tendencies, human being cannot grasp himself/herself through any conceptual knowledge. From these, we can conclude that existentialism is essentially

agnostic in nature. It refused human beings any rational or conceptual understanding of God. Even when some awareness of a ground of Being is suggested, one can never identify this ground with God.

1.5. ARGUMENTS AGAINST ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Philosophers, especially those belonging to the theistic tradition, have proposed a number of arguments to disprove the position taken by the atheists. As stated previously, atheism presupposes the non-existence of any gods. There are many different offshoots of an atheistic worldview although roughly we can speak of strong atheism and weak atheism.

Strong atheism is complete denial of the existence of deity in any form, which involves a contradiction. A strong atheist must deny divinity by attributing human being with divine abilities. Common atheistic observation concludes that human person is a finite being and can only obtain knowledge through personal experience and application but for the theists knowledge can also be received through divine revelation. The strong atheist needs to not only have all the knowledge of every person ever but also all of the knowledge in the universe. It can be concluded that a strong atheistic worldview, no matter how eloquently explained, is impractical and illogical. Clinging to a strong atheistic view requires that one must reject scientific and philosophical evidence currently known and yet to be known.

Weak atheism, however, covers a much wider range of atheistic beliefs. Typically, weak atheism is attributed to those with any sort of non-theistic worldviews. It denies the existence of God for various reasons. For some since God cannot be found through the uses of the senses, He does not exist. But we know that the air we breathe, the force of gravity, emotions, values, beliefs and thoughts cannot be seen, heard, tasted, smelled or touched. Yet all these exist. Similarly, God who is a spirit cannot be found by way of our senses. This does not mean that he does not exist. Some atheists who hold materialism argue that matter and space just happen to exist and always have existed. But we know that nothing can come from nothingness. Things cannot exist by chance. For the religious, the universe and everything in it was created by God.

Similarly, one can also refute agnosticism proposed by nominalism, empiricism, Kantianism, logical positivism and existentialism. To reject nominalism, we can say that nominalists failed to

recognize that while each being is indivisibly singular, the intellect has the power to consider one aspect of the singular while leaving others out of consideration. Thus intellect can attain universal notions, and subsequently, can have knowledge of God. The empiricists are guilty of one-dimensional interpretation of human experience. To limit experience to what is directly perceptible by the five senses is to eliminate large part of human experience, namely, experiences through intellect. God's existence is inferred intellectually rather than through the senses. Kant erred in saying that perception through human sensibility is an absolute condition for knowing anything. The Logical Positivists by proposing the principle of verifiability limits human knowledge like the empiricists. Finally, the existentialists commit a two-fold error. They fail to recognize that a finite being without an essence is a contradiction. For a finite existence is always the existence of something, and this, from this very beginning. Human being without an intrinsic limit or essence would be an act of infinite existence. Secondly, the existentialists fail to recognize that unless human freedom is grounded in intelligence and dependent upon it, humans cannot know the possibilities among which they can choose. Since essence is a potency that can be realized through existence, these possibilities are really surreptitiously re-introduced essences.

1.6. TOWARDS AFFIRMING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Believers in the existence of God automatically turn to scriptures to prove the existence of God. However, unbelievers reject all arguments from scriptures saying that God's self testimony is not creditable for proving the case. They argue that one's statements about oneself may be false. While that's true, self-testimony is still permissible in any court of law provided that other witnesses agree. Non-scriptural arguments are therefore needed. These arguments are discussed briefly here although some of them will be studied in detail in the coming units.

The intuitive argument, first presented by Augustine, is that humankind has a direct intuition of the existence of God. This argument relies on two significant facts. First, all humanity, throughout history and in all cultures, is incurably religious. Second, when people try to comprehend the immensity and grandeur of the universe, they realize some great intelligence and power is surely ordering the affairs of the universe.

The ontological argument, first presented by Anselm, asserts that the perfect being (God) must actually exist because man can conceive of him. Anselm declared that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Since humankind cannot conceive of anything that does not exist, and since humankind can conceive of the idea of God, then God himself must exist.

The moral argument is that within all people, there is an innate capacity to know right from wrong. This capacity to discern right from wrong indicates the existence of a moral governor of the universe, a moral creator whose goodness is absolute. That moral governor is God.

The cosmological argument, credited to Thomas Aquinas, is concerned with the laws of nature. The central idea of this argument is that the existing cosmos is an undeniable evidence of a creator. The natural law that supports this idea is that for every effect there must be an adequate cause. Since nothing can come from nothing and since the cosmos is something, then something or someone must have produced the cosmos. The cosmos is the effect.

1.7. LET US SUM UP

This unit discussed the problem of atheism and agnosticism, the two philosophical positions that negate the existence of God. It defined and differentiated both these theories and pointed out the different forms of atheism and agnosticism. The unit then elaborated how the proponents of these two positions argued in favour of non-existence of God and of our inability to have certain knowledge about the existence of God. We, then, examined critically the positions of both atheists and agnostics and pointed out their inherent contradictions and inconsistencies. Having examined the inadmissibility of the positions of atheism and agnosticism, the unit affirms the existence of God. The unit, thus, enables the student to take a plunge into the problem of the existence of God from a philosophical perspective.

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) Discuss the various arguments in favour of atheism and agnosticism.

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2) Can we accept atheism and agnosticism as viable theories when we consider the existence of God?

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1.8. KEY WORDS

Agnosticism: It is the doctrine that one cannot know the existence of anything beyond the phenomena of experience. It is the belief that there can be no proof either that God exists or that God does not exist.

Atheism: It is disbelief in or denial of the existence of God or gods.

Empiricism: It is the view that experience, especially of the senses, is the only source of knowledge.

Existentialism: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts.

Kantianism: It comprises diverse philosophies that share Kant's concern to explore the nature and limits of human knowledge in the hope of raising philosophy to the level of a science.

Logical positivism: A philosophy asserting the primacy of observation in assessing the truth of statements of fact and holding that metaphysical and subjective arguments not based on observable data are meaningless.

Materialism: It is the theory that physical matter is the only reality and that everything, including thought, feeling, mind, and will, can be explained in terms of matter and physical phenomena.

Nominalism: It is the doctrine holding that abstract concepts, general terms, or universals have no independent existence but exist only as names.

Philosophy of Religion: It is the branch of philosophy that studies key metaphysical and epistemological concepts, principles, and problems of religion. Topics considered include the existence and nature of God, the possibility of knowledge of God, human freedom, immortality, and the problems of moral and natural evil and suffering

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1.10. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Atheism is that system of thought which is formally opposed to theism. It is the doctrine or belief that there is no God. An atheist is a person who does not believe that deities exist. Agnosticism, on the other hand, could be seen as an attitude of the mind towards human's knowledge of God; namely, that God is humanly unknowable. An agnostic is not an atheist. An atheist denies the existence of God; an agnostic professes ignorance about His existence.

2. Atheism takes different forms. The most trenchant form which atheism could take would be the positive and dogmatic denial of the existence of any spiritual and extra-mundane First Cause. This is sometimes known as dogmatic or positive theoretic atheism. A second form of atheism is based either upon the lack of physical data for theism or upon the limited nature of the intelligence of man. This second form may be described as a negative theoretic atheism. A third form is positive moral atheism, in which human actions would neither be right nor wrong, good nor evil, with reference to God.

Similarly, we can speak of different kinds of agnostics. There are those who deny that reason can know God and make no judgment concerning that existence. A second group of agnostics deny that reason can prove the existence of God but nonetheless profess a belief in God's existence. There is a third group of agnostics who because of their philosophical commitments deny the possibility of knowing God. Some of these philosophical commitments include nominalism, empiricism, Kantianism, Logical Positivism and Existentialism.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. With regard to atheism, there are two types of atheological arguments, namely, logical arguments and evidential arguments. Logical arguments attempt to show that the concept of God is self-contradictory or logically inconsistent with some known fact. Evidential Arguments attempt to show that certain known facts that are consistent with theism nevertheless provide evidence against it. Such arguments start with a known fact, such as the amount of suffering in the world. The arguments then attempt to show that the fact in question supports the hypothesis of atheism over the hypothesis of theism because we have more reason to expect the fact to obtain on the assumption that God does not exist than on the assumption that God does exist. Accordingly, the fact in question is more probable on the assumption that atheism is true than on

the assumption that theism is true, and hence provides some evidence for atheism and against theism. By combining such facts, one can begin to construct a cumulative case for atheism.

With regard to agnosticism, taking recourse to different philosophical positions such as nominalism, empiricism, Kantianism, logical positivism and existentialism, the proponents attempted to uphold their view, namely, we cannot have knowledge about the existence of God. Thus, nominalism erases universality from being and holds it to be mere signification of words. It holds that there is nothing in beings that allows the mind to transcend from them to God. Hence we cannot know God with certainty.

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The central principle of Logical Positivists is the principle of verifiability, which states that a proposition is true if its language elements are reducible to or verifiable in terms of some direct or indirect sense experiences. However, statements about God are not verifiable, neither are they true or false. They are merely meaningless and non-sensical statements.

Finally, existentialism holds that the only essence of a human being is that which he/she freely creates for himself/herself through the decisive realization of his/her human possibilities. Human being in his/her existence is a free tendency. He/she makes himself/herself what he/she is. As a continual flux of existential tendencies, human being cannot grasp himself/herself through any conceptual knowledge. Existentialism is essentially agnostic in nature as it refuses human beings any rational or conceptual understanding of God. Even when some awareness of a ground of Being is suggested, one can never identify this ground with God.

2. Strong atheism is complete denial of the existence of deity in any form, which involves a contradiction. A strong atheist must deny divinity by attributing human being with divine abilities. Common atheistic observation concludes that human person is a finite being and can only obtain knowledge through personal experience and application but for the theists knowledge can also be received through divine revelation. The strong atheist needs to not only have all the knowledge of every person ever but also all of the knowledge in the universe. It can be concluded that a strong atheistic worldview, no matter how eloquently explained, is impractical and illogical.

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to recognize that unless human freedom is grounded in intelligence and dependent upon it, humans cannot know the possibilities among which they can choose.



UNIT 2 TRADITIONAL ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Augustine on the Existence of God
- 2.3 Ontological Argument
- 2.4 Cosmological Argument (Aquinas)
- 2.5 Bonaventure on the Existence of God
- 2.6 John Duns Scotus
- 2.7 Teleological Argument
- 2.8 Moral Argument
- 2.9 Argument from Religious Experience
- 2.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.11 Key Words
- 2.12 Further Readings and References
- 2.13 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to give the student some of the traditional arguments about the Existence of God. While it gives some arguments, there is no attempt made to formulate a universal proof for the existence of God. What we are trying to do is to examine some of the traditional arguments about God's existence. The basis for these arguments is reason, but then we realize and have to accept that the topic we are studying, namely, the Existence of God, is such that we cannot come to any universal conclusion, given the topic of our study. Hence we shall examine the place that proofs hold in such a context and the significance of some of these arguments. Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of some proofs for the existence of God;
- to differentiate the ontological, cosmological, teleological and moral arguments;

- to relate it to the positions of Augustine, Bonaventure and Duns Scotus
- to understand the character of an argument for the existence of God

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Most believers do not need proofs for the existence of God, even so we feel the need to speak of arguments in favour of the existence of God. On the other hand most non-believers or atheists would not feel the need of proving their non-belief or non-acceptance of God, because they see this as most natural. The responsibility then seems to be on the believers to give some arguments to prove the existence of God. While we agree that there can never be a universal proof for the existence of God, even so we can definitely speak of arguments in favour of the existence of God. This chapter will speak of “TRADITIONAL ARGUMENTS FOR GOD’S EXISTENCE.” The aim of this chapter is to examine certain arguments that have traditionally been used to prove or demonstrate the existence of God. We shall examine different types of arguments and we shall also look at some individual philosophers who had significant arguments to prove the existence of God.

We need to look into the actual demonstration of God’s existence, that is, the ways to show that the proposition “God exists” is true. We need to ask the question, “Is this proposition evident or not?” Evident is that which shows itself to us directly, so that it does not need any demonstration. For a proposition to be evident, at least as far as we are concerned, both the subject and the predicate must be known to us. If they are not, the proposition is not evident. Does this then mean that it is not true? No. It may not be evident but it may be true, although the truth of this proposition may have to be demonstrated. If the proposition “God exists” were evident, then there would not be any atheists. But there are atheists, because this is not an evident proposition, although it is true and certain but it needs to be demonstrated. This is necessary because the terms of the proposition are not known to us directly. Since we do not see God directly, we have to prove that he exists. But is a universal proof for the existence of God possible?

2.2 AUGUSTINE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

In the teachings of St. Augustine there is a vast difference between God and the world. God is eternal, is transcendent, all good, all wise, absolute in every way. He is the cause of everything, the creator of the universe out of nothing. He also taught that God in the beginning, predetermined everything so that he knew from the first what would happen to all his creatures through-out eternity. The God of Augustine is the idealization of everything that man considers good and worthy. He is absolute power, perfect goodness, the source and creator of everything. He knows everything and has so controlled the universe that everything is determined by him forever.

St. Augustine's central proof of God's existence is from thought, the proof from within. It begins from the apprehension of the mind of necessary and changeless truths which is present to all. This truth is superior to the mind which cannot change it or amend it. The mind varies in its apprehension of truth, but truth remains ever the same. Eternal truths must be founded on being and reflect the Ground of all truth. They reflect the necessity and immutability of God who is the Ground of eternal and necessary truth.

St. Augustine also seeks to prove the existence of God from the external and corporeal world but these are more like hints, or reminders. He was keen to show that all creation proclaims God who is recognized in the dynamic attitude of the soul towards God. The soul seeks happiness, and some seek it outside themselves. St. Augustine tries to show that creation cannot give the soul the perfect happiness it seeks, but points upwards to the living God who must be sought within. He seeks to demonstrate the existence of God from his effects. He views the rational knowledge of God in close connection with the search of the soul for the Truth which is a kind of self revelation of God to the soul.

2.3 ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The first type of argument that is used to show the existence of God is the ontological argument, and it is so called because it attempts to show that the very concept of the idea of God implies his existence in reality. That is to say, if a person is able to clearly conceive the idea of God then he or she ought to be able to understand and accept that God must exist. It was St. Anselm, the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury who first gave a serious formulation of this argument. His argument was as follows.

God is the greatest possible being. He is “That than which nothing greater can be thought”.

God exists at least in the mind or understanding.

A being who exists only in the mind is not so great as a being who exists in reality as well as in the mind.

If God existed only in the mind, he would not be the greatest possible being.

So “that than which nothing greater can be thought” must exist in the mind as well as in reality.

Hence, God must exist in reality. (as well as in the mind.)

This argument met with many objections because of its claim that the existence of something can be inferred merely from its definition.

Gaunilo a contemporary of Anselm produced a parallel argument, substituting the concept of God with that of the “most perfect island”. Following this argument, logically the ‘most perfect island’ must exist in reality. But it was not the case, thus proving the argument wrong. But Anselm replied that this argument applied only to God, because the concept of God is unique in the sense that God is the only necessary being. All other beings, as the ‘island’ are finite objects and hence not necessary. Hence we can always conceive a more perfect island, but God is already the greatest possible being, and nothing greater can be thought of. We cannot think of a merely perfect God, while we can always think of a more perfect island.

Immanuel Kant also objected to this argument, because he said, that one cannot legitimately think of ‘existence’ as a property which an entity may or may not have, or have to varying degrees. When we say of something that it exists, we are talking of it as already actualized. Existence is not a ‘property’ of a thing as for instance its being red or blue or yellow. So it cannot be a property that adds something to the greatness of God. From Anselm’s argument it appears as if existence in reality adds something to the greatness of God.

2.4 COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (Five Ways of Aquinas)

Another argument that strives to prove the existence of God is the so called Cosmological argument. This argument strives to proceed from the fact of the existence of the world to a transcendent creator. These arguments originate in the thinking of Aristotle and have been presented by Thomas Aquinas who used Aristotle’s ideas as the intellectual medium to put down

his own religious philosophy. These are commonly referred to as the Five Ways of St. Thomas. His arguments could be presented as follows.

First Way (from motion)

Everything that moves is moved by something.

That mover is in turn moved by something else again.

But this chain of movers cannot be infinite or movement would not have started in the first place.

Therefore, there must be an unmoved mover. (whom we call God.)

Second Way (from the nature of the efficient cause)

Everything has a cause.

Every cause itself has a cause.

But you cannot have an infinite number of causes.

Therefore, there must be an uncaused cause, which causes everything to happen without itself being caused by anything else.

Such an uncaused cause is what people understand by 'God.'

Third Way (from possibility and necessity)

Individual things come into existence and later cease to exist.

Therefore at one time none of them was in existence.

But something comes into existence only as a result of something else that already exists.

Not all things can be ONLY possible. There must be one that is of itself Necessary

Therefore, there must be a being whose existence is necessary, 'God'.

Another form of the Cosmological Argument is the **KALAM ARGUMENT**. It was spelt out by the Muslim philosophers Al-Kindi and Al-Ghazali in the ninth and tenth century.

KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The Kalam Argument for the existence of God originated and became highly developed in Islamic theology during the late Middle Ages. It gets its name from the word "kalam", which refers to Arabic philosophy or theology. It is an Arabic term that literally means 'argue' or 'discuss', though it has also been translated as 'theology' or 'dialectical theology'. Traditionally the argument was used to demonstrate the impossibility of an actual infinite existing in the real world, as well as an argument from temporal regress, thus showing that the universe cannot be eternal. In recent years these philosophical arguments have been confirmed by scientific discoveries, viz., the Big Bang theory. The most thorough and articulate proponent of the argument today is Dr. William Lane Craig.

Statement of the (modern) deductive Kalam Cosmological Argument:

Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence. (Causal principle.)

The universe (space, time, and matter) began to exist. (Evidenced by two philosophical arguments, the Big Bang, and the second law of thermodynamics.)

Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.

Sub-argument:

As the cause of the universe (space, time, and matter), the cause must be outside of space, time and matter, and therefore be spaceless, timeless, and immaterial. Moreover, the cause must be a personal agent, otherwise a timeless cause could not give rise to a temporal effect like the universe. (Argument expanded.)

This is an accurate picture of God.

Therefore, God exists.

The first premise of the argument is the claim that everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence. In order to infer from this that the universe has a cause of its existence the proponent of the kalam cosmological argument must prove that the past is finite, that the universe began to exist at a certain point in time. The crucial premise of the kalam cosmological argument, then, is the second: "The universe has a beginning of its existence". How do we know that the universe has a beginning of its existence? Might not the universe stretch back in time

into infinity, always having existed? The proponent of the kalam cosmological argument must show that this cannot be the case if his argument is to be successful.

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 are the strengths and the weaknesses of the Ontological Argument

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2) What are the different types of Cosmological Arguments?

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2.5 BONAVENTURE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

While Bonaventure supported the relation of philosophy and theology, he did formulate arguments for the existence of God. He philosophizes in the light of what he already believes in. His arguments are rational and he makes no reference to dogma in them. Yet he pursues his arguments in the light of the faith which he possesses. His ideal is of Christian wisdom, in which the light of the Word is shed not only on theological but also on philosophical truths, and without which those truths would not be attained. He was mainly interested in the relation of the soul to

God and so his proofs for the existence of God were about stages in the soul's ascent to God. This God is not just an abstract principle of intelligibility but is rather the God of the Christian consciousness. St. Bonaventure does not deny that God's existence can be proved from creatures but rather he affirms it. He says that God can be known through creatures as Cause through effect. This mode of cognition according to him is natural because for us sensible things are the means by which we arrive at knowledge of the objects transcending sense.

In *De Mysterio Trinitatis* (5,29) Bonaventure gives a series of brief arguments for the existence of God. He says if there is a being from another, there must exist a being which is not from any other, because nothing can bring itself out of a state of non-being into a state of being, and finally there must be a first Being which is self-existent. Again, if there is possible being, being which can exist and being which can not exist, there must be a being which is Necessary, that is a being which has no possibility of non-existence, since this is necessary in order to explain the reduction of possible being into a state of existence. If there is a being, a potency, there must be a being in act, since no potency is reducible to act except through the agency of what is itself in act. Ultimately there must be a being which is pure act, without any potentiality, God.

Every human being has a natural desire for happiness which consists in the possession of the supreme Good which is God. Therefore every human being desires God. But there can be no desire without some knowledge of the object. Therefore the knowledge that God or the supreme Good exists is naturally implanted in the soul. The human will is naturally orientated towards the supreme Good, which is God, and this orientation of the will is inexplicable unless the supreme Good, God, really exists.

2.6 JOHN DUNS SCOTUS (1265 – 1308)

According to Duns Scotus God is not properly speaking an object of metaphysical science even though Metaphysics is the Science of Being and God is the first being. Scientific truths are known apriori while the metaphysician knows truths about God only aposteriori. The philosopher comes to know God only in and through his effects. He holds that man has no intuitive knowledge of God in this life since the intuition of God is precisely that form of knowledge which places a man outside the state of life. Our knowledge starts from things of

sense and our natural conceptual knowledge of god is arrived at through reflection on the objects of experience and is imperfect.

Scotus is not so attracted to the argument from motion, but inclines towards the argument from the fact of contingency to the existence of a first cause and a necessary being. Contingent beings can neither cause themselves nor be caused by nothing. Scotus distinguishes between the series of essentially ordered beings and the series of accidentally ordered beings. He does not deny the possibility of an unending regress of successive contingent causes, but rather he denies the possibility of an unending vertical series of simultaneous total causes. Even if we grant the possibility of an infinite series of successive causes the whole chain requires an explanation which must be outside the chain itself since each member of the chain is caused and so contingent. It is necessary to postulate a transcendent cause. The totality of ordered effects is itself caused by some cause which does not belong to that totality. Scotus shows that the first cause in the essential order of dependence must exist actually and cannot be merely possible, that it is necessary being, that is, that it cannot not exist and that it is one. There cannot be more than one necessary being.

In his commentary on the Sentences, Scotus argues as follows. We have to proceed from creatures to God by considering the causal relation of either efficient or final causality. Contingent being, is caused by nothing, or by itself, or by another. As it is not possible for it to be caused by nothing or by itself, it must be caused by another. If that other is the first cause, then we have found what we are looking for. If not, then we need to proceed further. But in the vertical order we cannot proceed forever searching for this dependence. Nor can we suppose that contingent being cause one another because then we shall proceed in a circle without arriving at any ultimate explanation of contingency. We cannot escape by saying that the world is eternal, since the eternal series of contingent beings itself requires a cause. Similarly in the order of final causality there must be a final cause which is not directed to any more ultimate final cause. The first efficient cause acts with a view to the final end. But nothing other than the first being itself can be its final end. So the first efficient cause cannot be of the same nature as the effect, but must transcend all its effects. And as first cause it must be the most eminent being.

2.7 TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

This argument is related to the sense of the word 'telos' which signifies the meaning, end or purpose. Here we are speaking of the telos, of the world. In a way this argument also argues that the sense of purposeful design that we see in nature suggests that the world has a designer, namely God. That is why this argument is also referred to as the Way of Design or the Fourth Way of Aquinas.

Thomas Aquinas links the idea of causation to that of purpose. He says that causation gives things their perfection. And then he links this to the idea of purpose. He holds that goal directed behavior is in all beings, even if they lack awareness. Such beings that lack awareness are directed to their goal by someone who has the awareness and understanding that they themselves lack. Everything in nature is directed to its goal.

While this is one of the traditional arguments, it was best explained by William Paley (1743 – 1805). He gave the example saying that if one was to find a watch lying on the ground, one would assume that it had a maker and had been designed by a watch maker. This would be natural because one can see immediately that it is made up of different parts which work together. They work in harmony to tell us the time. The world too he says is like a machine, with different parts designed so that they have a part to play in the whole. The intricate design of the world in which, like the watch, different parts worked together in such a way that suggested a complex design and planning. The design is such that when looked at as a whole one cannot but think of the designer of the world, who is God.

Religious common sense tends to look at the intricacy of nature as pointing to a God who is the designer and provides a purpose to creation. There is no evidence to sustain an analogy between human creativity and the idea of a divine creator. It is difficult to sustain the teleological approach as a logical argument. At the best we can only say that the world appears to have some order and purpose. For the believer, it supports his or her belief. But to the atheist, it is logically inconclusive.

2.8 MORAL ARGUMENT

This line of argument examines those aspects of human experience which relate to religion. It asks whether there is anything in the way in which people respond to the idea of God which can be used to prove that God exists. One possibility is the experience of morality, namely that we have a sense of what we ought to do and also a sense of guilt when one realizes that one has done what is believed to be wrong. The second possibility is the religious experience itself. Moral rules arise as God's commands, from an objective look at human nature and the structures of the world or as the product of human society and human choice.

We look at the second possibility. Aristotle related morality to his idea of a final cause. He held that we ought to do that which leads to our maximum self fulfillment. Once we discover our true nature we will want to act accordingly. By this approach we could say that morality is rational and objective. If one experiences moral obligation, it implies that one is free to act and that one will experience happiness as a result of virtue. For this to be possible there has to be some overall ordering principle which will reward virtue with happiness, and this might be called God. This was the argument of Kant. He seemed to be saying that you cannot prove the existence of God, but one's sense of morality implies that the world is ordered in a moral way, and that this in turn implies belief in God.

If one believes that there is an objective moral order, it may be used either to suggest that the world is created by a moral being, God, or to show that morality is well established on objective rational grounds and no God is needed. On the other hand, if morality is a human product, no God is required to account for moral experience. Hence the moral argument cannot prove the existence of God. At most it can illustrate the way in which the idea of God is used in situations where there is a moral choice to be made. This is the Fifth Way of St. Thomas.

2.9 ARGUMENT FROM RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

There is in every person the capability of self-transcendence in every experience. That is to say, a very ordinary this-worldly experience seems to point beyond itself and reveals something about the meaning of life as a whole. It reveals to us the religious and the transcendent dimension. Some people do use this as an argument for the existence of God.

For those who have had a religious experience it is impossible to prove the non existence of God. One cannot argue against their experience. But then the issue is that there are various ways of interpreting what has been experienced. What one person calls God may have a perfectly rational explanation to someone else. While we could be mistaken about an experience, it is also possible that we might have a correct experience and have truly experienced God. This is true also of our religious experience. But this requires a previous knowledge of what God is so that we can say whether the experience is correct or not.

The problem is that such knowledge is not possible of God. Because if there was such knowledge then there would be no discussion on the existence of God, because if God exists then his existence would be evident to all and there would be no such debate. Hence if religious experience is a source of knowledge of God, it remains convincing only to those who accept or share this experience. But to the philosopher, the proposition ‘God exists’ can be either correct, incorrect or meaningless. Religious experience can thus become the basis for the argument for the existence of God only when all people accept one definition of the word ‘God’.

If religious experience according to different cultures can be found to have a common core, then there is hope of coming to a common understanding of the term ‘God’. But if we do not arrive at a common core then most will be unconvinced by the argument from religious experience. This argument may be enlightening and persuasive, but it is not logically compelling. That is why this argument is not much liked by philosophers. However for people with a religious mind, it is the most persuasive of all arguments.

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) Christian Western Philosophers like Augustine, Bonaventure and John Scotus have valid arguments for the Existence of God. Spell out these arguments.

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2.10 LET US SUM UP

The Ontological Argument follows the apriori approach. While the cosmological, teleological, moral and religious experience approaches are aposteriori. While considering the arguments about the existence of God it is good to remember that God is not something which might or might not happen to exist. We have to understand the concept of necessary existence. God does not merely happen to exist. Neither can he come into existence or pass out of existence since such a being would not be God. For God, his existence is necessary. If he does not exist then his existence is impossible. But if God's existence is possible then it is necessary. It is his essence to exist, he is being itself, and not 'a' being.

Hence when we try to give arguments about the existence of God, we do not try to show the existence of God as the existence of one entity alongside others, but we are speaking about a fundamental way of regarding the whole universe. It is about the structure of being itself and not merely about the possible existence of 'a' being.

All in all, the ontological argument has made us aware of the logical problems in speaking about God as "that than which no greater can be thought". It has also made us aware of the distinction between a conceptual perfection and an existential perfection. The claim that the existence of something can be inferred from its definition does not seem possible for most people. Anselm made an illegal leap from a conceptual existence, to existence in reality.

The cosmological arguments and the argument from design suggest that there are features of this world which enable the mind to go beyond experience. We try to understand the cause of everything and we also try to understand why the world is as it is.

The moral argument suggests that together with freedom and immortality, we have an intuition of God. This is more evident every time we have or experience a moral obligation.

The argument from religious experience cannot be conclusive because experience is always open to various interpretations. Yet religious experience keeps us focused on the fact that at the heart of religion there is in man a struggle to express our belief in God. Religious experience is a context in which we try to understand the existence of God.

Finally, these arguments may not be conclusive but they are significant because they indicate the thought process of a religiously inclined person. It indicates in a special way what they understand by the word 'God' and how they use that word. For a believer these arguments reinforce their faith. For the agnostic or the atheist they are unlikely to convince. But all in all at least they show us the real differences in various perspectives that the belief in God implies. As it is said, "For him who believes, no proof is needed. For him who does not believe, no proof will ever be sufficient."

2.11 KEY WORDS

Act: the perfection of a being, or the existence of a being.

Argument: offering reasons and causes in support of a conclusion.

Atheist: a person who denies the existence of God.

Being: whatever exists or may exist; something existing in its own way.

Causation: the principle by virtue of which anything is produced

Concept: abstract, universal idea; the intellectual representation of an object.

Contingent: uncertain, non-necessary, non-essential; a being which exists, but which may not exist.

Cosmological Argument: reasons offered in proof of God's existence, taken from the order that exists in the world.

Existence: that which makes a thing to be.

Experience: sense awareness, an immediate and direct perception of reality.

God: the supreme being, creator of all things, the first cause, the most perfect of all beings.

Immutability: the inability to change or be changed.

Moral Argument: based on man's consciousness of universal and absolute binding character of the moral law.

Necessary: that which needs to be there by all means if a certain end is to be achieved.

Ontological: related to the study of being.

Potency: a tendency to actuality; a dormant capacity or faculty.

Proposition: a judgement symbolised in words and so arranged as to convey a complete thought.

Reality: anything that exists, independent of man. (could be actual or existent.)

Soul: a spirit or entity that is supposed to be only in all living things. (Greek psyche, or Latin anima.)

Teleological: related to the end, purpose or final cause.

Telos: end.

2.12 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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2.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. It attempts to show that the very concept of the idea of God implies his existence in reality. That is to say, if a person is able to clearly conceive the idea of God then he or she ought to be able to understand and accept that God must exist. It was St. Anselm, the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury who first gave a serious formulation of this argument.

This argument is considered weak since it can be applied only to God, because the concept of God is unique in the sense that God is the only necessary being. All other beings, as the 'island' are finite objects and hence not necessary. Hence we can always conceive a more perfect island, but God is already the greatest possible being, and nothing greater can be thought of. We cannot think of a merely perfect God, while we can always think of a more perfect island.

2. The Cosmological argument consists of the Five ways of St. Thomas. This argument strives to proceed from the fact of the existence of the world to a transcendent creator. These arguments originate in the thinking of Aristotle and have been presented by Thomas Aquinas who used Aristotle's ideas as the intellectual medium to put down his own religious philosophy. These are commonly referred to as the Five Ways of St. Thomas. The first three ways are part of the Cosmological Argument.

First Way. (from motion.) Second Way. (from the nature of the efficient cause.) Third Way. (from possibility and necessity.)

Another form of the Cosmological Argument is the **KALAM ARGUMENT**. It was spelt out by the Muslim philosophers Al-Kindi and Al-Ghazali in the ninth and tenth century.

The Kalam Argument was used to demonstrate the impossibility of an actual infinite existing in the real world, as well as an argument from temporal regress, thus showing that the universe cannot be eternal. In recent years these philosophical arguments have been confirmed by scientific discoveries, viz., the Big Bang theory

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. In the teachings of Augustine there is a vast difference between God and the world. God is eternal, is transcendent, all good, all wise, absolute in every way. He is the cause of everything, the creator of the universe out of nothing. He also taught that God in the beginning, predetermined everything so that he knew from the first what would happen to all his creatures through out eternity. The God of Augustine is the idealization of everything that man considers good and worthy. He is absolute power, perfect goodness, the source and creator of everything. He knows everything and has so controlled the universe that everything is determined by him forever.

Augustine's central proof of God's existence is from the apprehension of the mind of necessary and changeless truths which is present to all. This truth is superior to the mind which cannot change it or amend it. Eternal truths must be founded on being and reflect the ground of all truth. They reflect the necessity and immutability of God who is the ground of eternal and necessary truth.

Bonaventure supported the relation of philosophy and theology, so his proofs for the existence of God were about stages in the soul's ascent to God. This God is not just an abstract principle of intelligibility but is rather the God of the Christian consciousness. St. Bonaventure does not deny that God's existence can be proved from creatures but rather he affirms it. He says that God can be known through creatures as Cause through effect. This mode of cognition according to him is natural because for us sensible things are the means by which we arrive at knowledge of the objects transcending sense.

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UNIT 3 MODERN ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Rationalism
- 3.3 Empiricism
- 3.4 Idealism
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Further Readings and References
- 3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0. OBJECTIVES

We try to give synthesized answers to the question of God-talk in the Modern philosophers. How did the rationalists, empiricists and idealists apprehend the reality of God? And what are the basic premises through which the inference with regard to existence of God is reached? These are the ultimate questions, worth the effort of probing in this unit. By the end of this unit one should be able

- To have a basic understanding of modern philosophers' assumptions, the content, the avowal in disproving the earlier attempts and proving one's own thesis as truth bearing.
- To evolve a critical appraisal of the philosophers with the hints given for discussions.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Theodicy provides us with the sufficient material with proofs for and against the existence of God. Here we deal with the modern philosophers' arguments either proving it directly or in an

in-direct way. We start with the rationalists, proceeding to empiricists and culminating our study with the idealists. Only selected few philosophers are taken for our study for leaving the rest is due to time and space constraints.

3.2 RATIONALISM

Descartes

Descartes begins his philosophy by Doubting- himself and God. The former is resolved through the inference “Cogito Ergo Sum” ‘I think therefore I am.’ He proceeds to say that God’s existence is firmly grounded than ours moreover God is not a deceiver hence the task to prove God’s existence is undertaken.

Substance is the primary determination- accident adds quality to it- is a secondary determination. ‘Substance is one, which requires nothing else other than itself in order to exist.’ God is the substance which is infinite, independent, all knowing, all powerful and by which man and all that exist have been created. God is the pure subject- Other creatures too can be called substance in as much as they depend on god.

The idea of god is At Intra - from within. By nature we have innate potentiality from birth, to form the idea of God. The idea of infinite substance should have proceeded from an existing infinite substance. We see that there is more reality in infinite than in finite substance. Atheist detests from activating such innate idea of God.

The Innate ideas go along with the external world. God bridges these entities. I realize my limitation and imperfection only with the comparison with the unlimited and infinite being ..., that being is God upon whom Man’s existence relies..., from whom Man derives his existence, for man can not be the ultimate cause of himself and the world – we require a being different from himself who cannot be less than God. Mountain and valley need one another and so man and god. Animals and plants are considered as mere sophisticated machines for men.

Through the process of abstraction we get the idea of perfect being from a limited and imperfect being.

God – means who has all perfections in an unlimited way. Existence is perfection- so He should have existence. Perfection is further divided into ESSENTIAL and EXISTENCE. The former adds to what one is and the latter makes our very being-not adding something and not becoming

a part of what we are. Hence there is a need to assert God as substance and the inevitability of his Existence, which is thus proved.

Discussion

- Proofs -reproducing the old.
- Clumsy definition of Substance.
- Devaluing animal world and plants
- Branding atheists as fools.
- Dependency of the creature - devaluing-unwarranted supposition?

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. Define the key concepts in Descartes; substance, accidents and innate ideas.

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Spinoza

He is a God Intoxicated man as Germans brand him. He comes out with the philosophy of ONENESS or UNIFICATION. Every thing is basically one. A tailored definition of substance from Descartes is vividly seen; Substance is that which can be understood without the help of any other thing. The Substance is God or Nature. Under the aspect of TIME it is NATURE. Under the aspect of INTUITION it is GOD. God and nature are inter-changeable. They are not like cause and effect- as though god is the immaterial cause and the world as material effect He speaks of EMANATION –which would mean Flow out of. It is not creation-as if God making something out of nothing.

Emanation is God makes something out of itself. E.g. Spider emanates its web itself. God or Nature evolves into two directions. They are spirit and matter. They are infinite and eternal. The characteristic of spirit is thought and that of matter is existence. The 'Good' must be shared- so God wants to share-emanate. Thus emanation happens necessarily and eternally yet freely because compulsion is within.

The greatest virtue of mind is to know God as the universal cause- logically inter-connected infinite system- and to perceive the knowledge of union which the mind has with the whole nature.

Discussion

- If god does not fall under the primary datum of experience can HE be the starting point of philosophy?
- Pantheism- identifying world with God.
- Freedom is absence of compulsion from without, but from within, accepted by its very nature-God.(presumption)
- Abstract Monism- the finite objects and things are illusory modes having no existence of their own? Man, his thoughts too share the same fate?

Leibniz

He is the first one to give us a word 'theodicy'. His indeterminism, many realities were all opposed to the one reality and determinism of Spinoza. He brings in the concept of **Monad** and further proceeds to expound the theory of **pre-established Harmony**. Monad signifies unity, the One simple substance that lives, forms the soul and spirit of the entities. They are unextended, shapeless, size-less, being not a mathematical or physical point..., but truly are the metaphysically existent point.

Every Monad is active and alive- certain variation in degree is admitted. Each Monad is a summary of the entire world. There is no interaction between the monads. They have within themselves the source or their activity. Man is the colony of monads, a contingent being and God is said to be the uncreated monad.

The substance is re-worked, explained in terms of monads ..., having the capacity of action..., conversely compound substance is a sort of collection of monads.

Though isolated, having separate purpose, monads behave in accordance with its created purpose; monads form a unity of the ordered universe, thus there is a large single harmony. Each monad mirrors the whole universe. Such a harmony is the result of God's activity. This pre-established harmony is the sufficient proof of God's existence.

On proving God's existence: From sufficient cause, arrive at that substance which is invariable and self-dependent, which is God. From a-priory arrive at a Being in whom there is no distinction between existence and possibility. From the law of continuity view perfection and extend it to the One who is the perfection of all qualities. For cause of the world existing outside of it, is the rational and eternal cause, an eternal mind behind the eternal and inevitable truths and a creator- God is being confirmed.

Discussion

- Every thing is already preset in the mind of God- strivings towards perfection –Useless- a sort of fatalism?
- Man's freedom curtailed- considered as mere puppet of God?
- Mystery of evil and suffering?

3.3. Empiricism

Lock

For Lock knowledge is restricted to ideas resulting from the objects we experience ..., that takes two forms. One is sensation and another reflection.

We have the experience of sensation then only we have experience of reflection. Our mind is 'tabula rasa' empty sheet and experience writes knowledge on it. There is no innate ideas..., through senses we receive the distinctive perception of objects thus ideas of qualities we get. Reflection is the activity of the mind –produces ideas- involves perception, thinking, willing, believing, reasoning and knowing.

Simple ideas originate from sensation. Mind sorts out differences. Mind works to separate them then begins to abstract culminating in forming complex ideas.

Quality is the power to produce any idea in our mind. Primary quality is found in the object such as solidity, extension figure etc., and secondary qualities produce ideas such as color, sounds, taste and odor in our mind.

Substance causes sensation, and is the object of sensitive knowledge- gives power that helps for regularity and consistency to our ideas.

But the idea of God is not clear and distinct as the idea of substance inferred from simple ideas. It is the product of demonstrative reason. We have intuitive knowledge which is clear and certain e.g. knowledge of our own existence .., sure.

Demonstrative idea is that mind progress from simple ones to other ideas in which mind engages in agreement or disagreement. Demonstration is the mode of perception that leads the mind to knowledge of some form of existing reality. Every thing begins and end in time.., a non-entity cannot produce any real being, it is an evident demonstration that from eternity there has been something- that eternal being is most knowing, powerful and it is plain to admit the truth of the knowledge of God though senses haven not immediately discovered it to us. Thus demonstrative knowledge ensures us the certainty of reality of God's existence.

Intuitive knowledge gives certainty that we exist and Demonstrative knowledge, certainty of reality of God's existence and sense knowledge assures that other selves and things exist when we experience them.

Discussion

For Lock sovereignty is placed under the human hands—a legislature, though supreme not absolute. It is held as trust- only as a judiciary power- and if found contrary to trust reposed in them then rebellion is justified.., and not only external but also internal throwing out.., altering them is permitted. Opposed to Hobbes- held to be absolute.

Berkley

He gives a new theory of vision. His famous dictum is 'to be is to be perceived'. Knowledge depends on actual vision or other sensory experience. Quality of material objects are seen to the measure of the faculty of our vision is capable of seeing. We perceive objects- contemplating our own ideas and no abstraction is involved in it.

There is no other reality other than sensible world. Matter and corporal substance do not exist. Substance is a misleading inference of the philosophers. Gravity, causality is nothing but cluster of ideas our mind derives from sensation. The sensible world neither gives substance nor causality. Things external to our minds exists and achieve their order even when we do not perceive them.

Experience of material things is external to our mind, out of our mind (not only mine but all); then if it is independent of my mind then there should be some other mind wherein they exist ... thus an inevitable omni-potent, omnipresent, eternal mind which knows and comprehends all things should exist.

Things depend on God for its existence- he is the cause of orderliness of things in nature. I realize that the other minds too have ideas like that of mine. There is a greater mind between the finite minds that co-ordinates all experience of finite minds –whose ideas constitute the regular order of nature. Our ideas come from God and His orderly arrangement of ideas is communicated to us. Objects are not caused by matter or substance but by Him- who is the ultimate reality. Even when we do not perceive, objects continue to exist due to His continuous perception.

There is special interpretation of causation- insight into it- for; causal connections are explained in terms of mental operations- which produce imagery ideas- through the mental power- thus every thing is nothing but the product of human minds. The real perceived ideas are created and caused to be in us by an infinite mind.

Discussion

- His response to materialism and skepticism?
- Arguments for the reality of God and of spiritual beings –sufficient?

Hume

His rigorous premise that our ideas reach no further than our experience makes him skeptical about the traditionally held proofs especially those having recourse to Causality. Being an empiricist he held that the existence of God not be proved on the basis of experience neither he is the subject of belief or faith. Human reason is incapable of apprehending the reality of God. Proofs are misleading and futile.

Teleological argument;

There is system and organization, beauty and goodness and so god's existence, intelligence and goodness is thus proved.

A. Argument from analogy is futile. Things such as heat, cold and gravitation etc., cannot be explained on the basis of thought or reason. Laws of human life differ from that of animal life and the purpose one discovers in human life cannot be imposed upon other forms of existence- so better not to deduce the fact of the existence of God from the fact of universal existence.

B. Whole- not the basis of part; Thought, reason and purpose are only part of creation- don't use it to analyze the entire creation. Human world and natural world are different and one cannot be used to deduce the other.

C. God doesn't resemble Human mind. Man's mind is subject to incessant change and to conceive of God as being similar to the human mind is rather fallacious.

D. Nature of God derived from nature of creation. Creation is not perfect and so logical conclusion would be that God too is imperfect. Nature as the basis of comparison would lead us to conceive of God who cannot satisfy us.

Refutation of God as the author of the universe

We cannot prove the accuracy of beliefs on the basis of our experience because it is limited and imperfect. Better to detest from conceiving god as the creator of mechanical instrument. God as the soul of the universe would better suffice us.

Moral arguments revised

God as the cause of all morality not assumed since it is not out of experience. Our experience does not vouch for any moral order in the universe. It is wrong to assume that God is moral even though man's reason is incapable of realizing this fact.

Ontological argument revised

When we do not know the nature of god, we can not argue about his existence on the basis of this nature. The belief in God arises rather out of man's physical and psychological needs- not to be based on human reason or on experience but on the requirement of human life- on human emotion and will.. It should be analyzed not from the rational standpoint but from the historic and genetic viewpoints-considering evolutionary aspects.

Discussion

- Inconsistency in believing in the existence of God.
- Daringly believing in the 'purpose in everything', and in nature
- Having recourse to faith...in the philosophical circle
- His influence on Feurbach who develops new findings such as 'theogenic wish' and 'contrast-effect' [God-man relationship] is seen.

3.4 Idealism

Kant's Idea of God

An idealist, profounder of critical philosophy Kant argues that all types of proofs are fallacious. The ontological arguments fail because it treats existence as if it were a 'real predicate'- not as a concept but certain determinations in them accounts for certainty- and need of a perfect being, that accounts for the possibility of any thing to exist. Causal argument fails for just to avoid an actually an infinite causal series in the world we posit a first cause- necessary being - God. God is the highest idea, the idea of highest unity, of the one absolute whole including and encompassing every thing. This idea transcends experience, and it is one of the results of reason which brings under one head all happenings. The impossibility of experience of whole universe makes this idea an entity of this whole, personified as God.

Along with this idea over reason and God, Kant places thought over religion and nature, i.e. the idea of religion being natural or naturalistic. Kant saw reason as natural, and as some part of Christianity is based on reason and morality, he concludes that Christianity is 'natural'. However, it is not 'naturalistic' in the sense that religion does include supernatural or transcendent belief.

Yes we can not experience God through reason yet reason can bring God back as a necessary unknown. Using the name of god one must live a good moral life-for bad life will bring evil. Kant found the practical necessity for a belief in God. It's relation of happiness with morality as the "ideal of the supreme good" is clear. The foundation of this connection is an intelligible moral world, and "is necessary from the practical point of view". He says that only the idea of freedom accounts for the condition of the moral law, whose reality is an axiom. Thus the categorical imperative, authenticates God's role- also an immediately experienced moral situation requires Him, serving as foundation for our ethical principles. Voltaire's contention "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him" becomes true in Kant's statement. Religion does counterfeit service to God- encouraging external ritual, superstition and hierarchy. Conscientious adherence to the principle of moral rightness in the choice of one's actions is to be the goal. Rejection of the possibility of theoretical proofs and his philosophical re-interpretation makes Kant as thoroughly hostile to religion in general and Christianity in particular.

Discussion

- The neutrality in the God-talk and over-emphasis of practicality of morality!
- Philosophical speculation lacking in his discourse on Evil.
- Un-due optimism on 'the good-will' of man and the unrealistic refuge sought in the so called 'categorical imperatives'.

Hegel

Philosophy has to do with 'Ideas' not mere concepts as Hegel proposed, finds its way throughout his doctrine. Religion for him is the attainment of this 'Absolute Idea'. The emphasis is more on Christianity which synthesises the divine and human in the God-man Jesus Christ.

Definition of spirit and light referring to God;

Spirit- the absolute being, self-consciousness, the all truth and knows all reality as itself- in contrast to the reality- is compared to the darkness and night- as the pure ego. This object is for the ego, the fusion of all thought and all reality-the mode is the pure all-containing, all suffusing light as it rises. Its counterpart is the equally simple negative, darkness. The state of

mere being has an unreal by-play on this substance. Its determinations are merely attributes, which do not succeed in attaining independence. This one is clothed with the manifold powers of existence with the shapes of reality. Pure light scatters its simplicity as infinity of separate forms and presents itself as an offering to self-existence that the individual may be sustained in its substance.

Plants and Animals as objects of Religion:

Self-conscious spirit, passing away from abstract, formless essence and going into itself, makes it simple unity assumes the character of the manifold of entities existing by themselves; - divides into plurality of weaker and stronger, richer and poorer spirits. The innocence, characterizes the flower and plant- and as a sort of anti- thesis, negative quality causes dispersion of passive plant forms into manifold entities- and antipathetic fold spirits fight and hate each other to the death and consciously accept certain specific forms of animals as their essential reality.

The Representation of God

Artistic spirit achieves consciousness which is immediate in character. The environment and habitation abstains its pure form, the form belonging to spirit, by the whole being raised into the sphere of the pure conceptions. Ends are not merely posited but constitute the individuality, first of the Gods and then of men. Religion assures man that his God is the universal end, who is present to his consciousness as a form of representation of his own. The ancient Gods, earth, ocean and sun, picturized as earlier titans, are the spirits reflecting ethical life of self conscious nation. The restless, endless individuality is destroyed causing isolation- imposed grandeur on the Gods, the substance being relegated. The supposed reality ensures gladness; it is worshiped and endured. Each marble God stands for the ethical life of a particular people, in worshipping its God, the community achieves self-consciousness.

Discussion

- Christianized the ideas of spirit, nature and freedom
- Pantheistic world-view, identifying nature with God.
- Forcing man to adhere to the universal end.

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. Define the terminologies 'spirit' and 'light' in Hegel.

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2. Explain God's manifold manifestation in plants and animals.

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3. The representation of God in individual consciousness, anthropomorphized in ancient gods partially alienates yet serves in achieving self-consciousness – how?

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3.5. LET US SUM UP

The dualism of Descartes, the monism of Spinoza and a different kind of pluralism in Leibniz believing in one substance but accepting different kinds of monads are covered. The emphasis is on the capacity of human mind on innate ideas or on self evident truths.

Stress on human experience supported with demonstrative reason in Lock, the greater mind coordinating our experience in Berkley, and historic and genetic roots revealing the belief in God arising out of physical and psychological needs in Hume are analyzed.

'The idea of God' in Kant serving as the foundation of our ethical principles, stemming from moral situation and Hegel seeing God as absolute spirit, manifesting in plants and animals- his representation seen in individual consciousness portrayed in ancient Gods mirroring ethical life and facilitating the process of attaining self-consciousness are also seen.

3.6. KEY WORDS

Innate idea of God: by nature man has inborn potency to form the idea of god with in – while activating this one is led to belief in him.

Emanation: Something flows out of something – God makes something out of Himself.

Demonstrative reason: something more than intuitive knowledge- mind progresses from simple ideas to greater and higher ones and has agreement or disagreement of it. This is the mode of perceiving the eternal being.

Teleological: theory which explains that everything has some purpose, goal or end.

Historical and genetic view point: the need of God arising from man's physical and psychological needs- since religion too involves evolution.

Representation: something becoming available to man on behalf of some other reality- God presents himself to man's consciousness, indeed a replica of His own.

Categorical Imperatives: the basic ethical principle present in man a- priori, which accounts for the 'good will' – motivates man to will and act so as to posit a 'maxim' form his acts.

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. **Substance** is the primary determination. 'Substance is one, which requires nothing else other than itself in order to exist.' God is the substance which is infinite, independent, all knowing, all powerful, creatures too can be called substance in as much as they depend on god.

Accident adds quality to the primary substance which is a secondary determination. For e.g. I am fat or intelligent man which adds quality to me as a man.

Innate ideas: By nature we have innate potentiality from birth, to form the idea of God. The idea of infinite substance should have proceeded from an existing infinite substance. We see that there is more reality in infinite than in finite substance. God is defined as **substance**. The idea of god is thus **At Intra** - from within. The Innate ideas go along with the external world. Defining the innate ideas vindication for the proof of God's existence is sought in Descartes.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. **Spirit**- the absolute being, self-consciousness, the all truth and knows all reality as itself-in contrast to the reality- is compared to the darkness and night- as the pure ego. This object is for the ego, the fusion of all thought and all reality-the mode is the pure all-containing, all suffusing **light** as it rises. Its counterpart is the equally simple negative, darkness. This **one** is clothed with the **manifold powers of existence** with the shapes of reality. Pure **light** scatters its simplicity as infinity of separate forms and presents itself as an offering to self-existence that the individual may be sustained in its substance.

2. Self-conscious spirit, passing away from abstract, formless essence and going into itself, makes its simple unity, assumes the character of the manifold nature of entities existing by themselves- divides into plurality of weaker and stronger, richer and poorer spirits. The innocence, characterizes the **flower and plant**- and as a sort of anti- thesis, negative quality causes dispersion of passive **plant** forms into manifold entities- and antipathetic fold spirits fight

and hate each other to the death and consciously accept certain specific forms of **animals** as their essential reality.

3. Artistic spirit achieves consciousness which is **immediate** in character. The environment and habitation abstains its pure form, the form belonging to spirit, by the whole being raised into the sphere of the pure conceptions. Ends are not merely posited but constitute the individuality, first of the Gods and then of men. Religion assures man that his God is **the universal end, who** is present to his consciousness as a form of representation of his own.

The ancient Gods, earth, ocean and sun, picturerized as earlier titans, are the spirits reflecting ethical life of self conscious nation. The restless, endless individuality is destroyed causing **isolation**- imposed grandeur on the Gods, the substance being relegated. The supposed reality ensures gladness; it is worshiped and endured. Each marble God stands for the ethical life of a particular people, in worshiping its God, the community achieves self-consciousness.



Contents

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.2 God as Creator

4.3 God is Eternal

4.4 God is Omnipotent

4.5 God's Omniscience

4.6 God is Simple

4.7 God's Necessity

4.8 Let us Sum up

4.9 Key Words

4.10 Further Readings and References

4.11 Answers to check your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we are going to study about the nature and attributes of God. Nature and attributes of God are very important features of all religious traditions. These serve as keys to faith in God for the believers. Here we will discuss the main nature and attributes of God as commonly accepted by the scholars of religious thoughts. We critically examine the theories of different religious thinkers on the nature and attributes of God. By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Have an over-all glance of the nature and attributes of God.
 - Rationally distinguish between the Infinite Being (God) and finite beings.
 - Appreciate the teachings of various great religious thinkers on this topic.
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4.1 INTRODUCTION

What is God? What do we mean when we use the word 'God'? Do all who use the word God mean the same thing by it? Can we assume that there is just one concept of God? Over the years we know people have thought of God radically different ways. It is perhaps natural to

assume that Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a common concept of God. Their followers profess agreement on some issues such as God is creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.

Today many philosophical and religious problems about 'God' arise from misunderstandings about exactly what that word is taken to mean in different religious traditions. For example, within Western religious traditions, to speak of God as literally existing in a particular place, a being 'out there' in some way, external to the world, is to limit him. And a being so limited cannot be God. So we need to be clear that any argument about an external, separate entity is not the understanding of God in Semitic religious tradition.

We know ordinary things exist because we can define them, set boundaries to them, know what they are. In other words, things are known to exist because they are limited. We can stand outside them and point to them. But if God is infinite and eternal, he is everywhere all the time. It would not be possible to point to him as we can with the finite objects, because it would not be possible to point away from him. It is, therefore, clear that God is not part of the universe. God is not outside the universe either; for, if he is infinite, he cannot be outside anything.

That does not mean that we cannot employ symbolic and poetic language to express belief in God. But such language needs to be recognized for what it is, and not taken literally. Once taken literally, the God it refers to becomes a useless or dangerous idol. For the purpose of our discussions about the existence of God, we need to have some basic definition of what the term 'God' means. R Swinburne in *The Coherence of Theism* offers the following definition that includes the nature and attributes of God:

God is a person, without a body (i.e. a spirit), present everywhere (Omnipresent), the creator and sustainer of the universe, a free agent, able to do everything (i.e. omnipotent), knowing all things (Omniscient), perfectly good, a source of moral obligation, immutable, eternal, a necessary being, holy, and worthy of worship. Similarly, many thinkers of Religions describe God with many attributes such as: God is – Omnipotent, Omniscient, Eternal, Simple, Necessity, Good, One, Changeless, Love, and Perfect. God cannot be either male or female, but for convenience he will be referred to as male. We shall deal with a few of these attributes of God.

4.2 GOD AS CREATOR

According to traditional theism, God is said to be the creator of the universe, and he is said to have created it out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). This is an important feature of theistic belief, for it implies that God is not an external force working with matter or coming in to animate it, nor is he an agent over against other agents. Rather, he is the absolute origin of everything in the universe. There is no external material object, no 'nothingness' out of which things we have in the world can be made. Everything that comes into existence does so as a creative act of God. This is the implication of the idea of God as creator.

Now there is another side to this argument. If there is no matter external to God through which he creates, then God cannot be separate from creation. For example we cannot say 'There is something of beauty', and then point to something else and say 'There is its creator.' In other words, to say that God is creator *ex nihilo* implies that everything is alive with his life.

According to the eternalist thinkers, temporality is an essential feature of creatures. They hold that the universe was created with time and not in time. It implies that the creation is the product of a divine timeless decree. God is before creation not by virtue of existing at a time when the universe was not yet in existence, but by virtue of his necessity and the creation's contingency. It implies that everything created is necessarily in time, mutable and so they are corruptible. On the other hand, anything not created is necessarily eternal, immutable and incorruptible.

4.3 GOD IS ETERNAL

What does it mean to call God eternal? Two main answers have been given to this question. According to the first, 'God is eternal' means that God is non-temporal or timeless. In other words, He is in no way limited or conditioned by time. According to the second, it means that God had no beginning and that He can have no end that he is interminable. God has always

existed and will continue to exist forever. God's mode of being involves no 'before' or 'after' and no 'earlier than' or 'later than'. In other words, in God past, present and future are all given at once as a single now. It is completely without successiveness. God does not comprise of anything that we could recognize as a history or biography. This view is called 'the classical view of divine eternity.' The second view says that God is temporal, according to which it is incoherent to suppose that God is outside time. But it is coherent to suppose that God has always existed and always will.

Those who say that God is timeless are committed to the view that God is both changeless and impassible. But divine immutability and impassibility is not entailed by the temporal view of divine eternity. According to its defenders a timeless God must be vastly different from people. Such a God can, for example, have no thoughts which succeed each other. And such a God can have no memories, expectations or emotions. But if God exists in time, then he might be thoroughly mutable. And, like people, he might have thoughts which come after each other. God might also have memories, expectations and emotions. He might be much like us, as defenders of the temporal view often seem to take him to be.

Arguments in Defence of Classical View of Divine Eternity

- God is cause of all change. But change and time are inseparably connected. So God can not be something existing in time.
- God is the creator who accounts for the existence of the universe. But one can only make sense of things existing in time in so far as one thinks of them as parts of the universe. So God can not be something existing in time.
- God is perfect and unlimited. But nothing in time can be this. Among other things temporal existence always implies loss. Things in time lose what they once had because things in time are subject to change. And they are always vulnerable to what the future might bring. But something which is perfect and unlimited can not lose what it has or be vulnerable to what might come.
- God exists is necessarily true. So something about God is his necessary existence. God is all that he can be, for any reality he lacks but could possess would need grounding in something else than himself. So God must be changeless and unchangeable. And if God is this, then God must be timeless.

- Things in time occupy space. But God does not. So God is outside of time.
- If God exists necessarily, and if God is essentially temporal, then time exists necessarily. But temporal things do not exist of necessity. So God should not be thought of as a temporal thing.

God's eternity has been the constant affirmation of monotheistic religious traditions. It follows from divine necessity. For, if God exists necessarily, it is impossible that He does not exist. Therefore, He can never go out or come into being. God just exists without beginning or end.

In other words, Eternity of God has been used in four different senses:

1. Timelessly logical and mathematical truth.
2. Enduring through all times.
3. Time is retained and yet transcended as total simultaneity. And,
4. As the fulfillment of all values in the best way.

Hence it has been maintained by some thinkers that God is changeless with regard to his essence, but has change in so far as his accidents are concerned.

God sees events as taking place in time, but from all eternity those events have been the same to Him as after they have taken place. God's eternity could be described as follows: Eternity is not, as men believe, before and after us, an endless line. No, it is a circle, infinitely great—all the circumference with creation thronged; God at the center dwells, beholding all. And as we move in this eternal round, the finite portion which alone we see, behind us is the past; what lies before we call the future. But to Him who dwells far at the center, equally remote from every point of the circumference, both are alike, the future and the past.

Within the tradition of classical theism which originated from ideas in Greek philosophy and is found developed in the Christian tradition by Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, God is definitely eternal rather than everlasting. He is not simply an ongoing part of the universe, but is beyond the whole process of change.

The Philosophers who regard God as eternal generally see him as embodying the structure of reality, out of which emerges space and time and the world which we encounter with the senses. This is highlighted by the idea of creation out of nothing *ex nihilo*— not at some point in the past, but as a bringing into reality everything that exists here and now.

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 does the traditional theism say about God as creator?

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2. What are the arguments in defense of Classical view of Divine eternity?

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4.4 GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

The word Omnipotence is composed of two Latin words: *Omnis* (all) and *potens* (powerful). It means the ability to do all things or to have absolute power. God is supposed to be a power to do all things. What can God do? In the Bible, according to the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel tells the Virgin Mary, “with God nothing will be impossible.” God possesses all power. In the book of Genesis 17:1 God declares: "I am God Almighty." The title "Almighty" is applied to Him over and over in the Bible. This title signifies that He possesses all might or power. Again we read in the gospel of Mathew 19:26: "With God all things are possible." Similarly, many other passages in the Bible and scriptures of other religions declare God’s omnipotence.

The Biblical authors typically speak of God's power as a mastery over nature. God has power chiefly as the orderer and ruler of the created world. God is the Lord of the world and it is subject to him. He has power over it. But should it not also be said that God must have power in a somewhat stronger sense – not just power over things, but power of an unlimited or infinite kind? Many thinkers arrive at a conclusion that God possesses power of this kind which is intrinsic to him and therefore he is called Omnipotent.

What does one mean by calling God omnipotent? According to some thinkers, God is omnipotent since he can do even what seems logically impossible. Still others are of the opinion that the omnipotence of God does not mean, that He can do things that are logically absurd or things that are against his will. For example, he cannot lie, because the holiness of His character prevents Him from willing to lie. And He cannot create a rock larger than He can lift; nor both an irresistible power and an immovable object; nor can He draw a line between two points shorter than a straight one; nor put two mountains adjacent to one another without creating a valley between them. He cannot do any of these things because they are not objects of power. They are self-contradictory and logically absurd.

Some scholars think that God's omnipotence means his ability to bring about the existence of any conceivable thing, events or state of affairs. Distinguishing between passive power (as 'I can be shot') and active power (as 'I can sing'), Thomas Aquinas argues that God is omnipotent since he can make (active power) anything to exist which can be thought of as (absolutely speaking) able to be. God is omnipotent in the sense that there is no definite limited range of possibilities in what he can bring about. On the contrary, the beings belonging to a distinct genus and species are limited in the things they can bring about, for they can only produce effects which are characteristics of things in that genus and species. According to Thomas, however, God is not limited in anyway. If God creates out of nothing, his power is not limited. If his act of creation is not something that took place in the past, but an ongoing feature of life, it implies that God brings everything about, without being limited by the material that he uses to do so. In this sense, the idea that God is omnipotent is implied in the doctrine of creation. It would be illogical to call God the 'creator' in this absolute sense and then to say that there are things he cannot do.

4.5 GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

God's omniscience means that he is all-knowing. Since God is not a bodily being he does not possess sense organs and therefore does not have sensations and emotions. It is argued that if God is eternal in the sense that his existence is not extended in time, then he is changeless or immutable then there can be no process in God like he coming to know something or reasoning something out. And if God is not in time then his knowledge can not be located at any moment in time. He must have possessed all knowledge from the beginning; for otherwise He would be learning all the while, and that would of itself constitute a change in Him and would necessarily lead to even more manifest changes. And if God does not depend on creatures for anything, then his knowledge can not in any respect be produced by creatures. It must belong to God as he is in himself. He is omniscient.

According to theism, from all eternity God has possessed all knowledge and wisdom. In the Bible, the evangelist John in his epistle declares that God "knoweth all things" (1 John 3:20). God's omniscience may also be argued from His infinity. In the scriptures God is pictured as an infinite being. Thus His knowledge must be infinite.

Moreover, the necessity of omniscience on the part of God may be seen from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians 1:11 in the Bible, which says that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Only an omniscient being could work all things after the counsel of his own will.

Some thinkers also argue that God's omniscience includes perfect foreknowledge. From eternity God has known all things that have come to pass and all things that are yet come to pass. He has ever known exactly what things would have come to pass if His immutable purpose had been different from what it is at any point.

The basis of God's foreknowledge of all things that come to pass is His own purpose. God could not have known that a thing would come to pass unless it had been certain to come to pass. God's eternal, immutable purpose is the only scriptural basis for the certainty of future events.

The difference between the intelligence of God and human beings can be stated as follows: God and human beings are intelligent; but in what manner? Man is intelligent by the act of reasoning, but the supreme intelligence lies under no necessity to reason. He requires neither premise nor consequences; nor even the simple form of a proposition. His knowledge is purely intuitive. He beholds equally what is and what will be. All truths are to Him as one idea, as all places are but one point, and all times one moment.

Those who hold that God is all-knowing give the following reasons:

- God is wholly perfect. He can not be this if he lacks knowledge. Therefore, God is all knowing.
- The Order in the world can be accounted for in terms of a God which has knowledge.
- God is the creator of the universe. But creating is an act of intelligence. So God has knowledge.
- Knowledge is something which exists in the world. Since God accounts for all that exists in the world and since this must reflect that God is, knowledge is something we can ascribe to God.

These arguments prove that God is omniscient or all-knowing.

If God is omniscient, he knows everything. There can be two ways of looking at this argument:

1. If he is eternal, existing outside time altogether, then his omniscience is timeless. His knowledge of past, present and future is simultaneous. It is not that he correctly guesses what will happen in the future, but that – for him – there is no future. His knowledge is eternally present.
2. If he is everlasting, then he will know everything that has happened in the past, and everything that is happening in the present. He will also be aware now of those things in the present which will determine what happens in the future. In this sense, God might be said to ‘know’ the future, even though he has not been there yet!

The central problem with this argument for theists concerns human freedom and responsibility. If God knows what we think we freely choose to do, is not our freedom an illusion? Once someone knows that something is going to happen, then that thing is not a matter of chance, but inevitable. If it's not inevitable, then God cannot know it. In other words, if God knows what is to come, how can the future be anything but predestined or unpreventable?

In Short

- If God is omniscient, he knows everything.

- He therefore knows that I will do X.
- Therefore, I am not free to choose not to do X.

Can we then argue that God's omniscience and contingency are compatible notions? Many philosophers have suggested that we can. Most famous argument is that of Boethius. According to him God is eternal, meaning 'the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life.' According to Boethius, therefore, God's knowledge is not best thought of as foreknowledge. It should rather be thought of as 'knowledge of a never passing instant.' In that God sees future things present to him. For Boethius, God does not foreknow, God simply knows. This argument suggests therefore, that God might know that at some point in the future I will freely choose to do X. In this case, my freedom is part of what God knows – therefore I remain free to choose.

But this argument seems to create a logical problem as follows:

- I am free to choose if, and only if, there are at least two possible options at the moment of choosing.
- If God knows that I am free to choose, he must allow two possible outcomes.
- Therefore he cannot know which of those outcomes I will choose without denying me my freedom to make that decision.

An example might be: 'You can choose any colour you like, as long as it's red!' (No freedom) or 'You can choose any colour you like.' (Freedom, but I cannot insist that you choose red.)

One way out of this dilemma could be to say that we freely make choices based on many factors, both conscious and unconscious. We do not fully understand these, and therefore do not fully appreciate why we make the choices we do. On the other hand, an omniscient God would understand all about us, and would therefore know exactly those factors, including our desire not to be predictable, which lead to our apparently 'free' choice.

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. State in short the argument of Thomas Aquinas on God's omnipotence.

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2. What are reasons given by those who hold the view that God is all-knowing?

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4.6 GOD IS SIMPLE

The claim that God is simple is an ancient one. But what do we mean to say that God is simple? A famous account of divine simplicity comes in Augustine of Hippo's *The City of God*. Here he says, There is one sole Good, which is simple and therefore unchangeable; and that is God. By this Good all good things were created but they are not simple, and for that reason they are changeable. The term 'simple' applies to things which are in the fullest and truest sense divine, because in them there is no difference between substance and quality.

According to Augustine, God is simple because he is immutable. But Augustine also thinks that God is simple as not possessing different properties or attributes. He says that the expressions such as, 'the knowledge of God' or 'the goodness of God' are not distinct realities in the divine substance.

According to Anselm of Canterbury, 'The supreme nature is simple, thus all things which can be said of its essence are simple one and the same thing in it.' Anselm acknowledges that those who believe in God use different statements when speaking of God's nature. They say, for example,

'God is good', 'God is just', 'God is wise.' But these expressions do not imply that God is something with really distinct attributes. According to Anselm, there is no distinction between God and anything we might want to call 'the attributes of God.' Therefore, both for Augustine and Anselm, the various attributes the believer ascribe to God in sentences such as, 'God is X', 'God is Y', and so on, are not distinct realities in God. They are God.

Some defenders of divine simplicity however, have said more than this. For they add that God is simple in the sense that there is no real distinction between God's nature (or essence) and God's existence. According to their account, God is simple since he is immutable and since he has no attributes really distinct from himself. They also argue that God is simple since existence belongs to God by nature. God is simple since God is Being or existence without qualification. Thomas Aquinas famously puts it, God is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* (Subsisting Being itself). According to Aquinas, God is simple since he is immutable and since he is not a being with different attributes. For Aquinas however, God is simple since he is not a 'composite' of essence and existence.

The following arguments have been put forward in support of divine simplicity:

- God can not be thought of as having changeable properties, distinct from himself, since God is the source of all changes.
- God can not be thought of as having distinct temporal properties; since God as creator of the universe, must transcend time.
- God is not a material object. So he can not be thought of as having parts in the way that material objects have parts.
- Something with different properties depends for its existence on the existence and conjunction of those properties. But God can not be something which depends for existence on anything. God is the reason why anything exists at all.
- One can not distinguish between God and God's existence or between God's nature and God's existence, since to do so would imply that existence is something which God receives from another. But the being of God is wholly underived.

These lines of argument are insisting that there must be a dramatic difference between God and creatures or contingent beings. Compositeness or lack of simplicity is very much a feature of things in the world. These are material, temporal and dependent. How shall we preserve God's

transcendence in relation to the created order? For defenders of belief in divine simplicity, one way of doing so is to teach that God is simple.

4.7 GOD'S NECESSITY

Since Aristotle, in western philosophical theology God has been conceived as a necessary existent being. Probably, for Aristotle God's necessary existence meant simply his immunity to generation and corruption. This conception is connected with the contemporary notion of God's 'factual necessity' which is stated as follows: given that God exists, it is impossible that he ever came into or will go out of existence. He is uncaused, eternal, incorruptible and indestructible.

During the Middle Ages, Islamic Philosophers such as al-Farabi began to enunciate an even more powerful conception of God's necessity. According to them, God's non-existence is logically impossible. This conception of God's necessary existence lay at the heart of Anselm's Ontological argument. It states: if God's non-existence is logically impossible, it follows that he must exist. God is logically necessary being.

Powerful theological and philosophical reasons are given for taking God's existence to be logically necessary. Philosophically, the conception of God as the greatest conceivable being implies his necessary existence in this sense, since logically contingent existence is not as great as necessary existence. If God is by definition God is necessary being, in the sense of logical necessity, cosmological questions simply do arise with respect to God. His existence is self-explanatory in a way that the existence of no other being is. The existence of necessary being answers the question, "why is there something rather than nothing?" The conceptualist argument also entails the existence of a logically necessary being in order to ground the realm of abstract objects. The moral argument leads naturally to such a being, since moral values and principles are not plausibly logically contingent. The motivation for claiming that God is logically necessary being stems from the conviction that God is necessarily the ultimate being in the universe.

Traditionally, the arguments were given for necessary being for two reasons: The first is to halt the regress of causes. Of necessary being no further questions can be asked. The second function is to provide a sense of ultimacy to the explanation. It eliminates any vagueness or ambiguity in

the answer to the question 'why is there something rather than nothing at all?' If God is personal, then we can speak of him as the cause of the universe. There is no mystery about the ultimate foundation of existence, for causal questions and ultimacy questions come together in the one logically necessary person: God.

Check Your progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1. What are the arguments put forward in support of divine simplicity?

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2. Traditionally, what are the reasons given for God as necessary being?

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4.8 LET US SUM UP

The discussion on the nature and attributes of God helps us to understand what people mean by God. In the course of our analysis we discovered that God is the creator or the ultimate cause of all the finite beings of the universe. Therefore, he is logically an uncaused cause. He is simple and therefore is not limited in his being and knowledge. The critical and analytical survey of the nature and attributes of God leads us to comprehend the implications this has for religious belief.

By definition God is the locus and source of all values. Such a being is absolute goodness and worthy of worship.

4.9 KEY WORDS

- **Theism:** Belief in the existence of God.
- **Atheism:** The conviction that there is no such being called God.
- **Agnosticism:** The view that there is no conclusive evidence to decide whether God exists or not.
- **Pantheism:** An identification of God with the physical universe.
- **Panentheism:** The belief that God is within everything.
- **Deism:** The idea of an external designer God who created the world, but is not immanent within it.
- **Idolatry:** The literal identification of God with any individual thing or concept.

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4.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. According to traditional theism, God is said to be the creator of the universe, and he is said to have created it out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). This is an important feature of theistic belief, for it implies that God is not an external force working with matter or coming in to animate it, nor is he an agent over against other agents. Rather, he is the absolute origin of everything in the universe. There is no external material object, no 'nothingness' out of which things we have in the world can be made. Everything that comes into existence does so as a creative act of God. This is the implication of the idea of God as creator.

2. Arguments in Defence of Classical View of Divine Eternity

1. God is cause of all change. But change and time are inseparably connected. So God can not be something existing in time.
2. God is the creator who accounts for the existence of the universe. But one can only make sense of things existing in time in so far as one thinks of them as parts of the universe. So God can not be something existing in time.
3. God is perfect and unlimited. But nothing in time can be this. Among other things temporal existence always implies loss. Things in time lose what they once had because things in time are subject to change. And they are always vulnerable to what the future might bring. But something which is perfect and unlimited can not lose what it has or be vulnerable to what might come.
4. God exists is necessarily true. So something about God is his necessary existence. God is all that he can be, for any reality he lacks but could possess would need grounding in something else than himself. So God must be changeless and unchangeable. And if God is this, then God must be timeless.
5. Things in time occupy space. But God does not. So God is outside of time.
6. If God exists necessarily, and if God is essentially temporal, then time exists necessarily. But temporal things do not exist of necessity. So God should not be thought of as a temporal thing.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Some scholars think that God's omnipotence means his ability to bring about the existence of any conceivable thing, events or state of affairs. Distinguishing between passive power (as 'I can be shot') and active power (as 'I can sing'), Thomas Aquinas argues that God is omnipotent since he can make (active power) anything to exist which can be thought of as (absolutely speaking) able to be. God is omnipotent in the sense that there is no definite limited range of possibilities in what he can bring about. On the contrary, the beings belonging to a distinct genus and species are limited in they can bring about, for they can only produce effects which are characteristics of things in that genus and species. According to Thomas, however, God is not limited in anyway. If God creates out of nothing, his power is not limited. If his act of creation is not something that took place in the past, but an ongoing feature of life, it implies that God brings everything about, without being limited by the material that he uses to do so. In this sense, the idea that God is omnipotent is implied in the doctrine of creation. It would be illogical to call God the 'creator' in this absolute sense and then to say that there are things he cannot
2. Those who hold that God is all-knowing give the following reasons:
 - God is wholly perfect. He can not be this if he lacks knowledge. Therefore, God is all knowing.
 - The Order in the world can be accounted for in terms of a God which has knowledge.
 - God is the creator of the universe. But creating is an act of intelligence. So God has knowledge.
 - Knowledge is something which exists in the world. Since God accounts for all that exists in the world and since this must reflect that God is, knowledge is something we can ascribe to God.

These arguments prove that God is omniscient or all-knowing

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. The following arguments have been put forward in support of divine simplicity:

- God cannot be thought of as having changeable properties, distinct from himself, since God is the source of all changes.
- God can not be thought of as having distinct temporal properties; since God as creator of the universe, must transcend time.
- God is not a material object. So he can not be thought of as having parts in the way that material objects have parts.
- Something with different properties depends for its existence on the existence and conjunction of those properties. But God can not be something which depends for existence on anything. God is the reason why anything exists at all.
- One can not distinguish between God and God's existence or between God nature and God's existence, since to do so would imply that existence is something which God receives from another. But the being of God is wholly underived.

2. Traditionally, the arguments were given for necessary being for two reasons: The first is to halt the regress of causes. Of necessary being no further questions can be asked. The second function is to provide a sense of ultimacy to the explanation. It eliminates any vagueness or ambiguity in the answer to the question 'why is there something rather than nothing at all?' If God is personal, then we can speak of him as the cause of the universe. There is no mystery about the ultimate foundation of existence, for causal questions and ultimacy questions come together in the one logically necessary person: God.

BLOCK 3

Religious experience and faith is expressed through language. Language as a means of communication has generated a lot of interest in philosophical discussions, particularly in matters of religion and God-talk. Language, as a fundamental form of human expression, is a central element in every religious tradition. One of the ways that the believers claim to have encountered God is through religious experience or the experience one has had with the transcendent, like Moses who encountered God on Mount Sinai, Gautama Buddha and others too. But these religious experiences are discredited by both the unbelievers as well as believers (especially through their inadequate expressions and exaggerated claims). So the question that is raised is whether emotional dimension has a place in the matters of religion and God? The question that is further asked is whether such an object does exist? If such an object does exist, how can it be known? If known, how can a transcendent reality be expressed in our material and tentative expression?

This block consists of four units that will discuss in detail the problems of religious language and religious experience.

Unit 1 gives us an overall view of Religious Language. It deals with the various problems faced; it studies the possibility of religious language as a sacred substance, the words as sacred, the role of the speaker, hearer, the medium and the context, the functions of the language, the relation of the language and worship.

Unit 2 highlights the various approaches to religious language. Beginning with the three traditional ways of approaching religious language, this unit studies some of the theological predicates, the possibility of verifying the theological statements, and the role of myths and mysticism.

Unit 3: This unit deals with the preliminary analysis of religious experience. Today religious experience has gained a lot of importance in the philosophy of religion. Here we will study the meaning of religious experience, the various levels of experience, religion and religious experience, analysis of religious experience, and the views of Richard Swinebourne.

Unit 4: Unit four studies the contributions of two eminent writers William James and Rudolf Otto on Religious Experience. William James analysed the religious experience mainly from the psychological point of view and Rudolf Otto tried to bring out the aspects of Divinity and religious experience, which according to him go beyond the rational.

Language embodies and expresses one's religious beliefs and convictions. But the content and manner of communication of the same is often questioned and debated. Today religious experience takes priority in encountering and relating to the transcendent over the traditional arguments for the existence of God.

UNIT 1

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Content

- 1.0 Objective
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Language and creation
- 1.3 Religious Language as Sacred Substance
- 1.4 Religious or sacred languages
- 1.5 Language in Sacred Functions
- 1.6 Language and Worship
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Key words
- 1.9 Further Readings and References
- 1.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVE

The main object of this unit is to get an overall view of religious language – its meaning, its problems and ways in which language has been regarded as the manifestation of the sacred.

We will be dealing with:

- Language as sacred substance
- Analysis in the social context
- Language and its sacred functions
- Language and the worship

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Language, as a fundamental form of human expression is a central element in every religious tradition. Traditional terms used to describe the forms of religious language – such as prayer,

praise, petition, thanks, confession and exhortation. The key to the modern understanding of language is to see it as an integrated system of components that are concerned with form and purpose, as well as with meaning.

When future philosophers assess last century's major philosophical emphasis, it surely will be claimed as the century of the linguistic turn. Where as other eras have been dominated by interest in metaphysical speculation, the nature of reason or major philosophical – political ideologies, a preoccupation with language has emerged again and again in the 20th century. Religion has always had a concern for language that has out stripped that of philosophical tradition, due in large part to the common conviction that the primary subject of religious language is a mystery that is expressed only with difficulty. It is the sense of the mystery and that which surrounds religious utterance, the fact that if we look at how people use the word 'God' we find poetry, metaphor, paradox, ambiguity, incoherence and silence. All say that they do not know how to use the words properly. But if we reject religious utterances, on whatever grounds, we must reject a great deal else besides, much of humour, satire, poetry and emotional expression. From the centre of language, we progress, through increasing ambiguity to the edges of language, which mark between sense and nonsense, between sayable and unsayable.

Literature, humour and religion are the three main areas that explore language's edges, and the fact of such explorations reflects a basic human need to express more than our ordinary, rule-allowed-behaviour allows, and to be opaque and inexact upon occasion. The wider the spectrum of language a man employs, the richer the world in which he finds himself.

God is religion's peculiar way of marking the boundary of language- it is an utterance when one wants desperately to say the most. The ultimate verification of the language of faith lies in the continuing process of meditation on the part of the user which produces an increasing realization of adequacy of the language claims to be his own experience.

An explanation of religious language really depends upon how we define religion and language. In general there are three basic approaches to the study of religious language.

- 1) First approach assumes that religion refers to some transcendent reality, usually called sacred, or all encompassing question in life, such as meaning of life and death, good and evil and suffering.

- 2) Second approach views religion as basically expression of emotions. With both of these approaches, religious language is not to be taken literally but is to be seen as symbols that stand for emotions that are non-cognitive.
- 3) The third approach denies that there is anything special about religious language. This theory is known as semantic theory, draws on Logical Positivism and claims that the meaning of religious language should be explained as a part of ordinary language in which meaning is determined by the truth conditions entailed by all languages.

Spoken language manifests itself in the speech act, a type of purposeful human activity that can be analyzed in terms of its intended effect within a social context. A speech act involves 1) a language in which to embody a message

- 2) a speaker to send the message
- 3) a hearer to receive it
- 4) a medium by which it is transmitted
- 5) a context to which it makes reference.

Sacred language can be examined in terms of how it gives distinctive treatment, in turn, to each of these elements of speech act situation. Then we will see how these components are combined to achieve the various goals of sacred speech acts.

1.2. LANGUAGE AND CREATION

The texts of ancient Sumer provide the first example of the commonly found Near Eastern doctrine of the creative power of the divine word. The major deities of the Sumerian pantheon first plan, creation by thinking, then utter the command and pronounce the name, and the object comes into being. In the first book of Bible, namely Genesis, God brings order out of chaos by simply speaking “Let there be light” and by naming “God called the light Day, and the Darkness he called Night”. Adam’s giving of names to the plants and animals in the second chapter of Genesis confirms mere physical existence with linguistic existence.

Vedas contain the most developed speculations about the cosmic role of language. Several of the Vedic texts record the story of a primordial contest between speech and mind to see which is the

most fundamental and essential force. While mind always wins, there is still the acknowledgement that speech is a basic cosmic force. One Vedic god, Prajapathi, as the god of creation, speaks the primal syllables 'bhur, bhuvah, svar' to create the earth, atmosphere, and heaven. He is said to give order to the world through name and form, which are elsewhere called his manifest aspects. These two terms 'nama-rupa' are key elements in much of later Hindu Philosophy, standing for the two basic dimensions of reality. The single most important term from this earliest stratum of Indian thought on language is 'vac' meaning speech. It has been personified as an independent deity, the goddess who is prajapati's wife and who is, in some places, given the role of the true active agent in creating or becoming the Universe.

In the West, a comparable idea has been expressed in the doctrine of the 'logos'. It was developed through a combination of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic ideas. Logos was viewed as the rational principle that pervaded and gave order to the nature. It was demiurge that mediated between the created cosmos and the transcendent god, in whose mind existed the eternal forms. This idea was taken over by Hellenistic Judaism, especially in the writings of Philo Judaeus, where 'logos' was identified with biblical 'Word of God'. It then influenced Christianity from second century onwards and started referring Jesus Christ as the Logos. The Christian view of the logos seems to stress its quality as language, word, and message, rather than as mere thought. Besides the world ordering function, there is the idea that the logos is a principle of salvation as well, delivering the message that shows the way to return to the condition of the original cosmic purity. Such conception of the double movement of creative language is found within the Indian Tantric system also.

The Supreme deity of Hindu Tantrism, Siva is pure consciousness and thus silent. But in his first manifestation he unites with his consort, Vac (speech) who is also termed Siva's 'sakti (power), the female agency through which the process of creation will proceed. Creation begins with a subtle vibration that develops into the 'mothers of the letters' of the Sanskrit alphabet, then into the words of speech, and finally into the referents of those words, namely the concrete objects of the world. Certain monosyllabic vocables, called 'biju mantras' (mantras are syllables, words or whole sentences that serve as both liturgical utterances and meditational devices), are regarded as the primordial forms of this linguistic evolution and therefore, as sonic manifestations of basic cosmic powers; Literally 'seeds' of the fundamental constituents of the universe. For example,

'yam' is equivalent to wind, ram' to fire. Importantly , the Tantric adept who masters the use of 'mantras ' is felt to know how to control the process of cosmic evolution, and to able to reverse that process to take himself back to the condition of primordial unity and silence that constitutes the goal of Tantric practice

The same could be seen in Qabbalah, the medieval tradition of Jewish mysticism. The main idea was that God himself was totally transcendent, but flowing froth from him were his manifest and knowable aspects. Parallel to the emanation doctrine, there existed the conception of creation as the unfolding of the divine language. Instead of realms of light, there issued forth a succession of divine names and letters, namely, the 22 consonants of the Hebrew alphabet. As in Tantrism such a belief led to tradition of word –magic. The initiate into the practice of Qabbalah was supposedly capable of repeating acts of cosmic creation through proper combination of the Hebrew letters.

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 are the traditional terms to describe the forms of religious language?

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2). Which are the basic approaches to the study of Religious language?

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1.3. Religious Language as Sacred Substance

One of the most important aspects of the modern understanding of language is the realization that meaning rests on the conventional relationship between the signified and signifier. The latter- a word- is comprised of both form and substance. Form is the phonological and grammatical rules of proper formation and substance is its sounds, if a spoken word. The meaning of a word. However, is not inherent in either its form or substance. In pre -modern attitudes toward language, such distinctions were not usually made. In particular, to regard some linguistic manifestation as sacred did not imply that it was exclusively, or even primarily, the meaning that was taken to be holy. More often it was the exact form or even the veritable substance in which it was expressed that was felt to be the locus of the sacrality. This is seen most clearly in the reluctance or refusal to allow translation of certain religious expressions into equivalent statements. Religious traditions have often held the position that synonymy does not preserve sacrality.

The Dogon people of Africa believe that the speech used by the priest during ritual action contains a life force, or 'nyama' that is conveyed by his breath and becomes mixed with the life force of the invoked gods and the sacrificial offerings that are to be redistributed for the benefit of the all people. The nyama is given to the priest by a snake deity who appears at night and licks his body, thereby conveying the moisture of the word – the same creative power used by God at the beginning of the world to fertilize the cosmic egg. The Chamula, a Maya community of Mexico, have a similar notion of the useful power inherent in the substance of sacred speech used in ritual, believing that this more formal and redundant language contains a 'heat' that is consumed by the gods along with other offered substances.

1.4. RELIGIOUS OR SACRED LANGUAGES

Many of the world religions have developed the idea that an entire language, usually other than the vernacular, is sacred. Such languages are often reserved for liturgical or for other functions conveying sacred power, such as healing or magic. A sacred language usually begins as a vernacular through which a revelation is believed to have been received. This can lead to the belief that the language is particularly suited for revelation. They consider that it is superior to

other languages and inherently sacred. The typical example we can find in Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas. Sanskrit literally means 'perfected' or 'refined'(samskrta). In Islam, the Arabic wording of the Quran is regarded as essential to its holiness, as it is repeated in the many passage of the book itself " we have sent it down as an Arabic Quran". This has sometimes led to the inference that translations of the Quran are not themselves sacred scriptures, but more like mere commentaries. Such belief in the sacrality of what originally was a vernacular seem to be special cases of the widespread idea that one's people and culture are the best, superior to others by virtue of a special closeness to the gods. The Chamula people of Mexico say that the Sun deity gave them the best of all the languages of mankind; thus they call it 'true language.'

The Chamula people distinguish three different forms of their own language, the most important of which is 'ancient words' those which were given to their ancestors during the first stages of world creation. These are the formal phrases used in ritual. This example will illustrates a general principle. Many traditional peoples, as well as high cultures, recite sacred doctrines and rituals in an archaic form of speech that is only barely comprehensible to contemporary speakers. But the language is regarded as sacred, not primarily because it is different from the vernacular, but because it contains the doctrines of revered figures from the past, such as gods, prophets, or ancestors. The desire to express the unchanging, eternal validity of some scripture or liturgy by not allowing any change over time in its language will necessarily result in the language becoming largely unintelligible to those without special training. Such is the case for many of the prayers that are spoken by the priests in Shinto shrines, having been preserved in their original classical Japanese of the tenth century. The further passage of time can yield a fully distinct , now 'sacred' language, as the offspring vernaculars develop into independent forms. Such was the case for Sanskrit in relation to its vernacular offshoots, the Prakrits, as well as for Latin in relation to the Roman languages.

After Scripture, Cult is the place we find the sacred language. Here the preservation of archaic forms of language is a part of the general conservation of liturgical practice. The inclusion in the Latin celebration of Holy Eucharist of such ancient and foreign sounding elements as the Hebrew and Aramaic formulas ' Halleluja', 'Amen', and 'Maranatha'. The Greek prayer 'Kyrie eleison'

added an element of mystery and a sense of connectedness to a religiously significant past, which even the Latin phraseology would eventually come to represent.

Whenever language has become mere form to the common person, having lost the ability to convey any message beyond its symbolic representation of a particular manifestation of sacrality, there will be a reaction by those who see a need for a scripture or liturgy that can once again speak and teach. Many religious movements have begun on this note, railing against frozen formalism and demanding and usually producing vernacular expressions of their religious feeling. Buddhism began in this manner, as did many bhakti movements in medieval India. The latter stressed the vernacular compositions- devotional poetry- that often became the foundation for the flowering of literature in the regional language. In the West, Martin Luther's insistence on hearing, understanding, and responding to the divine word led to the Protestant use of vernaculars and to the elevation of liturgical practices, such as the sermon, that stressed not just presentation of the scriptural forms but interpretation of the scriptural message.

Set of sacred words

There may not be an entire language as sacred for all the religions, most consider some special subset of speech as an embodiment of the sacred. The mere uttering or hearing of words from this set, which usually takes the form of a collection of sacred scriptures, will be believed efficacious, whether or not the meaning is understood. This emphasis on formulaic, as opposed to spontaneous, language brings with it a stress on techniques of preservation and precise recitation of the given texts, rather than on methods for inspiration and creation of new expressions. The sacred words of scripture are a divine gift to man, which relieve him of the burden of inventing his own, merely human, response to the sacred.

Within the set of Holy Scriptures, a single passage may stand out as the holiest of all, and therefore the most efficacious. Hinduism recognizes the mystic syllable 'OM' as the essence of all the Vedas, and the hymn known as the Gayathri (Rigveda3.62.10), has achieved a place of

preeminence among all mantras. The smallest unit of sacred language is the single word, and there have been many candidates for the one that should be regarded as the holiest. However, the most widely recognized sacred word is the name of a god. This stems from a common association of the name of someone with that person's soul. Utterance of the name was felt to give power over the being. So the name of God in various religions has alternately been taboo – to be avoided because likely to incite the awesome power of the deity – and a focal point of prayer, meditation, or magic. The Igbo tribe of Africa tries to avoid using the names of gods they consider particularly capricious, employing instead such circumlocutions as “The One Whose Name Is Not Spoken”. On the other hand, for Sufis, the mystics of Islam, the intense repetition of the divine name over and over again in the practice of ‘dhikr’ is regarded as one of the most effective means of achieving the highest state of pure, undivided consciousness of God.

The Speaker

The characteristics possessed by the speaker have often been regarded as significant factors contributing to, or detracting from, the sacred impact of the words uttered. The greatest impact comes when the speaker is regarded, in effect, as being a god. Very dramatic are those cases where a god is believed to talk directly and immediately through a person in the present tense as in the case of Oracles. Here we have been speaking in tongues, or acting as a medium, oracle, or prophet.

For human persons, their status will affect the sacrality attributed to their words. Particular status may even be a necessary precondition for the use of sacred words. Priests for example, may have exclusive rights to the use of liturgical utterances. In vedic religion, only the three upper classes were allowed to perform rites with Vedic mantras. High status will enhance the effectiveness of one's speech.

All religions have struggled with the problem of keeping their tradition of rites and prayers from becoming an empty formalism. They insisted that a certain quality of heart or mind accompany the recitation of the sacred formulas. This usually involves a greater attention to the meaning of the language and requires a different attitude on the part of the speaker than does mere exactness in the repetition of the forms. In Vedic India, where precise articulation of mantras become an

essential ingredient of an effective ritual, there also developed an idea that priest who had the esoteric knowledge of the symbolic import of the ritual, and who silently rehearsed that knowledge during the performance, had the most effective ritual of all.

The Hearer

There is a great difference in perspective on the issue of the sacrality of language between the speaker and the hearer or audience. The characterization of a sacred language as unintelligible and valued only for its form, as discussed above, would apply, then, only to the untutored audience, and not to the priestly speaker who had been taught that language.

Sometimes the priests will be ignorant of the meaning of the words he uses, as in the case today, for example, among the many of the Hindu Brahmins who use Sanskrit recitations in their rituals, or the Buddhist monks who chant the Pali scriptures.

In many applications of sacred language, the intended hearer is a god. However, unlike the addressee, in ordinary conversational situations, the addressed gods seldom speak back. Many times it is a monologue or in a ritual there may be multiple speakers, but seldom are they responding to or addressing one another.

The Medium

The spoken word uses the medium of sound for its transmission. This gives it qualities that make it quite distinct from the written word, conveyed through the medium of print. Many scholars understand and emphasize the numerous differences between oral cultures and literate cultures. One key difference is that preliterate people regard the speaking of an utterance as an act of manifestation of power. The word is viewed as an active force that is immediately involved in shaping the world. In contrast, the written word comes to stand for lifeless abstraction from the world.

The medium of sound has a number of flexible qualities that can be manipulated to express nuances of power and sacrality in ways that go beyond the meaning of words. These range from variation in tone and speed to the use of sound patterns such as rhythm and rhyme. The simplest

of these vocal but nonverbal or paralinguistic features is variation in loudness. In the high cult of Vedic India, three variations were used for the mantras. 1) aloud, for the priest who recited the hymns of praise; 2) muttered, for the priest who performed most of the physical handiwork; 3) silent, for the priest who sat and watched for errors in the performance. The loud recitations were further divided into high, medium, and low tones, with the louder portions also spoken at a faster pace. The instructions for the traditional Tridentine Mass of Catholicism also called for three different tones, from loud to inaudible.

While heightened sacrality, as in a liturgical climax, is sometimes marked by the loudest dynamic, often it is just the opposite. Silent speech or pure silence have often been regarded as the highest forms of religious expression. Thus, many times in the history of Mass, the climate hallowing and offering of the sacraments has been recited inaudibly, or so softly that only those immediately around the celebrant can hear. In Indian Tantra an explicit doctrine developed according to which “prayer without sound is recommended as the most excellent of all”. Among the Zuni of North America, a person’s most prized prayers are said only ‘with the Heart’.

The Context

Full understanding of any speech act requires knowledge of the context it occurs. Language regarded as sacred quite often has its context a ritual setting. In that case, the intended effects of the speech acts are largely confined to the domain of the ritual. Some rituals do, of course, intend their effects to carry over into the non ritual environment as for example, when the priest says “I now pronounce you man and wife”. Sacred Language may also find expression in settings other than ritual, in the case of spontaneous prayers or the occasional use of magic spells.

The relationship between the ritual language and its context is much different from that between ordinary language and its context. Since ritual language is, for the most part, the repetition of a fixed text, it precedes and, in effect, creates, its context rather than reflecting and representing in speech a context regarded as prior and already defined. Therefore much ritual language is directed toward defining the characteristics of the participants and the nature of the ritual situation. The rich symbolism of both object and action that marks off ritual behaviour from ordinary behaviour will add yet another distinctive trait to ritual language. Its message is often

paralleled in the symbolic systems of those other media – the visual and tactile properties of the physical objects, the kinesthetic sensibilities of gesture and movement – which then serve to reinforce, enhance, or even complete the verbal meaning. For example, as the Dinka priest recites an invocation over the animal victim during a sacrifice, he accompanies each phrase with a thrust of his sacred spear to ensure that his words ‘hit the mark’ and weaken the beast for the final physical act of killing.

During the reciting of the consecration in the Mass the priest breaks bread and offers the cup of wine to reenact the Last Supper and thus, give parallel reinforcement to the words that make reference to the same event.

1.5. LANGUAGE IN SACRED FUNCTIONS

The several speech act components just surveyed, from language itself to the context in which it is spoken, combine to achieve the final product of the sacred utterance. We can consider the effect in two ways- 1) transforming some object or state of affairs and 2) worshiping spiritual beings.

Language and transformation

There is a significant difference between sacred language uttered within the context of a ritual and that spoken outside of such a setting. A ritual is a self-contained and idealized situation in which the participants and objects momentarily take on changed identities in order to play out sacred roles. The words are chief instruments by which these transformations take place. There are three elements in it, namely, the human participants, the ritual objects and the ritual goals.

The human participants

The Human persons need to express their pious qualifications for undertaking the ritual. First person indicative utterances are most frequently used to accomplish this task. In Christianity, for example, the proper identity of a repentant sinner and believer in the correct doctrine becomes

manifest through the recitation of the confession,” I confess to almighty God .. that I have sinned
“ and “.I believe in one God..”

Some ritual traditions involve transforming the human into a divine being, in many cases by using language that states an identity between parts of their bodies. This is a common theme in Navajo healing rites. One prayer for example, describes the deeds of two Holy people at the time of creation, and then continues: “With their feet I shall walk about;...with their torso I shall walk about. ”The priest in a Vedic ritual must also establish his partial identity with gods, using such mantras as “ I pick you (grass bundle) up with the arms of Indra.”

The ritual objects

The trans mundane character of the ritual objects is, in a parallel fashion, often conferred or made explicit by indicative phrases. Most of the implements at a vedic sacrifice are addressed by the priest with second person utterances, such as this one to a wooden sword: “You are the right arm of Indra.” The words spoken over the sacraments of the Christian Eucharist “This is my body” also typify utterances of this category, whose function could appropriately be labeled consecration.

The Ritual goals

Once the ritual setting has been transformed into an assemblage of divine or cosmic personages and forces, the transforming language of the liturgy will be directed to the task of promoting those powers to bring about some desired end. At the simplest level, there are the wishes that the ritual will produce a positive result. This may be in the first person as in the case of the patron of a Vedic sacrifice “By the sacrifice of gods for Agni may I be food eating”. When one utters a wish that some negative condition may come about for another, it is a curse.

One may also direct the ritual objects to bring about a goal, as when the Vedic priest calls on the firmly fixed baking title: “You are firm. Make the earth firm. Make life firm. Make the offspring firm”. There are some transformations that are supposed to carry over into, or take place in, non ritual settings. Marriage pronouncement is one such instance. These verbally accomplished acts bring about a change in their status.

1.6. LANGUAGE AND WORSHIP

The most prominent sacred task to which language is put is the worship of the gods. The transformation of the ritual setting is usually an activity preparatory to the climatic offering of praise. The service of god always demands a complex verbal etiquette. Interaction with god cannot be matter of simple manipulation; instead, every act must be cushioned with words of explanation and concern. Furthermore, the intangible nature of god demands a linguistic means to make their presence take on a more concrete reality.

Most of the religious traditions have decided that worship of the gods must follow a particular form. In Judaism there is the principle enunciated by rabbis: “A man should always utter the praises of God before he offers his petitions”. Most of the fundamental themes of worship will be found within the structure of invocation, praise, offering, and petition.

Invocation

Logically the first topic of any service of worship, securing the god’s presence at the rite – usually with second person imperatives requesting them to come – will form an elaborate early portion of many liturgies. Hindu tantric ritual uses an invocation to bring about the presence of the god in the concrete image that is the focus of worship “O lord who protects the world, graciously be present in this Lingam until the end of worship”.

Praise

Essentially to praise means to pronounce publicly and thereby acknowledge recognition of a god’s praiseworthy characteristics. If these involve deeds accomplished in the past that were for the benefit, one expresses thanksgiving. There is always the hope, and probably expectation, that mentioning such deeds of benevolence will prompt the deity to act again on the celebrant’s behalf. Certainly uttering praise is intended to make the god favorably disposed, or even to fill the god with renewed energy.

The simplest way to give linguistic expression to praise is to say “I praise” as in the Christian Gloria “ We praise thee, we bless thee, we adore thee, we glorify thee..”

Offering

The high point of many worship services is the act of offering some gift to the invoked and praised gods. Words are necessary accompaniments to the physical act to define it as an act of offering, motivated by the appropriate intention on the part of the worshiper. There must also be statements expressing the proper concern for the god's feelings. Again the simplest way to establish an act as one of offering is to say "I offer". Almost always there will be a request that god accept the offerings. Hindu worship includes such phrasing as "What has been given with complete devotion ... do accept these out of compassion for me"

Petition

Logically the final act of worship, petition is in many cases the motive force behind the entire service. There are religious traditions, that downplay this goal as in Islam. In Judaism and Christianity there is a clear mention of petitions. In the standard weekday service of rabbinic Judaism, the central element, the Amidah, contains a set of 12 supplications, the 'tefillot' accompanied by praise.

The term prayer, though often used in the widest sense to refer to almost any form of language used in dealing with gods, might best be restricted to this function of petition.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What are the most fundamental themes of worship expressed by the religious language?

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1.7. LET US SUM UP

All religions have their own language to speak about the Ultimate, to express the feeling of sacred, awe and holiness. Word has a power of creation and is a sacred substance. Religious language is spoken in the atmosphere of speaker, hearer, medium and a context.

It has a power of transformation and the participants can experience it in the ritual objects and goals. Religious language is used as means of worship in invocation, praise, offering and petition.

1.8. KEY WORDS

Language: Language is a particular kind of system for encoding and decoding information.

Religion: Religion is a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a supernatural agency or agencies usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

Substance: Substance is a concept of object, or thing when this is contrasted with properties or events. It is something that stands under or grounds the things.

Cult: Cult is a system of ritual practices.

Sacred words: They are a way for believers to align themselves more closely with the gods they worship.

Transformation: Transformation means, a spiritual transformation which refers to a fundamental change in the place of the sacred or character of the sacred in the life of the individual.

1.9. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Traditional terms to describe the forms of religious language are- prayer, praise, petition, thanks, confession and exhortation.

2. First approach assumes that religion refers to transcendental reality; second views religion as an expression of emotions and third approach denies that there is anything special about religious language.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The fundamental themes of worship are invocation, praise, offering and petition

UNIT 2

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE - II

Contents

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Three Traditional Ways

2.3 Meaning of Theological predicates

2.4 Non Assertive Interpretations

2.5 Let Us Sum Up

2.6 Key words

2.7 Further Readings and References

2.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0. OBJECTIVES

Objective of this unit is to understand the various approaches to religious languages. We will deal with:

- the traditional understanding
- the meaning of Theological predicates
- non assertive interpretations

2.1. INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that many of the terms that are applied in religious discourse to God are being used in special ways. They all differ from their use in ordinary contexts. For example, when it is said that 'great is the Lord' it is not meant that God occupies a large volume of space; when it is said that 'The lord spoke to Joshua' it is not meant that God has a physical body with speech organs. There is a long shift of meaning between the familiar use of these words and their theological employment. In all these cases in which a word occurs both in secular and in theological

contexts, its secular meaning is primary in the sense that it developed first and has accordingly determined the definition of the word. When we use these terms in religious sense they all possess a peculiar meaning and outlook. So various attempts have been made to understand the relation between the religious and secular languages.

2.2. THREE TRADITIONAL WAYS

In the medieval period we see these clearest expressions. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas (1224-74) argued that religious language is analogical, that is, it conveys truth but not literal truth. In the same century, John Duns Scotus (1264-1308) contended that Thomas's view was incoherent. Duns Scotus emphasized that only two options are possible, univocal and equivocal language. For example, the word 'bat' can mean two different things, a baseball bat or a flying mammal. If we do not know to which it refers, the use is equivocal. If we do know to which it refers, it is literally, or univocally, one or the other. No other option exists. Nobody thought seriously the alternative of equivocal language. They assumed that since religious language, particularly Scripture, is in fact meaningful, it must be either univocal or analogical. They forgot the fact that religious language is noncognitive. This view is held by the majority in the eastern thought. More specifically, all words must be denied or negated in order to understand Ultimate Reality truly, hence this option is often designed as 'negative way' (via negativa). This view was held by German mystic Meister Eckhart(1260-1327) and by the great Jewish Philosopher, Moses Maimonides(1135-1204). This tradition sees language as valuable only in the sense of being evocative of an experience of the divine or the ultimate.

The Negative Way

The assertion that all religious language is equivocal, and must be negated, may strike us as being skeptical and belonging rather to unbelief than to belief. But this is the view of those who had the emphatic vision about the reality and vividness of an experience of God. This is the view of the mystical traditions of all religions. In the West, this idea is rooted in Platonic thought which was influenced by Eastern ideas mediated by the Pythagorean School. Neo-Platonism emphasized that aspect of Plato's thought that stressed the transcendence of the One or Good and

the way the One is beyond all categorical language or thought. Plotinus (204-70) in the third century portrayed a mystical view of God. The One is beyond all knowing and saying. The One emanates into intellect and from intellect emanates soul and from soul emanates matter. The ascent to the One happens through a purification from matter to soul and soul to intellect and from intellect to One. It is an imageless or apophatic type of meditation. One quits oneself, getting rid of the 'lowest' and moving to the 'higher' that is, one quits the body, then the images of the mind, then the words and thoughts of the mind, opening up the possibility of the unmediated encounter with the One, "flight from the many to the one", as Plotinus called it. What is usually emphasized is that this experience is ineffable yet intensely real, the most real experience one can have. This influenced the medieval spiritual tradition in Meister Eckhart and the anonymous author of the "Cloud of Unknowing".

Neo-Platonism influenced Augustine, who in turn was the key intellectual figure in the Western Church till Thomas Aquinas.

Pseudo-Dionysius or Dennis the Areopagite suggested that there are different approaches to God. In "The Divine Names" he shows how the names of God do not literally describe God but point to God as the cause of all things. On the other hand he appears to subordinate this affirmative way to the negative way. He argues that "the higher we ascend the more our language becomes restricted" until finally we arrive at a "complete absence of discourse and intelligibility". The way we must follow to this highest point is the 'via negativa' which means that all terms must be denied of God.

A striking example can be seen in 'Mystical Theology' of Pseudo-Dionysius

"Once more, ascending yet higher we maintain that It is not soul, or mind, or endowed with the faculty of imagination, conjecture, reason, or understanding; nor is It any act of reason or understanding; nor can It be described by reason or perceived by the understanding, since It is not number, or order, or greatness, or littleness, or equality or inequality, and since It is not immovable nor in motion, or at rest, and has power, and is not power or light, and does not live and is not life; nor It is personal essence, nor eternity, or time; nor It be grasped by the understanding, since It is not knowledge or truth;...nor It is Spirit, as we understand the term,

since It is not son -ship or Fatherhood;...It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature – free from every limitation and beyond them all”

Several observations can be made on this passage. First it relies on the common method of the negative way.. One moves beyond words and concepts by denying them, which is to lead, not to skepticism or unbelief, but precisely to the truth, to the insight and actual experience that God is beyond all such words. This represents a reliance on language, but it is reliance on a functional or evocative sense only. No cognitive or descriptive content is allowed. Second, we must note the remarkable thoroughness with which he carries through the method. Not only the negative terms are denied – evil, falsehood, unreality – but the positive terms – goodness, truth, reality – also are negated, even to the point of denying fatherhood and son-ship to God- an astounding step for a Christian theologian. Third, we should note that the rigor of this passage undercuts any approach involving cognitive meaning. Fourth, despite the thoroughness, at the end the author lapses into unusually strait forward assertion. When he deals with the question of why we should approach God in this way, he alludes to common rational explanations of God’s relation to the world.

What happens to Dionysius here points to a perplexing inconsistency on the part of most proponents of the equivocal way. It is very difficult to speak and write about what one has experienced, in short, to communicate about it, which is what they want to deny. In fact, mystical writings are very extensive and often very illuminating. Perhaps the only consistent response would simply be silent and not say or write anything.

A similar approach in the Western tradition was the twelfth century work of the Jewish Philosopher Moses Maimonides, who wrote in the “The Guide for the Perplexed”:

There is a great danger in applying positive attributes to God. For it has been shown that every perfection we could imagine, even if existing in God..would in reality not be of the same kind as that imagined by us, but would only be called by the same name, according to our explanation; it would in fact amount to a negation”

He contends that the best that can be done is simply to deny any attribute applied; the result will be that “you have undoubtedly come one step nearer to the knowledge of God”. Some would argue that such a purely negative approach simply fails; it never says enough to make a difference. And even if it did, Maimonides inconsistently like Dionysius, calls upon affirmations of God at other points in his thought such as God’s simplicity and God’s understanding.

In Indian Philosophy, the concept of ‘neti neti’ (not this not that) reveals the indescribability of Brahman by any attributes or language. The Nirguna Brahman in Sankara’s Philosophy clearly tells us that we cannot describe Brahman either positively or negatively. Brahman is beyond all positive and negative qualities and attributes. Whatever we say about God we can say that He is not that.

Another example from the Eastern mystical tradition that especially underscores the ‘instrumental’ use of religious language is Zen Buddhist ‘koan’, a seemingly nonsensical riddle that is to be the means to ‘satori’ or Enlightenment. A well-known ‘koan’ is “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” A disciple may puzzle over such a riddle for months or even years, and when the disciple come to the end of all rational approaches, precipitated perhaps by a slap or blow by the Master at the opportune time, ‘satori’ occurs. The nonsense is the point. This usage exemplifies very well how language can be valuable in the negative way, but as a means, not as a description. Nevertheless, even Zen Buddhists speak of what is supposedly unspeakable, if only to distinguish their vision of ultimate reality from a more typically Western one.

This contradiction or difficult challenge that lies at the heart of the negative way appears almost insuperable, especially if it arises in the context of a Western religion centered on a written revelation from God. Thus Aquinas and Scotus assumed that the equivocal option is ruled out because God has indeed communicated to us about the divine nature. On the other hand, this approach is a reminder, especially to the univocal way, that language is notoriously unstable when applied to God. We are stretching it to its breaking point – and perhaps beyond . It is a warning against the idolatry of language. Even religions centered on writing and speaking can see how language functions to protect the transcendence of God. An obvious example in the

Jewish tradition was the earlier refusal to speak or write the name of God, with result that today we still are not sure of what that name was.

The Univocal way

John Duns Scotus defines univocal language as follows: “I call that a univocal concept whose unity suffices for contradiction when it is affirmed and denied of the same things. It also suffices as a syllogistic middle term”. For example, in the syllogism - All humans are mortal; Socrates is human; therefore, Socrates is mortal – ‘human’ is used univocally as the middle term. Scotus recognized that there is much figurative language in Scripture, but the implication is that we would not know what such language meant apart from being able to translate it into literal language.

Scotus has been followed by modern theologians like Carl Henry. He argues against the third way of analogy: “The logical difficulty with the theory of analogical predication lies in its futile attempt to explore a middle road between univocity and equivocity. Only univocal assertions protect us from equivocity; only univocal knowledge is, therefore, genuine and authentic knowledge.” Further he writes, “Unless we have some literal truth about God, no similarity between man and God can in fact be predicated...The alternative to univocal knowledge of God is equivocation and skepticism”. What is curious is that within a short space Henry goes on to write, “Of course God is epistemologically transcendent; of course human beings do not have exhaustive knowledge of him” This concession appears to take back with one hand what he gave with the other. One can see in this tension Henry’s awareness of doing justice to the transcendence of God, yet at the risk of self –contradiction, which was one of the dangers of the equivocal way.

Paul Tillich also makes the same point. He is usually recognized for opening up the significance of symbolic language in expressing what cannot be expressed in any other way. It is quite clear in Tillich’s systematic theology that he expresses the classic univocal way. In the first volume of Tillich’s systematic theology, he maintains that there is only one literal statement in theology. He says “Theologians must make explicit what is implicit in religious thought and expression; and

,in order to do this , they must begin with the most abstract and completely unsymbolic statement which is possible, namely, that God is being-itself or the absolute”.

Schubert Ogden is another theologian who in his later writings firmly believes in the univocal way. He says that unless there is a univocal foundation, we cannot ascribe meaning to the use of symbolic or metaphorical language.

In conclusion, it is clear that the univocal way is still alive and well, but that it has its endemic problems. It may be that if the only choice is between equivocal or univocal language, many may choose the latter; but the cost is high. It is difficult to see how we can move from literal language, with its context in everyday life, to the transcendence of God without sacrificing something precious to common religious sensibilities. That is why it is often those most committed to spirituality opt for the equivocal way.

The Analogical way

Thomas Aquinas opted for the analogical way, attempting to do justice to the intentions of both other ways and yet to avoid their drawbacks. His appeal to analogy became the standard model for understanding religious language. He began with the ‘via negativa’ and ruled out univocal way from the outset. God is not a being like other beings. God cannot be ‘classified’ into some genus and species. Every term used of God must consequently in an important sense be denied, “for what He is not is clearer to us than what He is”. Aquinas agrees with Scotist that we do have cognitive revelation, that is, we know something of God and can express this knowledge in language. As Aquinas says “If then, nothing was said of God and creatures except in a purely equivocal way, no reasoning proceeding from creatures to God could take place. But, the contrary is evident from all those who have spoken about God” How do we, however, understand this “mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation?”

Aquinas’ answer is that we know and speak of God ‘analogically’. We can understand it in two ways: analogy of attribution or proportion and analogy of proportionality. Analogy of attribution can be understood through an example that Aquinas uses. We attribute health to persons in a

literal sense, that is persons possess health 'formally'. On the other hand, we might say of medicine that it, too, is healthy, but it certainly is not healthy in the literal sense that people are healthy. The reason seems to be that medicine causes people to be healthy; thus, it is healthy in a derivative or 'virtual' sense. When we then turn to Aquinas' famous emphasis on God as the first or uncaused cause of the world, it follows that since God is the cause of everything, the names of everything can be virtually attributed to God. God is love because God is the cause of love. As Aquinas expresses it more fully:

"Our natural knowledge takes its beginning from sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things. But our mind cannot be led by sense so far to see the essences of God, as their cause. Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His essence be seen. But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God whether He exists, and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him".

We can make an opposition as if God is the cause of everything, then everything can equally be attributed to God. Is God as aptly 'love' as a 'lion'? Is God as much evil as good? In response, Aquinas first of all can appeal to his understanding of evil as non-being to dismiss negative terms. Evil in itself is nothing. Negative characterization of God, therefore, on the basis of the analogy of attribution, is ruled out. Second, since God is infinite, terms that are capable of infinite expansion are more appropriately applied to God than terms that are not. Thus 'good' is more appropriately applied to God than is 'lion'. Calling God a lion or Jesus the bread of life are what Aquinas calls metaphors. He expresses the difference well:

"There are some names which signify these perfections flowing from God to creatures in such a way that the imperfect way in which creatures receive the divine perfection is part of the very signification of the name itself, as stone signifies a material being, and the names of this kind can be applied to God only in a metaphorical sense. Other names, however, express these perfections absolutely, without any such mode of participation being part of their signification, as the words being, good, living, and the like, and such names can be properly applied to God"

For Aquinas analogy is a much more potent category than metaphor. The second approach to analogy, that of proportionality, follows from the name. We may say that a cabbage has life or is alive. Probably we would consider that it has life literally in the way that any other garden plant lives. On the other hand, we may consider that there is only a proportional relationship between the life of a cabbage, and a rabbit. Life functions differently in both cases, but it is also similar, that is, analogical. When applied to God, the proportionality is simply extended. We then would say that life is to a cabbage as life is to God. God has life or love or goodness, or power, in the way appropriate to God. The two approaches to analogy thus complement each other.

2.3. MEANING OF THEOLOGICAL PREDICATES

Most philosophers have located the difficulties of religious language in the predicates of theological statements. What does 'good' mean in 'God is good'? It may seem that we should start with the subject of the statements, with the concept of God. But there is no alternative to starting with the predicates. For the only way to make clear what one means by 'God' is to provide an identifying description, such as 'the creator of the universe'; and to understand that phrase one must understand the predicate 'created the universe' as applied to God. Theological predicate can be divided into negative and positive. The positive predicates can be concerned either with attributes like good, wise etc. or with actions like makes, forgives, speaks etc. Negative predicates present no special difficulty, but in themselves they are clearly insufficient to give any positive conception of the deity.

Derivation and application

When one reflects on the use of predicates in theological statements one comes to realize two fundamental facts. 1) This use is necessarily derivative from the application of the predicates to human beings and other observable entities. 2) The theological use of predicates is markedly different from the application of predicates to human beings.

Theological predicates are derivative primarily because it is impossible to teach theological language from scratch. How would one teach a child what it means to say "God has spoken to

me” without first making sure that child knows what it is for a human being to speak to him? In order to do so one would have to have some reliable way of determining when God was speaking to him, so that when this happens one could say to him “that is what it is for God to speak to you”. And even if we admit that God does speak to people from time to time, there is no way for one person to tell when God is speaking to another person unless the other person tells him, which would require that the other person have already mastered the theological use of language. Hence there is no alternative to the usual procedure of teaching the theological use of terms by extension from their application to empirically observable objects.

As for the difference in the use of predicates as applied to God and to human beings, there are many ways of seeing that terms cannot have quite the same meaning in both cases. If, as in the classical Christian theology, God is conceived of as not in time, then it is clear that God’s performance of actions like speaking, making, or comforting is something radically different from the temporally sequential performance of actions by human beings. Aquinas in his famous discussion of this problem based the distinction between the application of predicates to human beings and the application of predicates to God on the principle that God is an absolute unity and that, therefore, various attributes and activities are not distinguishable in God as they are in men. But even if we allow God to be temporal and straightforwardly multifaceted, we are left with the corporeal – incorporeal difference. If God does not have a body, it is clear that speaking, making, or comforting cannot be the same thing for God as for man.

This leaves us with a serious problem. We must show how the theological use of these terms derived from their non theological use. Until we do, it will be unclear just what we are saying about God in such utterances. The usual way of dealing this problem is by cutting out the inapplicable portions of the original meaning of the terms, leaving the remainder for theology. Thus, since God is incorporeal, his speaking cannot involve producing sounds by expelling air over vocal cords. What is left is that God does something which results in the addressee having an experience of the sort he would have if some human being were speaking to him. The nature of the ‘something’ is deliberately left vague. Since God is a pure spirit, it will presumably be some conscious mental act; perhaps an act of will to the effect that the addressee shall have the experience of being told such and such . More generally , to attribute any interpersonal action to

God is to attribute to him a purely mental act which has its intended result a certain experience , like the one that would result from such an action on the part of the human being.

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) 1) What are the traditional approaches to religious Language?

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Verifiability of Theological statements

In the last few decades a great many philosophers have come to accept some form of the ‘verifiability theory of meaning’, according to which one is making a genuine factual assertion, a real claim as to the way the world is, only if it is possible to conceive of some way in which what he is saying can be shown to be true or false by empirical observation. Applying this theory to theology, it has been argued that since an empirical test is in principle impossible to carry out for statements about a supernatural incorporeal personal deity, these statements cannot be regarded as straightforward factual assertions, but must be interpreted in some other way.

Are theological statements testable?

The question of whether theological statements are subjects to empirical test is quite complicated. If we rule out mystical experience as a means of observation, then it is clear that statements about God cannot be tested directly. But science is full of hypotheses about unobservable entities – electromagnetic fields, social structures, instincts, - which verificationists accept as meaningful because they can be tested indirectly. That is, from these hypotheses we can draw implications which can themselves be tested by observation. The question is whether directly testable consequences can be drawn from theological statements. We can phrase this question as follows: Would we expect any possible observations to differ according to whether there is or is not a God? It would clearly be unreasonable to require of the theologian that he

specify a set of observations which would conclusively prove or disprove his assertions. Few, if any, scientific hypotheses could reasonably be demanded is that he specify some observable states of affairs which would count for or against his assertions.

One thing that makes this problem difficult is the fact that on this point religious belief differs at different times and places. Supernatural deities have often been thought of as dealing in a fairly predictable way with contingencies in the natural world and human society. Thus in many primitive religions it is believed that gods will bring abundant crops or victory in battle if they are approached in certain ways through prayer and ritual. Even in advanced religious traditions like the Judaeo-Christian, it is believed that God has certain fixed intentions which will result in prayers being answered and will result in the final victory of the people who believe in him.

It would seem that such expectations provide a basis for empirical test. In so far as they are fulfilled, the theology is confirmed; in so far as they are frustrated it is disproved. However, things are not that simple. Even in primitive communities such tests are rarely allowed to be decisive; the empirical implications are hedged around with a variety of escape clauses. If the ritual dances are held and still the crops fail, there are several alternatives to abandoning traditional beliefs about the gods. Perhaps there was an unnoticed slip somewhere in the ritual; perhaps devils were conducting counter rituals. More sophisticated explanations are employed in the more advanced religions. For example, God will answer prayers, but only when doing so would be for the good of the supplicant.

Are theological Statements assertions of fact?

As to whether a statement that cannot be empirically tested must not be construed as an assertion of fact, a theologian might well challenge the application of the verifiability theory to theology. If God is supernatural, we should not expect his behaviour to be governed by any laws or regulations we could hope to discover. But we could never be certain that, for example, the statement that God loves his creatures would imply that a war should have one outcome rather than another. This would mean that, according to verifiability theory, it would be impossible for us to make any statements, even false ones, about such a being. But a theory which would

prevent us from recognizing the existence of a certain kind of entity, if it did exist, would be an unreasonable theory.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What are the fundamental facts concerning the use of predicates in theological statements?

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2.4. NON ASSERTIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Thinkers like George Santayana without holding that theological sentences are factually meaningless, are convinced that as factual assertions are false, but still are unwilling to abandon traditional religious discourse. They feel that somehow it has a valuable function in human life, and in order to preserve it they are forced to reinterpret it so that the unwarranted factual claims are expunged.

Non assertive interpretations can be divided into four groups. Statements about God have been interpreted as; 1) expressions of feelings of various thoughts; 2) Symbolic presentations of a variety of vital aspects of experiences, from natural facts to moral ideals; 3) Integral elements in ritualistic worship; 4) A unique kind of ‘mystical ‘ or symbolic’ expression, not reducible to any other use of language.

Expressions of feeling

Theological utterances have been interpreted as expressions of feelings that arise in connection with religious belief and activity. Thus we might think of “God made the heavens and the earth” as an expression of the sense of awe and mystery evoked by grandeur of nature; of “God has

predestined every man to salvation or damnation” as an expression of a pervasive sense of helplessness; and of “God watches over the affairs of men” as an expression of a sense of peace, security, at-homeness in the world. This is a ‘poetic’ expression rather than expression by expletives. It is like expressing a sense of futility by saying “life is a walking shadow” rather than like expressing futility by saying ‘Ah, me’. That is, the feeling is expressed by depicting a situation which might naturally evoke it; a sense of security, for instance, is evoked by some powerful persons looking after one.

Symbolic Presentations

Symbolic interpretations of religious doctrines have been common for a long time. Many of the traditional ways of speaking about God have to be taken as symbolic. God cannot literally be a shepherd or rock. The shepherd functions as a symbol of providence and rock as a symbol for God’s role as a refuge and protection in time of trouble. A symbol in this sense is some concrete object, situation, or activity which can be taken to stand for the ultimate object of discourse through some kind of association, usually on the basis of similarity. We speak symbolically when what we literally refer to is something which functions as a symbol.

In the traditional use of symbolic interpretation it is, necessarily, only a part of theological discourse which is taken as symbolic. For if we have to hold that the symbolic utterances are symbolizing facts about God, we will have to have some way of saying what those facts are; and we cannot make that specification in symbolic terms, on pain of infinite regress. But we are now considering views according to which all theological discourse is symbolic, which means that if we are to say what is being symbolized it will have to be something in the natural world that can be specified in non theological terms. The most common version of such a view is that theological utterances are symbolic presentations of moral ideals, attitudes, or values. This position has been set forth most fully and persuasively by George Santayana. According to him every religious doctrine involves two components: a kernel of moral or valuational insight, and a poetic or pictorial rendering it. Thus the doctrine that the physical universe is a creation of a supremely good personal deity is a pictorial rendering of the insight that everything in the world is potentially usable for the enrichment of the human life. The Christian story of incarnation,

sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a way of making the point that self-sacrifice for others is of supreme moral value. It is worthwhile embodying these moral insights in theological doctrine because this vivid presentation, together with the systematic cultivation of feelings and attitudes that accompanies it, provide a more effective way of getting across the insights than would a bald statement.

The way in which interpretations of the first two kinds throw light on the theological use of predicates is analogous to the way in which one explicates the use of words in poetic metaphors. If we consider the metaphor in “sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care”, it is clear that ‘knit’ is not used simply to refer to a certain kind of physical operation. This utterance has quite different kind of implication from ‘she knit me a sweater’, in which ‘knit’ does have its usual sense. In the metaphoric statement, ‘knit’ is used in its usual sense to depict a certain kind of situation which, as whole, is presented as an analogue of the effect of sleep on care. The only way of effectively getting at the function of the word ‘knit’ is by seeing how the whole phrase ‘knits up the raveled sleeve’ is used to say something indirectly about sleep.

In the first two of the four kinds of the non assertive interpretation we are examining whether theological statements are essentially metaphors. And if they are correctly so regarded, we get nowhere if we extract the word ‘made’ from the sentence “God made the heavens and the earth” and try to say what it means by itself. What we have to do is take the picture presented by the whole sentence and see how it functions as a way of expressing a feeling of security, or as away of presenting the insight that everything in the world can be used to enrich human life.

Ritualistic interpretation

The ritualistic interpretation of theological discourse can best be introduced by citing the reply of an intellectually sophisticated high –church Anglican to question from an agnostic friend. The question was “How can you go to the church and say all those things in the creed?” The reply “I don’t say them ; I sing them” In the view under consideration, the corporate practice of worship is the native soil from which talk about God springs. Talk about the attributes, doings, and intentions of a supernatural personal being has meaning as a part of the practice of worship and

is puzzling only when it is separated from that context. If we think of an utterance like “ God made the heavens and the earth” as the expression of a belief about the way things in fact originated and then wonder whether it is true or false, we will be at a loss.

To understand it we have to put it back into the setting where it does its work. In that setting, these words are not being used to explain anything, but to do something quite different.

Unfortunately, proponents of this view have never been very clear about what this ‘something different’ is. The clearest suggestion they give is that the talk about God serves to provide an imaginative framework for the conduct of worship. It articulates one’s sense that something important is going on, and it keeps to indicate the appropriateness of one response rather than another. In speaking of Holy Eucharist as the re-enactment of the self-sacrifice of an omnipotent personal God who took the form of human and in conceiving of it as a cleansing and renewing incorporation of the substance of such God, one provides for the activity a pictorial framework that records and nurtures the felt solemnity of the occasion and the attitudes and aspirations kindled by the ceremony. This position presupposes, contrary to the usual view, that ritual worship has an autonomous value, apart from any theological foundation. It is generally supposed that a given ritual has a point only if certain theological doctrines are objectively true. But in ritualistic interpretation, theological doctrines are not regarded as statements about which questions of truth or falsity are properly raised. Since these doctrines depend for their significance on the ritual, it is supposed that the ritual has some intrinsic value in forming and giving expression to valuable sentiments, feelings, and attitudes.

Myths

Ernst Cassirer has developed the notion that the basis of religious discourse lies in a unique ‘symbolic form’ which he terms ‘mythical’. He maintains that it is found in purest form in the myths of the primitive people and is based on a way of perceiving and thinking about the world which is radically different from our accustomed mode. In the ‘mystical consciousness’ there is no sharp distinction between the subjective and the objective. No clear line is drawn between symbol and object, between wish and fulfillment, between perception and fantasy. Again, no

sharp distinction is made between the object itself and the emotional reaction it evokes; emotional response is taken to be an integral part of the environment. As a result none of our familiar standards of truth or objectivity are applicable. What is most real is what arouses the greatest intensity of emotional response and particularly, what is felt as most sacred. The mythical consciousness carries its own special organizations of space and time. For example, there is no distinction made between a position and what occupies it; every spatial position is endowed with a qualitative character and exerts influence as such. Sophisticated theology represents an uneasy compromise between mythical and scientific modes of thought, and as such cannot be understood without seeing how it has developed from its origins. It is basically a mythical view of the world, given a 'secondary elaboration' in a vain attempt to make it acceptable to the rationalistic consciousness; judged by rationalistic standards it is not only groundless, but meaningless.

Mysticism

Philosophers and theologians in the mystical tradition have put forward versions of this fourth kind of interpretation which do not regard theology as a manifestation of cultural lag. To the mystic the only way to communicate with God is through mystical experience, and this experience reveals God to be an ineffable unity. He can be directly intuited in mystical experience, but since there are no distinctions within the absolute unity of his being, and since any statements we can make predicates of him one thing rather than another, eg. Wisdom as distinguishable from power, no statement can be true of him. The most we can do in language is to direct our hearers to the mode of experience which constitutes the sole means of access. Proponents of this view sometimes speak of theological language as 'symbolic', but this differs from our second type of theory in that here there is no way to symbolize, and it is therefore questionable whether we should use the term 'symbol'. A symbol is always a symbol of something. In fact it is difficult to make clear just what, on this view, religious utterances are supposed to be doing. They are said to 'point to' 'adumbrate' or 'indicate' the ineffable divine reality, but all too often these expressions remain uninterrupted.

In recent years two interesting attempts have been made to develop this position further. W.T. Stace, in his book 'Time and Eternity' considers the chief function of religious language to be the evocation of mystical experience, or faint echoes thereof. This seems at first to be a subjectivist account, with the deity omitted, but as, Stace correctly points out, it is an axiom in the mystical experience as ineffable, he departs from his official position to the extent of giving some indications of the aspects of this experience with different theological utterances evoke. 'God is truth' evokes the sense of revelatoriness, and 'God is infinite' evokes the sense of all-inclusiveness.

Paul Tillich, although not squarely in the mystical tradition, is faced with similar problems in the interpretation of religious language. He holds that theological doctrines 'symbolize' an ultimate reality, 'being itself' about which nothing can be said literally except that it is metaphysically ultimate. Tillich develops the notion that it is an expression of 'ultimate concern', a complex of devotion, commitment, and orientation, focused on something non ultimate – a human being, a nation, or a supernatural deity. Religious statements, which literally refer to such relatively concrete focuses of ultimate concern, express the sense of sacredness such objects have as 'manifestations' of being itself. But just what it is for such an object to be taken as a 'manifestation' or 'symbol' of being-itself, Tillich never makes clear.

It would seem that talk about God is much more complex than is recognized by any of the existing theories. The brief discussion given above of empirically testable implications illustrates this point. Theological sentences perform a great many closely interrelated linguistic functions. In saying 'God, who created the world, watches over the affairs of men,' the believer is committing himself to approach God in prayer and ritual in one way rather than another. And these functions are intimately dependent on each other. Whatever is needed is a description of the relationship among these functions, one sufficiently complex to match the complexity of the subject matter

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What are the divisions of the non-assertive interpretations of Religious Language?

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2.5 LET US SUM UP

There are traditional and non traditional approaches to the religious language. All approaches have its own advantages and its own limitations. The language of religion is comprised of a set of symbols, myths, metaphors, Mysticism and esoteric signs which help men of religion to share and convey their profound and ineffable emotions and experiences. The same function is performed by various rituals, practices and observances. They are all acts without ordinary meaning. They perform the function of symbols, representing realities of religion. As poetic expression arouses in readers listeners certain emotional aura felt and experienced by the poet, in the same manner, religious languages or ceremonies and observances convey others some shared experiences and certain intimations from unknown or unseen.

2.6. KEY WORDS

Traditional: Pertaining to or characteristic of the older styles.

Tradition: Belief or customs taught by one generation to the next.

Negative way: It is a theology that attempts to describe God, by negation, to speak only in terms of what may not be said about the perfect goodness that is God.

Analogy: Analogy is an inference or an argument from one particular to another particular, as opposed to deduction, induction and abduction, where at least one of the premises or conclusion is general.

Univocal: A word is used univocally when it means exactly the same thing in several contexts.

Symbolic presentation: It is the practice of representing things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meaning or significance to objects, events, or relationships.

Myths: Myths are traditional stories and in the society in which it is told, it is usually regarded as a true account of the remote past.

Mysticism: Mysticism is a pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of an Ultimate reality, or God through direct experience, intuition, instinct or insight.

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2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1) The traditional approaches to religious language are:
 - a) The Negative way

- b) The Univocal way
- c) The Analogical way

Answers to Check Your Progress II

There are two fundamental facts concerning the use of predicates in theological statements.

Answer to Check Your Progress III

1. Non assertive interpretations can be divided into four groups:

- a) Expressions of feelings of various thoughts
- b) Symbolic presentations of a variety of vital aspects of experiences, from natural facts to moral ideals;
- c) Integral elements in ritualistic worship
- d) A unique kind of 'mystical' or 'symbolic' expression, not reducible to any other use of language.

UNIT 3

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Experience and the Levels of Experience
- 3.3 Religion and Religious Experience
- 3.4 Defining Religious Experience
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Further Readings and References
- 3.8 Answers to Check your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The religions are complex realities. A religion is not something that one sees externally. It is true that there are temples, ceremonies, religious art, religious communities etc. These are visible aspects. But their significance is to be approached through the inner life of those who use these externals. The inner life or the spirit that animates religion as a whole is religious experience. These two units are attempts to clarify religious experience which is the spirit of any religion.

By the end of these units, you should be able to:

- Say how religious experience is different from other 'normal' experiences
- Have an understanding of the role of religious experience in the religions
- Have an adequate understanding of the religious experience as it is different from other experiences.

- Say how William James looked at religious experience mainly from the psychological point of view and Rudolf Otto phenomenologically analysed the non-rational aspect of the religious experience

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Philosophy of religion today gives much interest in the study of religious experience. However, this has not been the case before modern period. Traditionally the philosophy of religion dealt with the matters concerning the proofs for the existence of God, His nature, God's relation with the world, problem of evil and so on. Interest in the study of religious experience arose due to many reasons. The serious study on religious experience began with the realization that the traditional arguments for the existence of God do not bring in the desired result. Moreover, there were believers who were dissatisfied with the 'way of the proofs' to establish the existence of God. Secondly the interest began as a reaction to the trends that underestimated the religious belief. Many educated people began to look down upon religious belief. As a result it was a need of the time to base religious belief on something that is experiential. Kantian philosophy too made religion an adjunct of morality. It is under such adverse situations that the study of religious experience began to be a prominent theme in the philosophy of religion. It was mainly because of the realization that the religious experience would give a good foundation for belief in God if we look at the kind of experiences which some of the people claim to have had of the divine. The concentration on inner experience can be also seen as one aspect of Romantic Movement's concern for subjectivity, the life of emotions and intuitions of the individual. This trend was in another way in harmony with the understanding of science: without experience nothing can be sufficiently known.

The first unit deals with certain preliminary analysis of religious experience. The first section of the unit analyses the experience in general and the levels of experience. The second section deals with relationship between religion and religious experience. The third section tries to define the religious experience with the help of certain descriptions of experience and thereafter we see important categories given by Richard Swineburne to define religious experience. The Second unit is a study of two eminent writers who analysed the dimensions of religious experience:

William James who looked at religious experience mainly from the psychological point of view and Rudolf Otto who phenomenologically analysed the non-rational aspect of the religious experience.

3.2 THE EXPERIENCE AND THE LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE

What is Experience?

To start with what is religious experience we must clarify what experience is in general? Experience is such a common thing that nobody bothers to reflect on. But a reflection on the very experience will shed some light on the reflection on the religious experience.

The English word 'experience' is derived from the Greek '*emperia*', the Latin translation of it is '*experientia*'. Earliest connotation of this word reflects its origin in terms that designate the action of testing the proof by actual trial (experimenting). Later the word expressed more generally the actual observation of acts or events considered to be the source of knowledge. At present the dominant meaning of experience is the actual living through an event (object) or events. The following example will bring out the meaning of experience.

An example of experience is as follows. As we are walking in the garden, a thorn runs into the sole of our foot, and consequently we have the experience of pain, and we withdraw our foot. The important aspect here is an immediate contact with an object and a reaction on the part of the person. In the same way I can speak of an event (a feast) I experienced. In this case such an event becomes the object of my experience. Therefore we can define experience as a direct contact with an object or objects. We emphasize in the definition 'direct' because a direct contact with the object is necessary for something to be an experience. For instance, I know much about the two World Wars but they are not events that I experienced. I was born after two World Wars so I had no direct contact with these events. That which gives rise to experience is a contact that must be immediate. In the above example of thorn running into the sole of the foot is immediate. If we are wearing sandals, the thorn will not run into our foot, because there is a medium between foot and the object. The reason for immediacy in the experience is the body. This fact is evident in the

case of experiences involving pleasure and pain, sweetness and bitterness etc. Aesthetic experience involving seeing or hearing of something beautiful and intellectual experience involving the understanding of something too have their source in the body. So we conclude that experience is always experience of something which is direct.

Levels of Experience

Since experience is always an experience of something, every experience must have an *object which can belong to various levels of existence*. 1. real or imaginary 2. material or spiritual 3. human, sub-human or superhuman 4. divine or diabolical 5. pleasant or unpleasant, causing reverential awe, admiration, attraction, fear, horror, disgust, revulsion etc. 6. having to do with body or soul

Contact means 'tactus with' or touch with and it can be of various kinds inasmuch as *it is realised* (by the subject) on various levels. First, the physical level: the thorn running into the foot as described above. Second, non physical level which are of different kinds: the level of the nervous system: headache, because some nerves are irritated – in this case no physical contact from outside; the level of emotions: good news (rank in the examinations, first prize in the lottery) stimulates the emotions, and there is had the experience of happiness; cognitive faculties: an artist gets an original idea which puts him in a state of tremendous happiness. What is had in this state of the artist is perception of, or intuition into something of the intellectual order, or of the order of fantasy.

Third, interpersonal level, where again we have to distinguish several varieties: one, contact through mere presence: a mother looks lovingly at her child that is asleep, or is at play without realizing that she is watching; two friends sitting together without talking, without even looking at each other. Two, contact through call, which can be various kinds: vocal, a look, a glance, a gesture, a slight movement can serve as a call. Three: a contact through intentionality, on the level of memory and affection: a man recalls to the mind his deceased mother who had been most dear to him. Finally, on the level of the apex of the soul- the highest point of contact: God touches the soul. This is admitted by all the mystics who teach that God can touch us.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What is an experience? What are the important aspects of experience?

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2) The object of experience can belong to various levels of existence: what are they?

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At present the dominant meaning of experience is the actual living through an event (object) or events. Therefore we can define experience as a direct contact with an object or objects. So we conclude that experience is always experience of something which is direct.

2. Since experience is always an experience of something, every experience must have an *object which can belong to various levels of existence*. 1. real or imaginary 2. material or spiritual 3. human, sub-human or superhuman 4. divine or diabolical 5. pleasant or unpleasant, causing reverential awe, admiration, attraction, fear, horror, disgust, revulsion etc. 6. having to do with body or soul

3.3. RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

What is the relation between religion and the religious experience? The simple answer is that the religious experience is the internal aspect of religion. Let us examine below in what way the religious experience could be considered as the internal aspect of religions.

The external and Internal Aspects of Religion

The religion is not something that one can see. It is true that there are temples, ceremonies, religious art. These are visible aspects. But their significance is to be approached through the inner life of those who use these externals.

The External Aspects of Religion

The religions have visible external aspects and internal spiritual side within them. Temples, mosques and churches are observable or visible signs of various religions. Together with these visible signs religion gives emphasis also to the aspect of community which has a common belief system, rules of conduct and way of worship. All these aspects of the religious community are external aspects of religion.

Religious Experience as the Internal Aspect of Religion

We can also speak of an internal aspect of religion: the religious experience. Why do people go to churches or temples or being in touch with a community of believers? It is because of an experience which creates in the believer peace and tranquillity. This religious experience then is the spirit of religion and in this sense it is the internal aspect of religion. Consider the ceremony of baptism of a baby in Christianity. How can we understand it, save by knowing what the baptism means to Christians and by knowing the hope and feelings of those who participate in the occasion? The Buddhist monk hopes for *Niravana*, this includes the contemplative experience of peace and of insight into the transcendent. Therefore the internal aspect of experience and external aspects of ceremony are fused together so intimately in every religion.

Religious experience can also be considered as the spirit of religion in another sense. A religion originates from the religious experience of its founder. This is very evident when we take into account the historical religions – Buddhism and Christianity. For instance, the foundational principle of Buddhism is the profound experience of Gautama Buddha. Jesus called his disciples to be with him and to experience his life. Christianity came into existence as a result of the disciples' experience of Jesus. Both Buddhist and Christian religions can be seen as attempts to institutionalise and perpetuate these foundational experiences. The reason behind this institutionalization is that those who have had these experiences consider them to be so valuable that they want all the others to have a share of what they have experienced. In the beginning the believers who had the religious experience recorded the experiences. These records were later accepted as the sacred scriptures. Gradually each community began to follow certain practises such as mode of worship, 'way of life' etc. The intention behind doing so was to perpetuate these experiences and to pass it on from one generation to the other. This mode of development is applicable not only to the historical religions but also to other religions like Hinduism. The *Vedas* and the *Upanisads* are the result of the religious experience of the ancient *Gurus*. They propagated the ways and means to perpetuate this experience to others. Therefore, reasonably we can say (a) religions originate from certain religious experiences of their respective founders (b) Religious experiences are institutionalised and perpetuated by the believers and thus formal religions come into existence. (c) The basic attractive element of the religions is religious experience. (d) Religious experience is the ultimate criterion and rule of faith in all the religions.

Religion and Types of Religious Experience

There are various types of religious experience in reference to the established religions - *Nirvana* is central experience in the Buddhist traditions, *Kevala* in the Jain tradition, *moksha* in *Advaita Vedanta* and God experience in theistic religions. *Nirvana* experience is consisted of an awareness of the fleeting consciousness, or else of their cessation and inner stillness that this involves. *Kevala* experience is an awareness of the abiding self that underlies our fleeting conscious states and is presupposed by, though ignored in, *Nirvana* experience. *Moksha* experience involves an awareness of the identity of oneself with Brahman. There is *Numinous* experience which, according to monotheistic tradition, is awareness of God. There is Nature

Mysticism which involves a sense of empathy with nature directed at whatever part of nature. It is perceptually available to the subject of the experience while one has the experience. This is not viewed as religious experience because it does not have a direct connection to religion (to the institution and practices).

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) The Spirit or the internal aspect of any religion is religious experience: explain?

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2) What are the various types of religious experience in reference to the established religions?

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3.4 DEFINING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The Question of Beginning

A religious experience is most commonly known as an occurrence that is uncommon in the sense that it does not fit in with the structure of 'normal' experience. It normally refers to individual's perception of the 'divine'. Studying religious experience is a difficult task. We face also difficulties in identifying common features in the religious experience. If we identify religious experience as experience of God then we would be neglecting Buddhist religious experience.

Therefore it should be general as to embrace all the religions. At the same time it should not be as general as to include other non-religious experiences such as ecstasy or such happy experiences induced by drugs or alcohol.

However, taking into account the above mentioned difficulties and complexity of religions; scholars have tried to categorize important aspects of religious experience. They have tried to identify common elements found in the religious experiences of different individuals and groups. Many religious and mystical traditions see religious experience as real encounters with God or gods, or real contact with 'other' realities. There is a small group of scholars who look down upon religious experience and say that such an experience is an evolved feature of human brain amenable to normal scientific study.

If we apply our general understanding of 'experience' to characterize religious experience, we will have to say that religious experience is an experience of religious objects. This is not entirely false; people do speak of experiencing divine 'objects' or 'persons' (God, Virgin Mary, Krishna, etc.) While it is not entirely false to speak of religious 'objects' there is a difficulty with this definition: What would qualify to be a religious object? There seems to be numerous candidates that qualify to be such objects (God, Nirvana, Brahman, Virgin Mary, Kali and so on). Moreover, to speak of God or any other as "objects" of religious experience is not easy. The reason is that the so called religious objects are not objects of our ordinary understanding. These are not available to our senses as other objects of experience. If there are difficulties to define religious experience in terms of experienced objects, how else are we to define religious experience?

One way of doing it is to say that a religious experience is an experience that occurs in a religious tradition or in contexts like that of religious worship or meditation. This is sure to include the Buddhist experience. But it will lead us to a serious omission. That is, such an explanation would exclude the original religious experiences like the Enlightenment of Buddha, in as much as it took place outside the traditional religious context. It is this sort of fundamental religious experience that gave birth to new religions. How, then shall we go about defining

religious experience? Ordinarily we define something either by appealing to common experience or to those who are proficient users of that idea. We did not have any serious difficulty in circumscribing the meaning of 'experience' because it was possible to appeal to common experiences. But that does not seem possible in the case of religious experience. It is also clear that majority of the authors do not talk about religious experience in terms of the 'object' experienced. On the contrary, they do it by turning to the subject of experience. But at the same time we cannot exclude completely the natural objects because they play an important role in religious experience.

Analysis of Religious Experience

In many occasions the religious experience is occasioned by reflection on the natural world. In other kinds of religious experience, a person's encounter with the divine arises not when the contemplation of the world gives way to religious perceptions, but when all such normal perception is interrupted and ruptured. In other occasions the whole range of experience may lead one to a special experience of the unity of all things. In these experiences, there is an awareness of the limit (wrongness according to William James) of a given situation and an overcoming of that limit by being connected to a larger reality that is hidden behind the natural covering. We try to analyse certain concrete experiences to illustrate this point.

Here is one of the most commonly quoted examples from William Blake:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

What is noteworthy is that the poet sees the same grain of sand and wild flower as the rest of us, but what he sees on this occasion is not just merely these objects; but a 'world' in a grain of sand, a 'heaven' in a wild flower; he experiences 'infinity' and 'eternity'. In other words, such experiences take place *in and through the nature* but are *not an experiences of nature* that all of

us have in our ordinary state of consciousness. There is something more than nature that is involved here.

William James describes the experience of a man who had a sense of a presence which filled him with joy. It happened at night when everything was still.

“There was not mere consciousness of something there, but fused in the central happiness of it, a startling awareness of some ineffable good. Not vague either, not like the emotional effect of some poem, or scene, or blossom, or music, but sure knowledge of close presence of a sort of mighty person, and after it went, the memory persisted as the one person of reality. Everything else might be a dream, but not that.”

Here the encounter with the divine (the person who had this experience did not interpret it theistically) aroused not when the contemplation of the world gives way to religious perceptions, but when all such normal perceptions are interrupted and ruptured.

We can speak of an experience in which one is aware of the unity of all things. Poet Wordsworth’s narration of the beauty of Wye Valley is an example of this sort. Wye Valley led him to detect

A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things and all objects of all thought
And all rolls through all things.

Here, this delightful perception of nature leads towards a more profound, pantheistic intuition of a spirit coursing through the world.

Here we have another example of a man who is healed of his depression that disturbed him.

One day I was feeling deeply depressed by the severe criticisms a colleague had received –a person who was living his life in an honest and truthful sense.... Nothing was real...

After the children had gone to bed, I decided to go for a walk. The night was dark, filled with black clouds. Large white flakes of snow fell on and around me. Inside, a surging restlessness replaced my benumbed state. ...Suddenly without understanding in any way, I experienced a transcendental beauty in the white darkness. It was difficult to walk on the glazed, iced surface... Immediately I felt a chill but at the same time I felt the

ice being warmed as my fingers touched it. It was a moment of communion, an experience of knowing and understanding, and a feeling of complete solace. If felt my inward heaviness lifting, and discovered a new capacity for...facing conflicts which existed around and in me.... We need only reach out in natural covering to come face to face with creation.

The person feels depressed, restless, benumbed; life is seen as meaningless and futile (“Nothing was real”). But it is the transition from that stage which is astounding: from a sense of depression and desolation, he is transported into a sense of communion and solace, knowing and understanding. It is realization that reality is just waiting for us to reach out beyond its natural covering that gives us the possibility to find solace and understanding.

First of all, all these experiences make us aware of a twofold nature of reality: there is the natural world that we are ordinarily aware and something “more” than the natural world that comes to our awareness in these experiences. The second example alludes to it in talking about reaching beyond the natural covering; the third example alludes to it more vaguely in terms of a kinship with nature. The “more” is an expression used by William James to refer to this reality that cannot be identified with the natural. Otto referred to it as the “wholly other”, “that which is beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar...” This twofold character of reality usually finds expression in such terms as natural and supernatural, profane and sacred, *vyavahariksata* and *Paramarthikasata* etc.

Secondly, there is some vague awareness about the nature of this sacred reality. Although it may not be entirely appropriate to talk of monism to refer to it, what is clear is that there is an intuitive awareness of certain unity or connectedness of all reality that is ordinarily seen as many. Some call this One reality God, others call this One reality Brahman, still others find none of these substantive terms appropriate and therefore call it *Sunyata*. Since this is a non-rational, non-conceptual reality as Rudolf Otto insists, these different ways of talking about that reality is not only understandable, but even necessary to get us beyond our words. Moreover, there emerges the awareness that this reality is the really real such that “We only begin to wake up to reality when we realize that the material world, the world of space and time, as it appears to our senses, is nothing but a sign and a symbol of mystery which infinitely transcends it.”

Thirdly, religious experiences have this existential character that is obvious in the second and third examples. There is an awareness of the wrongness of a given situation and an overcoming of that wrongness by being connected to a larger reality that is hidden behind the natural covering. However, we should always be wary of talking about this connectedness of reality in terms of a purely intellectual or abstract cosmic order as may be done in physics and cosmology. Rather, this connectedness is always in relation to human existential situations. Devoid of that context, no talk of a cosmic order or inter-connectedness of reality would have a religious character.

Fourthly, although we relied on spontaneous experiences that occur without any prior preparation so as to keep our understanding of religious experience broad enough, we should also be aware that most religious experiences do involve some prior preparation in the form of practices like yoga and meditation, regular prayer and interior silence, acts of worship and adoration. But what is remarkable is that even when prior preparation is involved, the experience itself is not seen as an automatic result of those practices. There is a sense of passivity in such experiences, a feeling of having been gratuitously granted a favour. Theistic traditions call it grace; but this sense of passivity is also present in the other traditions in some form or another. The Buddhist Enlightenment (including the Zen “satori” or awakening), for example, might come at the end of years of study and meditation; but when it comes it is experienced as a sudden flash and not brought about by one’s will. The very term ‘Enlightenment’ signifies this. Spiritual masters often warn their disciples that too intense an effort can be counter-productive. One is advised to “let-go”. Taking both these points together, we could say that religious experience is more like a change of *gestalt* than accumulation of knowledge or data.

3.5. LET US SUM UP

Taking these points together we could briefly say that a religious experience is an experience of cosmic connectedness and personal integration achieved through that connectedness; its opposite would be an experience of disintegration and alienation. In this context, we may pay attention to Richard Swinburne who offers the following categories to define religious experience.

1. Experience which the subject describes in terms of God or supernatural, based on the perception of an ordinary non-religious object. So, for example, I might witness a rather beautiful, but perfectly ordinary, sunset, and suddenly one sees it in terms of God's creation. Someone else could experience the same phenomenon and, while moved, would not talk of the experience as 'religious'.
2. Experiences which are 'out of the ordinary', and public. So, the disciples of Jesus 'witnessed' the re-appearance of him after the death. However, as with the previous experience the sceptic will have the same visual sensation and yet have not had the religious experience.
3. Experiences that involve sensations private to the individual. I might have a dream that an angel tells me to follow a particular course of action, which, on waking, I pursue. In many ways, the dream experience; in other words, the angel can be described in terms of a woman wearing white cloths.
4. The fourth example goes beyond the previous one. Here, the subject has a religious experience that cannot be described by using the normal every day language. Swinburne notes the example of mystics, who find it difficult if not possible to describe their religious experiences, and yet feel that there is something to be described if only they had the words to do the describing.
5. The final category occurs independently of perceived sensations. So a man may be convinced that God is telling him to do certain things. But there is no evidence of auditory or other sensations occurring.

Swinburne suggests also two principles for the assessment of religious experience

1. The principle of Credulity: With the absence of any reason to believe it, one should accept what appears to be true. Eg. If one sees someone walking on water, one should believe that it is occurring.
2. Principle of testimony: with the absence of any reason to disbelieve, one should believe what the eye-witnesses or believers are telling about religious experience.

In categorizing religious experience in this way, Swinburne highlights two key issues. Firstly, the experience may be in response to some public event, or it may arise in a purely private way.

Secondly, it may involve sensations (sight, sound, etc.) which can be clearly spoken of or it may transcend human language and concepts. Yet despite these differences, the crucial factor is the individual and his interpretation of these phenomena. This interpretation refers to ‘the more’, ‘the meaning’, ‘the effect’, ‘the beyond’.

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) Evaluate of the statement “religious experience is an experience of religious objects”!

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2) What are the two principles of Swinburne for the assessment of religious experience?

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3.6 KEY WORDS

Experience: Experience may be defined as a direct contact with an object or objects. The word ‘direct’ in the definition is emphasized because a direct contact with the object is necessary for something to be an experience.

Mysticism: Mysticism is the highest form of experience. Herein people have indescribable experiences that transcend language and expression. The reality opens up to the seeker in ways that will turn him/her into the awareness of reality.

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Earliest connotation of the word experience refers to the action of testing the proof by actual trial (experimenting). Later the word expressed more generally the actual observation of acts or events considered to be the source of knowledge. At present the dominant meaning of

experience is the actual living through an event (object) or events. Therefore we can define experience as a direct contact with an object or objects (event). So we can speak of two important aspects of experience: that is, it is always experience of something (object) and it should be direct.

2. Since experience is always an experience of something, every experience must have an *object which can belong to various levels of existence*. 1. real or imaginary 2. material or spiritual 3. human, sub-human or superhuman 4. divine or diabolical 5. pleasant or unpleasant, causing reverential awe, admiration, attraction, fear, horror, disgust, revulsion etc. 6. having to do with body or soul

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. People go to churches or temples or being in touch with a community of believers because of the religious experience they have in doing so. This religious experience then is the spirit of religion and in this sense it is the internal aspect of religion. Secondly as far as the origin of a religion is concerned religious experience plays an important role. A religion originates from the religious experience of its founder. This is very evident when we take into account the historical religions – Buddhism and Christianity.

2. There are various types of religious experience in reference to the established religions - *Nirvana* is central experience in the Buddhist traditions, *Kevala* in the Jain tradition, *moksha* in *Advaita Vedanta* and God experience in theistic religions.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. If we apply our general understanding of 'experience' to characterize religious experience, we will have to say that religious experience is an experience of religious objects. This is not entirely false; people do speak of experiencing divine 'objects' or 'persons' such as God, Virgin Mary, Krishna, etc. While it is not entirely false to speak of religious 'objects' there is a difficulty with this definition: What would qualify to be a religious object? There seems to be

numerous candidates that qualify to be such objects: God, Nirvana, Brahman, Virgin Mary, Kali and so on. Moreover, to speak of God or any other as “objects” of religious experience is not easy. The reason is that the so called religious objects are not objects of our ordinary understanding.

2. Swinburne suggests also two principles for the assessment of religious experience

- a. The principle of Credulity: With the absence of any reason to believe it, one should accept what appears to be true. Eg. If one sees someone walking on water, one should believe that it is occurring.
- b. Principle of testimony: with the absence of any reason to disbelieve, one should believe what the eye-witnesses or believers are telling about religious experience.



UNIT-4

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE - II

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.2 William James' View on Religious Experience

4.3 Rudolf Ottos's Analysis of Religious Experience

4.4 Let Us Sum Up

4.5 Key Words

4.6 Further Readings and References

4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Our objective in this unit is:

- to study closely two eminent writers who analysed the dimensions of religious experience:
- **William James** looked at religious experience mainly from the psychological point of view
- **Rudolf Otto**, a well known phenomenologist of religion, who tried to bring out the aspects of Divinity and religious experience, which cannot be expressed through rational, deductive method.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

“Experience” is a word commonly used in everyday life. Ordinary use of the word “experience” refers to an active act of consciousness. The Western identification of experience with sense experience has its implications when it comes to religion. On the one hand, there is the Platonic stream represented by Augustine and on the other hand the Aristotelian stream represented by Thomas Aquinas. Both accept the identification of experience with sense experience but as is to be expected, Aquinas has a greater appreciation of it than Augustine. But an appreciation of Aquinas would be impossible without recognizing that unlike the Greeks, his main contrast is not

between experience and reason, but between reason and revelation where the concept of reason includes sense experience. However, none of the medieval theologians, however, consider experience as central to their theological work. (> George Karuveleil, “Experience” in EICP). The situation began to assume a definite shape in the contemporary period with William James and Rudolf Otto. William James with his classic *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1901) and Rudolf Otto with an equally important classic *Das Heilige* (1917) translated as *The Idea of the Holy* have opened up new horizons of thinking on religious experience.

4.2 WILLIAM JAMES’ VIEW ON RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, is one of the most important books dealing with analysis of religious experience. The book may fairly be considered as a work in psychology. James himself did so. Therefore roughly we can say that his analysis of religious experience is done from the perspective of psychology.



Criteria to Judge an Experience

James' idea of religious experience is to be seen with the background of the Principles of Psychology and of his Radical Empiricism. In his book *The Principles of Psychology* he defined experience as the stream of consciousness. This idea of experience is very vital to his understanding of religious experience. Accordingly he pointed out organic and temperamental reasons for the various religious experiences. In his book *Radical Empiricism*, he underlines the importance of experience. He clarifies the meaning of experience as something continuous, changing and personal. According to him experience is self contained and self sufficient. Therefore, the principle of experience is to be experience itself. He held that everything real must be somewhere experiential. This principle of radical empiricism is something fundamental to James' epistemology. If there is genuine or authentic religious experience, it is based on this founding principle. He suggests a method and a theory of truth. His method proposes to interpret concepts in terms of their consequences. As a theory of truth James considers truth as an attribute of ideas rather than of reality. Truth can be verified by norm of usefulness. In other words truth can be verified by experience and experience is to be verified by experience itself.

Religious Experience

What is religious experience according to William James? It is "the consciousness which individuals have of an intercourse between themselves and higher powers with which they feel themselves to be related. This intercourse is realized at the time as being both active and mutual". The definition indicates that the religious experience is primarily a 'consciousness' of the individual who has an intercourse with the higher powers. He uses the term 'higher powers' to make it significant to all kinds of religious experience such as that of Buddhists, Hindus, Christians etc. According to him a conscious person is continuous with a 'wider self' through which experiences come. 'Wider self' according to him is not normal self of the conscious person but a dimension wider than the sensible world. It includes also the mystical and supernatural region. This unseen world also must be regarded as a *present reality* because it *affects* individuals and transforms their lives. Therefore religious experiences have positive content because they are conversations with the unseen, voices and visions, responses to prayer, changes of heart, deliverances from fear, inflowing of help, assurance of support etc. The religious experience in which there could be touch of the 'unseen' is only one form of religious

experience. According to him there are many forms or varieties of religious experience. He puts forth certain hypothesis which could be applied to all forms of religious experience.

James states three hypotheses applicable to all forms of religious experience.

1. There is the touch of the 'more', which may be the 'higher spiritual agencies'.
2. The subconsciousness which is the intermediary either for divine encounter or for abnormal psychic invasion
3. The active consciousness in which the individual realizes the experience as something real.

James uses these hypotheses to explain all kinds of religious experience, both healthy and unhealthy, normal and abnormal. The unhealthy or abnormal cases remain as mere psychological phenomena. They are due to the invasions from subconscious region. Invasions from the subconscious take objective appearances and suggest to the subject an external control. James speaks of the reality of genuine, healthy and normal religious experience. In this case there is the touch of a 'more', the unseen or the 'divine'. As our primary wide-awake consciousness throws open our senses to the touch of the material things, so it is logically conceivable that if there be higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch man. The possibility for such experience, according to him, might be our possession of a subconscious region which should yield access to the spiritual beings. In short genuine religious experience is encounter of the 'more', the unseen, or the higher spiritual agencies, through the subconscious region of the self. In this sense subconscious region becomes the intermediary between the normal self and the higher spiritual agency.

Varieties of Religious Experience According to temperamental basis

James was convinced of the organic and temperamental basis for the varieties of religious experience. He says that according to different constitutions, temperament and organic structures, there will be varieties of religious experience. Mainly he speaks of two types: religious experience of the healthy minded and religious experience of the sick minded. According to him the characteristics of the healthy minded people are that they all have a healthy outlook of life and they seem to be happy and contented with themselves. But this is not the case

of sick minded persons. Extreme incapacity to suffering and suffering to the extremities, with some foundation or without, is to be considered as neurotic or nervous constitution.

Validity of Religious Experience

James' analysis showed that some of the 'spiritual geniuses' were abnormal. He regarded some of them as neurotics and nervous. But such a condition did not prompt him to reject the truth of religious experience they had. Opinions are to be tested by logic and experiment. It is the same with religious opinions. Their value must be ascertained by spiritual judgements basing on immediate feeling, that is, in reference to experiential relations to our moral needs and to all other related aspects which we hold as true.

In the natural sciences and industrial arts we never try to refute opinions by showing up their author's neurotic constitution. Opinions here are invariably tested by logic and by experiment, no matter what may be their author's neurological type. He follows the same method of analysis with regard to religious opinions. Their value can only be ascertained by spiritual judgements directly passed upon them, judgements based on our own immediate feeling; primarily and secondarily on what we can ascertain of their experiential relations to our moral needs and to the rest of what we hold as true.

In short, the criteria to judge the validity of religious experience indicated by James are three. They are:

- (1) Immediate luminousness
- (2) philosophical reasonableness
- (3) and moral helpfulness

These criteria for knowledge appear repeatedly in James' philosophy. *Immediate luminousness* means direct evidence of the fact as in the perception. It is the criterion to judge basing on our own immediate feeling. By *philosophical reasonableness*, he means that the fact must be consistent to logic and experiment. It is the consistency of the alleged fact with the accepted

principles- in short, the indirect evidence of the fact. *Moral helpfulness* means the congruence of the fact with the passionate nature, especially with the resolute will. In short, the given fact should be contributing to the moral needs and to the rest of what we hold as true and good.

If one's experience can stand above the three tests, even though he is hysterical or nervously off his description makes no difference. James gives more importance to the last criterion. So in judging the validity of religious experience, James applies his pragmatic method. By these criteria James seeks the direct evidence of the fact, consistency with the existing truths and its moral usefulness. When a religious experience passes through these tests successfully, it can be considered true and valid. Then it becomes 'interesting' and important to life. Applying these criteria, James finds that they are not fully verified in the case of religious experience. It is mainly because of its individual and private character. Religious experience is immediately evident and morally helpful to the person concerned. But they cannot be tested by scientific experiment. And so they lack scientific validity. But that does not mean that they are not valid or true on the individual level. In fact, he advocates that it is literally and objectively true and can be very well held so, on the individual level.

Mysticism the Intense Form of Religious Experience

We were studying the criteria by which James proposes to judge a case of religious experience. The same criteria may be applied to check the validity of mysticism, which is a form of religious experience, perhaps, the supreme and intense form of it. Let us study briefly what he means by mysticism.

As we have seen, James holds, religious experience as the consciousness in which the individuals have a feeling of union with the higher powers. It is valid and true scientifically if it had immediate luminousness philosophical reasonableness and moral helpfulness. Mysticism is a peculiar and strange phenomenon in religious experience. James has no suggestion of its cause. But he has one thing to say as to what it is. Mystical intuition seems to him as a sudden and great extension of the ordinary 'field of consciousness'.

R.B.Perry quoting James' words, observes that for him mystical experiences are direct perception of fact by those who have them. James is concerned mainly with the cognitive aspect of mysticism and their value in the way of revelation. He omits the mention of visual and auditory hallucinations, verbal and graphic automatisms such as 'levitation', stigmatisation and healing of disease. The mystics have presented these phenomena in their witnesses. But James does not consider them as essentials to mysticism. But for him, consciousness of illumination is the essential mark of 'mystical' states. Whatever may be the mental condition of the mystics, James does not take away the value of the knowledge of consciousness which the mystical states induce.

James does not see any scientific reason, in the strict sense, to account for mysticism. He also qualifies many of the mystical cases as pathological. But he was very particular to distinguish some cases as unique. James quotes "When mystical activity is at its height, we find the consciousness possessed by the sense of a being at once *excessive* and *identical* with the self: great enough to be God; interior enough to be me. The 'objectivity' of it ought in that case to be called excessivity, rather, or exceedingness." He further states that what he calls himself as his own 'over-belief'. He argues that there is no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal. James says that so far as our ideal impulses originate in this region, call it mystical region, or the supernatural region, we belong to it in a more intimate sense than that in which we belong to the visible world, for we belong in the most intimate sense wherever our ideals belong. Since the experience of the unseen world produces effects in this world, unseen region in question is not merely ideal. When we commune with it, the effect is actually imparted to our finite personality. Therefore that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself. Therefore James finds no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal. The 'effect' the unseen world creates makes him to articulate its existence.

James elaborates four elements of mystical experience. They are ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity.

1. Ineffability means that the experience cannot be expressed in words: language is inadequate to express its nature and significance to one who has not experienced it.
2. Noetic quality of religious experience means that it is not just remarkable or pleasant and it contains a degree of knowledge: states of insight into depths of truth plumbed by the discursive intellect.
3. Transiency means that the experience is not long lasting. Mystical instances may last half an hour or at the most an hour or two.
4. The passivity highlights the fact that the experience, although often facilitated by personal concentration and discipline, involve the subject losing his or her own will. The person here is over taken by an experience that is, so to speak, forced upon him. That means this experience is not something that can be turned on and off at will.

For James the noetic quality and the sense of insight into the true nature of the world are important. He proposes the same pragmatic criteria to ascertain the scientific validity and truthfulness of mysticism namely, luminosity, fruitfulness and consistency with other truth. D. Browning observes that James grants mysticism the status of a hypothesis. Mysticism is also based on immediate testimony of experience. So it may be said to have immediate luminousness. But how can we prove its philosophic reasonableness? How can it be verified? It may not be possible because the mystical experience is private and individual. As we have already observed, he admitted the coming of saving experiences in religious experience as a positive content. And he considers it as literally and objectively true. So he must admit on a greater degree the positive content or fruitfulness of mysticism because it is a higher form of religious experience.

For James there is no need of a God of the traditional sense to explain all the events of religious experience or mysticism. Many cases of religious experience and mysticism, he interpreted in terms of consciousness, as `subconscious continuation of one's conscious life` and as `sudden

and great extension of the ordinary field of consciousness` respectively. However, in both, he distinguishes some genuine cases in which the feeling of the `divine` might be true.

Conclusion

Religious experience is the consciousness in which individuals have an intercourse between themselves and higher powers. The varieties of religious experience are varied as temperaments, organic structures and needs of man. Thus there are healthy minded and sick minded experiences. Even if the witness is not psychologically balanced, his or her witness can be considered valid and true. The condition for its validity and truthfulness is that it should stand the test of immediate luminousness, philosophical reasonableness and moral helpfulness. He specially treats mysticism because it is the intense form of religious experience. It has also a special effect on life in the world. He admits the reality of the 'unseen' in the mystical encounter. That is, according to him there are a farther side and a hither side for the genuine religious experience. On the farther side there is an encounter of the 'more', the 'unseen' and on the hither side we have the consciousness of it. There are many others who speak in the same line as James. If religious experience is possible and meaningful, it should be authentic. It can be authentic if the requirements implied in the authenticity are fulfilled. David L. Hall suggests four primary qualities for authenticity for normal propositions. They are validity, truth, interest and importance. According to Hall we can very well apply these principles to the religious experience and establish its authenticity.

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) Explain the logical conceivability of religious experience according to William James

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2) According to James what are the three criteria to judge the validity of religious experience?
How does he consider the pragmatic criterion as important to prove the validity of religious
experience?

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4.3 RUDOLF OTTOS'S ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Rudolf Otto, a well known phenomenologist of religion tries to bring out the aspects of Divinity and religious experience, which cannot be expressed through rational, deductive method. *Das Heilige*, translated with the title *The Idea of Holy*, is the most important work of Otto. He describes the religious experience as the experience of the Numinous.

The Phenomenological Method

In contrast to the traditional rational method, Otto's method is descriptive and phenomenological. Phenomenology tries to investigate into what actually appears to direct intuition. Husserl the originator of Phenomenology wanted to pay attention to the phenomena of experience. It is the study of immediate, direct experience with the intention to build an 'exact science' of description, or even a method of precise, sharable and testable description.

Phenomenology of religion is concerned with examining phenomenologically the character of religious experience taking this aspect or moment within the stream of experience as an object of analysis and reflection. In this way Schleiermacher analysed the structure of the religious self-

consciousness. Rudolf Otto tried to describe the essential character of the Holy through phenomenological analysis of religious experience. In his book *The Idea of Holy*, he phenomenologically analyses and describes what he calls 'non-rational or supra-rational in our religious experience. This section deals with Otto's analysis of religious experience and the epistemological aspect of such experience.

Analysis of the non-rational in Religious Experience

The deeply felt religious experience according to Schleiermacher, has peculiar quality, that is, feeling of dependence - more precisely an absolute dependence. Otto analyses the fundamental religious experience and tries to understand it in its own terms, especially by analysing the non-rational core of religion.

The Non-rational

What is even more attractive to Otto is that he holds religion to have a non-rational core which cannot be articulated in language. He does not deny the rational side of religion. Otto's point is that if we focus only on the rational side, we miss the essential character of religious experience. To this non-rational, non-explainable element of religion he gave the name "Numinous". If the religious realm cannot be explained in words, how can it be known? It can be known because everyone has an inborn sense of the numinous. In order to show this non-rational character of such experiences he avoids using ordinary words to describe them, preferring to use Latin words instead. Numinous is said to be *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. For instance what does one feel when one is in deeply felt personal prayer or when one partakes in a solemn liturgical service or when one is in an old church or temple? The appropriate expression to this feeling is *mysterium, tremendum et fascinans*. The feeling of it may come sweeping like a gentle breeze or tide, it may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasm and convulsions, or it may lead one to strong excitements or to ecstasy. It can also take wild and demonic forms and put one in horror status. It cannot be explained, but we cannot rule out the possibility to evoke it indirectly.

MYSTERIUM, TREMENTUM ET FASCINANS

mysterium: It denotes that which is hidden and esoteric, beyond understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar. Though what is enunciated in the word is negative, what is meant is absolutely positive.

Tremendum: The word is coming from tremor, which means normally the familiar emotion of fear. But here the term is used analogically to denote a kind of emotional response different from mere fear. It denotes an awe or awefulness due to *majestas* absolute 'overpoweringness'.

Fascinans: *Mysterium* is expressed as *tremendum* and also as *fascinans* or fascinating. These two qualities, the daunting and fascination are combined in a strange harmony of contrasts. The reluctant dual character of the numinous consciousness is at once the strongest and most noteworthy phenomenon in the whole history of religion. The mystery aspect is for religious man not merely something to be wondered at but something that throws him into trans. The element of fascination brings out the properties of love, mercy etc. in the religious experience.

The "Wholly Other"

The "more" is an expression used by William James to refer to this reality that cannot be identified with the natural. Otto referred to it as the "wholly other", "that which is beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar..." Therefore it falls quite outside the limits of 'canny'. According to Otto even on the lowest level of religious development, the essential characteristic of religious experience is 'stupor' before something 'Wholly Other', whether such an other be named Spirit, demon, *Deva* or be left without a name. This feeling of the 'Wholly Other' may be indirectly 'aroused' by means of objects which are already puzzling upon natural plane. "Wholly Other" as mysterious is something which is absolutely beyond our understanding. But that which merely eludes our understanding for a time is a 'problem' and not a mystery. Truly mysterious object is beyond our comprehension not only because our knowledge has certain limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other'.

Mysticism contrasts the numinous object, the "Wholly Other" with the objects of ordinary experience. Not satisfied with contrasting with such objects of nature, mysticism finally calls it

'that which is nothing. By this 'nothing' is meant not only that of which nothing can be predicated, but that which is absolutely and intrinsically other than the opposite of everything that is and can be thought. The 'nothingness' of the Western mystics is termed as *sunyam* or *sunyatha* or void and emptiness by Buddhist and Hindu mystics. All these refer to the Numinous ideogram of the 'Wholly Other'.

The Epistemological Aspect of the Experience of the Holy

Otto tries to clarify a transcendental basis of the experience of Numinous in the subject as Kant did in his epistemology.

The Holy is taken in the broad sense to include both rational and non-rational elements. The Holy is the category by which we apprehend the transcendent both in its rational and non-rational aspects. In the case of non-rational elements of the category of the Holy we are referred back to something still deeper than pure reason to that which mystics call 'the ground of the soul'. Otto follows the Kantian model to base religion and sense of God in man. According to Kant the knowledge arises from our faculty of cognition and sense impressions are occasions for such knowledge. The knowledge of the *Numinous* could be described in the same manner. It is derived from the deepest foundation of the cognitive apprehension of the soul. The experience of the Numinous arises by means of sense experience but not in and through sensory data. They are stimulus and occasion for the *numinous* experience to be stirred. The experience of the *Numinous* becomes purer when the soul disengages itself from this sense experience and takes its stand in absolute contrast.

Not only the rational but also the non-rational elements of the complex category of the Holy have *a priori* elements. The non-rational content has its own independent roots in the hidden depths of the spirit. The first stirring of demonic dread is purely *a priori* element. This could be pictured as the experience of the *Numinous* in the primitive and crude form. In the same way the developed form of the experience- *mysterium, tremendum et fascinans* is *a priori*. This non-rational element of the experience of the *Numinous* may be compared with the aesthetic judgement and the category of the beautiful. Intuitively I apprehend in the object only its sensuous qualities and its

spatial form and nothing more. The meaning 'beautiful' is not given by the sensory elements. I must have an obscure conception of the 'beautiful' and in addition, a principle of assumption by which I attribute it to the object. If not the simplest experience of a beautiful thing is rendered impossible.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

The religions in general are convinced that the Holy or the sacred reality is attested by the inward voice of religious consciousness or longing. It can also be directly encountered in particular occurrences and events. That is, besides the inner revelation from the spirit there is an outward revelation of the divine nature. Religious language gives the name 'sign' to such demonstrative actions and manifestations. From the time of the most primitive religions people found means to arouse in them the sense of the holy. It can be known and experienced because everyone has an inborn sense of the numinous. It cannot be explained adequately because of its mysteriousness, but it can be evoked indirectly and experienced.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What is the appropriate expression to the feeling of *Numinous*?

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2) How does Otto follow the Kantian model to base religion and sense of God in man?

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4.5 KEY WORDS

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4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. James speaks of the reality of genuine, healthy and normal religious experience where man has the touch of a 'more', the unseen or the 'divine'. As our primary wide-wake consciousness opens our senses to the touch of the material things, so it is logically conceivable that there be higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch man. The possibility for such experience, according to him, might be our possession of a subconscious region which should yield access to the spiritual beings. In this sense subconscious region becomes the intermediary between the normal self and the higher spiritual agency.

2. The criteria to judge the validity of religious experience indicated by James are three. They are:

- a. Immediate luminousness
- b. philosophical reasonableness
- c. moral helpfulness

He gives more importance to the pragmatic criterion. Since the experience of the unseen world produces effects in this world, the 'unseen region' in question is not merely ideal. When we commune with it, the effect is actually imparted to our finite personality. Therefore that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself. Therefore James finds no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal. The 'effect' the unseen world creates makes him to articulate its existence.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. To the non-rational, non-explainable element of religion, Otto gave the name "Numinous". The Numinous experience is expressed by him by three Latin words: *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. For instance, what does one feel when one is in deeply felt personal prayer or when

one partakes in a solemn liturgical service or when one is in an old church or temple? The appropriate expression to this feeling is *mysterium, tremendum et fascinans*.

2. According to Kant the knowledge arises from our faculty of cognition. Sense impressions are occasions for such knowledge. According to Otto the knowledge of the *Numinous* could be described in the same manner. It is derived from the deepest foundation of the cognitive apprehension of the soul. The experience of the Numinous arises by means of sense experience but not in and through sensory data. They are stimulus and occasion for the *numinous* experience to be stirred. The experience of the *Numinous* becomes purer when the soul disengages itself from this sense experience and takes its stand in absolute contrast.

BLOCK 4

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

This block, as mentioned above, consists of four units: religious pluralism, religious fundamentalism, inter-religious dialogue and the postmodern trends.

Unit 1 familiarizes us with Religious Pluralism and the problems it raises in general. This unit deals with the meaning of religious pluralism, conditions that promote or hinder religious pluralism, the responses put forward by philosophy to such a situation and the practical responses to religious responses.

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

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

Unit 4 studies the Religious Trends of Post-modernism. Post-modernism being a recent phenomenon has touched upon almost all the cultural aspects that affect our life today.

Postmodernism invites critical reflection and sustained debate. Here we deal with multiple meanings of spirituality, the relation between post-modernism and religion and the ways one can be religious in this post-modern world.

While focusing on the recent trends in the area of religion, the present block calls for a shift from the traditional ways of thinking. It searches for relevance of religion in a postmodern world which is also in struggle and dialogue with science and technology.



UNIT 1 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Conditions that Promote or Hinder Religious Pluralism
- 1.3 Philosophical Responses to Religious Pluralism
- 1.4 Practical Responses to Religious Pluralism
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 Further Readings and References
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

- to have a basic understanding of religious pluralism and the problems it raises;

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

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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

A broader definition of religious pluralism includes in its primary meaning not only the acknowledgement of the fact of plurality and an acceptance of the validity of all religions, but also an active engagement with plurality in the form of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. Thus, according to Diana Eck, “Pluralism is not the sheer fact of this plurality alone, but is active engagement with plurality. Pluralism and plurality are sometimes used as if they were synonymous. But plurality is just diversity, plain and simple—splendid, colorful, maybe even threatening. Such diversity does not, however, have to affect me. I can observe diversity. I can even celebrate diversity, as the cliché goes. But I have to participate in pluralism....Pluralism requires the cultivation of public space where we all encounter one another.” Thus, in the broader sense, religious pluralism involves not only the acceptance of the validity of other religions, but also dialogue among religions, where individuals of different religions discuss religious beliefs and learn from and work with each other without attempting to convince each other of the correctness of their individual set of beliefs.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) Differentiate between plurality of religion and religious pluralism.

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2) What are the ways in which the expression “religious pluralism” is used?

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1.2 CONDITIONS THAT PROMOTE OR HINDER RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Conditions for the Existence of Religious Plurality

One of the necessary conditions for the existence of religious pluralism is the existence of freedom of religion. Religious diversity can exist only if there is freedom of religion. To have freedom of religion it is not necessary that an individual religion accepts that other religions are legitimate or that freedom of religion and religious plurality in general are good things. What is necessary is that religions accept to coexist, acting within a commonly accepted law of a particular region. Freedom of religion exists when different religions of a particular region possess the same rights of worship and public expression.

Some argue that religious freedom alone is not enough for religious pluralism to flourish. For religious pluralism to flourish there has to be mutual respect between different religious traditions. The required respect can be promoted by societal and theological change aimed to overcome religious differences between religions and denominations within the same religion. Such a change can be introduced by a non-literal view of one’s religious traditions and by emphasizing fundamental principles rather than more marginal issues. It is basically an attitude which rejects focus on immaterial differences, and instead gives respect to those beliefs held in

common. It is clear that in such an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation religious pluralism can flourish.

Conditions That Hinder Religious Pluralism

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

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

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

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What are the conditions that make the existence of religious diversity possible?

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2) What are the conditions that hinder religious pluralism?

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1.3 PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSES TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Analysis of Religious Concepts

One of the early responses to religious pluralism was to show a desire to study the religious concepts of religions other than one's own. This gave rise to the branch of philosophy called comparative religion. Comparative religion is a field of religious study that analyzes the similarities and differences of themes, myths, rituals and concepts among the world's religions. In the field of comparative religion, the main world-religions are generally classified as Abrahamic, Indian or Taoic, and attempts are made to analyze the similarities and differences among the various ideational aspects of these religions. Thus attempts have been made to analyse Eastern descriptions of unitive mysticism; Hindu and Buddhist notions of reincarnation, centering on the question of personal identity from life to life; such Buddhist ideas as anatta ("no self"), sunyata ("emptiness"); and a number of other important concepts. But much remains to be done and many other major concepts await attention, both individually and comparatively. Indeed this area of philosophical inquiry has almost unlimited scope for development.

Reflecting on the Relationship among Religions

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

Exclusivism

Exclusivism addresses the problem of the relationship among religions in a simple way by dismissing as false all religions other than one's own. Basically, it is the view that there can only

be one true religion. Other religions are dismissed as false and misleading, at least in so far as their beliefs are incompatible with those taught by one's own. This is the most widely-held view; most of the adherents of each religion (including some, but not all, of its reflective thinkers), at least implicitly assume this view.

However, a "hermeneutic of suspicion" is provoked by the evident fact that in almost all cases the religion one accepts (or against which one reacts) is selected by the accident of birth. Someone born to devout Muslim parents in Iran or Indonesia is very likely to be a Muslim, someone born to devout Buddhist parents in Thailand or Sri Lanka is very likely to be a Buddhist, someone born to devout Christian parents in Italy or Mexico is very likely to be a Catholic Christian, and so on. Thus there is a certain non-rational arbitrariness in the claim that the particular tradition within which one happens to have been born is the one and only true religion. And if the conviction is added that salvation and eternal life depend upon accepting the truths of one's own religion, it may well seem unfair that this saving truth is known only to one group, into which only a minority of the human race have had the good fortune to be born.

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

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

Pluralism

Uncomfortable with the implications of exclusivism, many contemporary thinkers look for pluralist views. Pluralist views in all its various forms reject the exclusivist view that there can

only be one religion that knows the truth and is a locus of salvation, and accept that other traditions too can be sources of truth and salvation. The prominent pluralist views are: unity in diversity, complementarity of religions, and radical diversity.

The Transcendent Unity of Religions: One form of pluralism claims that the various historical religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are manifestations of a core universal religion. Thus the pluralist view adopted by Frithjof Schuon, Rene Guenon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Huston Smith and others distinguishes between the esoteric religion of the mystics and the exoteric religions of the mass of believers. It is then claimed that the former is, in its innermost core, identical across the different religions, whereas the latter, consisting of culturally conditioned concepts, doctrines, imagery, lifestyle, and spiritual practices, differ and are indeed at many points mutually incompatible. Each exoteric tradition (historical Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) should accordingly maintain its own unique individuality, because each is a valid expression of the ultimate reality that is directly known by the mystics. Thus historical religions are seen as different manifestations of core experience; all religions are united at the level of this experience.

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

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

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

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

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

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2) What are the important ways in which religious plurality is explained?

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Resolving Conflicting Truth Claims

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

tries to resolve the problem of conflicting truth claims with the help of the theories about the relationship among religions.

Solving Religious Conflicts with the Help of Evidence

Pre-Kantian philosophy, especially deist philosophy, believed that the central religious claims such as belief in God and the immortality of the soul can be proved rationally. But after Hume and Kant a widespread consensus emerged that the traditional theistic arguments fail to prove religious claims—although there are prominent thinkers who resist this conclusions. However, attempts to validate religious claims were not given up. Instead of reason experience was proposed as a valid source of religious knowledge. It is argued that religious people report a wide range of forms of distinctively religious experience, including mystical experiences of direct awareness of, and even union with, God; a sense of divine presence in moments of worship or contemplation; an indirect consciousness of God in the feeling of absolute dependence upon a creator, or of a divine presence and activity mediated through the beauties and sublimities of nature, the claims of conscience, the profound significance of human love, the crises of birth and death, and many kinds of personal and historical events. Can such experiences count as good evidences for resolving disagreements?

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

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

Critics have raised two objections against treating religious experience on a par with sense experience. First, whereas sense experience is universal and compulsory, religious experience is optional and confined to a limited number of people, so that whilst sensory reports can in principle be confirmed by anyone, reports of religious experience cannot be; and second,

whereas sense experience produces a universally agreed description of the physical world, religious experience within the different traditions produces different and often incompatible descriptions of the divine. Because of these reasons, critics reject the claim of parity of religious experience with sense experience. Thereby the principle of rational credulity is rendered inapplicable in the case of religious experience.

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

Solving Religious Conflicts with the Help of Theories of Religion

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

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

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

interpretations of religion have been offered to solve it, each of which would solve the problem in its own way.

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

This view favors one religion holding it as the sole depository of truth while dismissing all other ones, especially those that disagree with the religion of one's choice, as propagators of error. However, a "hermeneutic of suspicion" is provoked by the way one happens to favor a religion. Most often the decision to favor a religion is prompted by the accident of birth, rather than rational considerations. Thus there is a certain non-rational arbitrariness in the choice of a religion to be accorded the status of being the one and only true religion. And if the conviction is added that salvation and eternal life depend upon accepting the truths of one's own religion, it may well seem unfair that this saving truth is known only to one group, into which only a minority of the human race have had the good fortune to be born.

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

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

This view encounters two difficulties. First, it relativizes the different religious belief-systems and ways of life. Secondly, the claim that the esoteric religion of the mystics is identical across the different religions, is not borne out by facts. As a matter of fact, the descriptions of the mystics differ considerably. Whilst some mystics report union with a personal divine being, others report union with a nonpersonal reality, and still others report an annihilation of the self or

a merger into a universal self, or even blissful emptiness. Thus there seems to be no agreement even at the level of esoteric religion. Consequently, the problem of conflicting truth claims is left unsolved.

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

Here it is disputed whether mysticism constitutes, as is claimed, a direct and unmediated awareness of the divine reality, or whether even this experience is conditioned by the thought-forms of the mystic's tradition. Are the differences in the reports of the mystics to be attributed to varying interpretations of a common, ineffable experience; or should we hold that a preconscious interpretative activity enters into the formation of the conscious experience, so that the mystics' actual experiences are characteristically different? If the differences in the reports of the mystics are indicative of genuinely different experiences, the attempt to find in a common mystical experience a unifying principle beyond the multiplicity of religious beliefs and practices stands checkmated.

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

Plurality of Ultimates: The logical ground for proposing a single Ultimate at the source of differing experiences has been subjected to scrutiny. Are the differences in the reports of the mystics merely a matter of different experiences of a single Ultimate or are they indicative of the

existence of different Ultimates? If the differences are indicative of the existence of different Ultimates, it is easy to explain why religious claims conflict: the claims of different religions do not agree, because they describe different objects and experiences. Here the critical questions concern the relationship among the different Ultimates.

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

Check Your Progress IV

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) Examine whether religious experiences count as good evidences for resolving disagreements.

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2) What are the proposed solutions to the problem of conflicting truth claims?

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1.4 PRACTICAL RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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

i. Religious Toleration

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

Religious toleration is an aspect of toleration in general; it is enduring disagreeable religious differences which are either expressed or acted upon. It is not to be confused with secularization or erosion of religious devotion. It is also distinct from the sort of pluralistic ecumenicism that seeks consensus on central religious matters or views other religious beliefs as simply different routes to similar goals. We can believe that we are clearly right and others are egregiously wrong on a matter of huge and holy significance, and still decide not to use force or coercion to bring change in their beliefs and practices.

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

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

ii. Appreciating and Encouraging Diversity

The arguments for religious toleration mentioned above must be distinguished from another consideration that Mill introduced, namely, the positive appreciation and promotion of diversity. Locke was not one to celebrate plurality; he merely argued the irrationality of not enduring it. One could go further and argue for actually appreciating and even promoting disagreeable practices. Thus an employer might set up work schedules that accommodate an employee's disagreeable religious practices, and a society may empower minorities to broadcast disagreeable viewpoints. Mill and others have argued that it is prudent for individuals and societies to promote the airing of what contradicts them, because that is how we correct our mistakes and arrive at better reasons and more truth. Democratic governments not only tolerate criticism, but set up structures like opposition parties and free media to air alternative, and often critical, views. Theists also can take a leaf out of their book and set up structures that would protect and promote the airing of alternative views. The motivation for this can come from a view that human comprehension of God's will is inherently limited and fallible. This view would yield a theologically based, epistemological humility that not only tolerates but also enables the expression of what seems to be heresy, since the latter might give new insights into what one already believes. It must be specially noted that for promoting such cooperation one need not necessarily accept that the other is right at least in some way; such openness to accommodate those who differ from us is consistent with viewing the other as being wrong in a disagreeable way.

iii. Interreligious or Interfaith Dialogue

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

what is sought is positive interaction between people of different traditions and beliefs, aimed to promote mutual understanding and cooperation.

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

Check Your Progress V

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 meaning of religious toleration.

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2. Explain the meaning and importance of religious dialogue.

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, in our globalized and rapidly shrinking world, religious pluralism is obviously a major issue within the philosophy of religion. Besides the question of defining religious pluralism, discussion on the topic centers most frequently on two issues: the relation among the religions and the most appropriate response—both philosophical and practical—to the obvious fact of plurality. These issues present so obvious a challenge to philosophical speculation that it seems inevitable that they will be increasingly widely discussed in the coming decades.

1.6 KEY WORDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

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

2. The expression religious pluralism is used in a number of related ways. Some consider religious pluralism as a worldview which acknowledges that one's religion is not the sole and exclusive source of truth, and admits that there are at least some truths and true value in other religions. Another definition of religious pluralism involves accepting the beliefs taught by other religions as true though they differ from the ones taught by one's own religion. This involves an acceptance of the concept that all religions are valid though their beliefs appear to be conflicting. A broader definition of religious pluralism goes beyond the acknowledgement of the fact of plurality and an acceptance of the validity of all religions and includes an active engagement with plurality in the form of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. One of the necessary conditions for the existence of religious pluralism is the existence of freedom of religion. To have freedom of religion, religions must accept to coexist, acting within a commonly accepted law of a particular region. Freedom of religion exists when different religions of a particular region possess the same rights of worship and public expression. Secondly, for religious pluralism to flourish there has to be mutual respect between different religious traditions. It is only in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation that religious pluralism can flourish.

2. Just as religious freedom promotes religious pluralism, its absence shuts out religious pluralism. In atheist countries there can be no religious pluralism, since in such countries there can be no religion at all.

Another factor that hinders religious pluralism is exclusivism. Exclusivist religions teach that theirs is the only way to truth and salvation; they cannot see any good in other religions or

tolerate them. Some of them would even argue that it is the duty of a true believer to wage jihad against the falsehoods taught by other religions. This situation obtains in certain. It is easy to see that where such an attitude prevails, there can be no religious pluralism.

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

Answers to Check Your Progress III

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

2) Those who accept pluralism try to explain it. The prominent pluralist explanations are: unity in diversity, complementarity of religions, and radical diversity.

Unity in diversity: One form of pluralism claims that the various historical religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are manifestations of a core universal religion. Thus the pluralist view adopted by Frithjof Schuon, Rene Guenon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Huston Smith and others distinguish between the esoteric religion of the mystics and the exoteric religions of the mass of believers. It is then claimed that the former is, in its innermost core, identical across the different religions, whereas the latter, consisting of culturally conditioned concepts, doctrines, imagery, lifestyle, and spiritual practices, differ and are indeed at many points mutually incompatible. Thus historical religions are seen as different manifestations of core experience; all religions are united at the level of this experience.

Complementarity of Religions: This is another way of viewing plurality. Proponents of this theory speak of a Supreme Reality which wills all to be consciously related to it. Complementary aspects of this Reality are revealed within the different world religions. Thus, for example, the Semitic and Indian traditions are complementary, emphasizing the active and unchanging poles respectively of the Supreme Spiritual Reality to which they both seek to relate. By their friendly interactions, each seeking to learn from the others, a “convergent spirituality” may emerge in ways which cannot be known in advance.

Radical Diversity: This view holds that each tradition is unique and independent; there is no unifying factor common to all religious forms. Not only the external expressions but even the Ultimates of religion are different. The personal God affirmed by monotheistic religions, for example, is different from the ever-changing, interdependent process of the universe (pratitya-samutpada) affirmed by Buddhism. On this view, each religion is unique; there is no significant unity among them, except that of a common name and some of external structural features like moral codes, belief-systems and ritual practices. But the contents of these differ. Thus there is radical diversity. The attempt to find a unifying common core is futile.

Answers to Check Your Progress IV

1. After Hume and Kant a widespread consensus emerged that the traditional theistic arguments fail to prove religious claims. In its place experience was proposed as a valid source of religious knowledge. Therefore it is important to examine whether such experiences can count as good evidences for resolving disagreements.

Some people raised objections against using religious experience as a source of knowledge about God and supernatural realities, because such experiences may have a purely natural origin in the powers of the human imagination. Religious experience, they argued, remains objectively ambiguous.

At this point the “principle of rational credulity” is invoked, according to which it is rational to trust our experience as a source of valid knowledge except in so far as we have reason to distrust it. And it is claimed that the same principle should apply impartially to religious experience as well. Prima facie it is an awareness of a non-physical divine reality; and we must trust it insofar as we have no reason to distrust it.

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

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

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

Naturalism: Naturalism solves the problem in a simple way by denying its existence. It views all religious claims as false, arising from delusory projection upon the universe of human hopes, fears, and ideals. All religious claims of knowledge being false, their conflict does not present any problem.

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

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

Plurality of Ultimates: Some have proposed that the differences in the reports of the mystics are they indicative of the existence of different Ultimates. If this is true, it easy to explain why religious claims conflict: the claims of different religions do not agree, because they describe different objects and experiences.

Complementarity Theory: According to this theory, the Supreme Reality reveals complementary aspects of itself within the different world religions. Disagreements arise because no religion possesses the entire truth. It is then claimed that through their friendly interactions a total picture will emerge and conflicts will be resolved.

Answers to Check Your Progress V

1. One practical way of responding to religious diversity is to practice religious toleration. Toleration in general is the enduring of something disagreeable. It involves a decision to forgo using power or coercion to change the things we dislike; so it is not merely resignation at the inevitability of the disagreeable. Toleration involves having power to change the disagreeable, but not using it. Religious toleration is an aspect of toleration in general; it is enduring disagreeable religious differences which are either expressed or acted upon. We can believe that we are clearly right and others are egregiously wrong on a matter of huge and holy significance, and still decide not to use force or coercion to bring change in their beliefs and practices.
2. Another practical way of responding to religious diversity is to engage in interfaith or inter-religious dialogue. The term interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative and positive interaction

between people of different religious traditions and spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional level with the aim of deriving understanding and cooperation and if possible a common ground in belief. This can be achieved through a concentration on similarities between faiths, understanding of values, and commitment to the world.

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



UNIT 2

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

CONTENTS

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Definition
- 2.3 History
- 2.4 Context
- 2.5 Religious Militancy, Threat to peace, Democracy and Human Security
- 2.6 Religious Fundamentalism and Terrorism
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Key Words
- 2.9 Further Readings and References
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0. OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will look at:

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

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

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

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Fundamentalism is a clinging to values practices and selected doctrines or teachings currently perceived to be under threat by a group, a tribe or nation. These ideas and customs must be preserved at any cost, even by resorting to violence. It is a religious movement or point of view characterized by a return to fundamental principles and often by intolerance of other views and opposition to secularism.

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

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

2.2. DEFINITION

Fundamentalism refers to a belief in and strict adherence to a set of basic principles (often religious in nature sometimes as a reaction to perceived doctrinal compromises with modern social and political life. "All fundamentalisms follow a certain form. They are embattled forms of spirituality, which have emerged in response to a perceived crisis" (Karen Armstrong). The response to such a threat is neither democratic nor tolerant. Dialogue does not figure in the response; instead there is denial, rejection, withdrawal into its own stronghold of conviction that the "old" is the only truth, the only good and that all that contradicts it is evil. So it can even be seen as a struggle between good and evil, good and evil on a cosmic scale. This "Good and evil is to be defined absolutely in terms of the group with no scope for compromise." Such a struggle has often turned violent and is in some degree the root of World Wars. Karen Armstrong

suggests that all fundamentalist movements have certain common characteristics: fears, anxieties and desires that they are a reaction against scientific and secular culture. Fundamentalism often leads to terrorism which is the greatest threat to the peace and development of society in the present century. Greed for power, wealth and fame are the fuel that feeds violence in the 21st century and these are often disguised as religious movements, movements of social concern and justice. There are situations in which it is difficult to distinguish between fundamentalism and Idealism.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) Define fundamentalism.

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2). How does fundamentalism lead to violence?

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2.3. HISTORY

Religious fundamentalism is a common phenomenon to all religious denominations in some degree, differing in intensity at different time and in different places, depending largely on social and political conditions. It is protective of basic truths and practices and suspicious of innovations except those they find convenient. Religious fundamentalism as a phenomenon came about in opposition to the challenges of the liberal theology to Christianity. At that very beginning Christian Fundamentalism was a movement against narrowing the role of religion in

both public and private spheres of social life. It was not in favor of the 'secularization of society' or the so called 'privatization of religion'. Later religious fundamentalism as a concept used to describe various religious movements in different places all over the world. Precisely in the late 20th century, this concept was used to illustrate the Islamic movements, the so called 'Islamic Fundamentalism'

Christian Fundamentalism

Christians are generally two types, those who took a literal view of the Bible and the Church documents and others who have a liberal view of it. The former are the Christian fundamentalists; they came into existence as a consequence of the impact which 'liberals' had on Christianity. Liberal Christians attempted to restructure the social bases relied upon religious principles with new secular ones such as democratic values. Indirectly and somehow directly, that was a threat to religious values and the family structure. Consequently, throughout the twentieth century, through a literal commitment to the sacred documents, Christian fundamentalism emerged to combat with such a liberal theology of Christianity by returning to the rightful order of society. In this way, Christian fundamentalism came into existence as an anti-modern movement in modern era, in a sense it was rejecting the modern ideological products. Yet, it should be kept in mind that they were not hostile to all products of modernity. Fundamentalists use some elements of modern world (modern technology) as a factor to prevent other elements of modern era which they consider to be a threat to religion (i.e. materialism). For instance, the Christian rights emerged in 1970s, believe that only Christians and Jews are qualified to run governments; that is in a sense rejecting the separation of church and state, among those is Robert Son who owns the Christian Broadcasting Network (Hoffman and graham, 2006:403). Having this Christian fundamentalism emerged as a modern movement, as Armstrong puts it 'religious fundamentalists are essentially modern movements that could take no root in other time than our own' (Armstrong, 2001:viii)

The first use of the term Fundamentalism was recorded at the Nigara Bible Conference in 1878-1897. The Fundamentals – 12 books in 19th century funded by Milton & Lyman Stewart in Protestant churches in U.S.A. stressed the inerrancy of the Bible and a number of basic Christian

doctrines. The general assembly of Presbyterian Church listed their five fundamentals. The Baptist Church ranked among the Fundamentalists.

Christian Fundamentalism predominated in 18th and 19th century in United States in different denominations all claiming to hold the true message of Christ. According to James F. Mattil the fundamentalists hold that “ the key to fundamentalist Christian belief is their acceptance of the inerrancy of the Bible”.

The Iran hostage crisis 1979-80 brought into existence the term Islamic Fundamentalism as the media tried to explain the ideology of Ayatollah Khomeini. And it has since been used to describe Muslim violence in various parts of the world including the attack on U.S.A. in September 2001, the attacks on British railways in July 2007 and most recently the Pune attacks in 2010.

Islamic Fundamentalism

While Muslims have very strong religious convictions and they inculcate the values of the Koran in children from a tender age, history shows that the followers of the prophet Mohamed have encountered political resistance from its early days. This resistance has been vigorously felt in many and violent encounters throughout history in the Middle East and Europe. Despite war and bloodshed, cultural and intellectual riches of the Arabic world have permeated and enriched European and eventually world learning starting from 14th and 15th centuries. Arab discoveries in the field of Mathematics and Architecture are well known. Indeed Islamic culture was much more advanced in many ways than that then prevalent in parts of Europe and Muslims were rightly proud of this.

19th century colonialism by European countries, particularly Britain was resented and opposed by the Arab world and the struggle for political power was of utmost importance to the Islamic world. In fact this has always been an important aspect of the religio-political character of Islam. Extremist groups have grown out of resistance efforts.

India has been home to millions of Muslims since the Middle Ages and wars have been fought to establish Moghul dynasties; there was violence and intolerance, but it settled down to become a

prosperous empire under Akbar who showed remarkable tolerance, promoted Hindus, invited Jesuits to his court.

There had been instances of conversion under pressure and enforcement of Islamic laws and practices in some areas was inevitable, but on the whole there was very little recorded evidence of fanaticism or fundamentalism. Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis lived together as Indians.

Islamic fundamentalism came to the fore in the run up to Indian Independence followed by the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The fearful riots that accompanied the exchange of population as Hindus in the new Islamic state crossed the border into the new free India and Muslims fled into their own country.

The antagonism that developed between the two communities led to much hostility and often there were bloody clashes. Migrant Muslims tended to move together into ghettos for security and to protect themselves and their faith from what they feared would be oppression. On the whole those fears were not realized, except when vested interests roused communal flames by spreading rumours, often totally unfounded like the theft of the relic of the Prophet's hair in the mid sixties and the major one- the demolition of the Babri Masjid. This led to bloody riots with death and destruction and a heightened hostility between the two religious groups.

The growing Muslim population was seen as a threat to Hindu majority and the Muslims having experienced the fury of the attack felt more and more vulnerable and insecure, their faith and holy shrines under attack. To protect their lives, their faith and their holy places, the Muslim masses have become more and more fundamentalist in their outlook and in their mistrust of what they see as a Hindu government. Repeated incidence of violence on both sides have strengthened fundamentalist attitudes and practices among both Hindus and Muslims. The very fabric of India as a secular state has been threatened, but wise governance has saved the country from being torn apart.

Hindu Fundamentalism

Islam has often been considered a threat to the complacency of Hinduism. North Indian Hindus have been on the defensive since the end of the 19th century. The decennial census introduced by the British made the different communities aware of their own numerical strength and showed the Hindus as losing ground in terms of population. Without drastic action, the decline appeared to be irreversible. Christianity and Islam were proselytizing religions, with active mechanisms for conversion; Hinduism was not. As things stood, the traffic in conversion was flowing only one way, and those lost to Hinduism were gone forever. Hindu Nationalists strongly felt that three elements were most essential for the progress of the Hindu Jati (in this sense, community, although usually the term connotes caste): that its members share a common language, that religion is held in common by them, and that members are in unity and share a common origin. Although the Hindus were the majority community ruled by minority rulers since the 12th century A.D., there was no major uprising in any part of the subcontinent against any of the foreign rulers. Despite forceful conversions to Islam and other deprivations imposed on the Hindus during the reign of Mughals in general and Aurangzeb in particular, the only forces that rose or stood up against these harsh treatments were a handful like Shivaji, the Maratha warlord, and the Sikhs. Even the 1857 uprising against the British was more a military rebellion than one that was either a national or religious movement against the ruler

Hinduism, being a conglomerate of religious traditions, contains a very diverse range of philosophical viewpoints and is generally considered as being doctrinally tolerant of varieties of both Hindu and non-Hindu beliefs. Although related, Hinduism and Hindutva are different. Hinduism is a *sanathana dharma* while Hindutva is a political ideology. Fukuoka, Asian Culture Prize-winning Indian sociologist, and cultural and political critic Ashis Nandy argued "Hindutva will be the end of Hinduism."

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) Give in short the history of religious fundamentalism.

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2.4. CONTEXT

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

First of all, one aspect of religious fundamentalism is closely related to socialization process. It is usually the case that individuals coming from religious families are generally more religious than those brought up within more secular environments. Such people, like their parents and ancestors, tend literally to interpret religious text(s) in accordance with their traditions. Their behaviors mostly fall in the category of “nonviolent intolerance”. They are usually ethnocentric, they would advocate language of militancy, but normally, they are not directly associated with physical violence. Some other people, albeit not so many, however, may consciously choose to be radically religious. The motives for these people may vary, mostly in accordance with personal variables. Many people, for example, may become devoted believers due to inner

insecurity, caused by a real or perceived frightening or confusing environment. Social psychologists identify a basic need to reduce uncertainty or anxiety (Hogg and Abrams, 1993), construct meaning, and avoid confusion (Reykowski, 1982). Religious fundamentalism, as literal thinking, serves to these ends in many ways. First, by sticking to a religious belief and accepting it as the ultimate source of knowledge, the individual finds “satisfactory” explanations of puzzling or mysterious phenomena. Religion satisfies the desire to know and to understand, and is resorted to when more worldly means of explanation fail. In that sense, religious fundamentalism can be said to offer intellectual security by largely satisfying cognitive needs of the person. Inexplicable problems, which cannot be resolved by any other means, are unraveled by recourse to theological and religious sources of knowledge.

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

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

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

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

2.6. RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND TERRORISM

Definition

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

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

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

Terrorism is more often associated with individuals or groups, rather than with state policy, with groups attempting to overthrow existing political structures. This activity has been used by one

or both sides in anti-colonial conflicts- Ireland and the United Kingdom, Algeria and France, Vietnam and France/United States, disputes between different national groups for possession of a homeland-Palestine and Israel, Tamils in Sri Lanka , conflicts between different denominations.

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

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

America had its earthshaking shock with aerial attacks on New York and Washington on 11th September, as TV screens all over the world showed the Twin Towers toppling to the ground in clouds of dust and debris. It was the turn of Britain to suffer its punishment for its share in the Afghan and Iraq wars with the multiple blasts on the underground train system in July 2005. In both places Al Qaeda supporters among the resident populations had a share in the undertaking. They were men, often students who had come to America or Britain for study or employment and were in place when the “appointed hour” came. On reflection it was clear that months, even years of planning had gone into the preparation of these attacks. Sometimes small localized

attacks on this pattern take place, but it is rarely clear whether these are genuinely part of Bin Laden's scheme or mere copycat attempts by disaffected individuals or splinter groups.

India had its share of terror both domestic and imported. The demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 with its enormous loss of life and the wide spread riots that followed with burning, looting, rape and destruction has left a legacy of fear and hate in human hearts. It has left far reaching consequences of mistrust and enmity between the communities. With full Al Qaeda support an audacious attack on the Indian Parliament stunned the nation. There have been many terrorist attacks on Indian soil - the burning in Gujarat of a train carrying Hindu sevaks returning from Ayodhya and the repercussions of that incident. There have been attacks on several other sacred places, including churches in Orissa and Karnataka with wide spread looting, destruction and burning of village houses.

But the most terrifying attack on India came on November 26, 2008 when terrorists came in country boats into the creeks of Mumbai harbor and launched series of attacks on several sites in the city. The central VT stations, the Cama hospital, Nairman House, the Taj hotel, were all targeted with machine gun shells and RDX blasts. It was a three-day battle with many deaths and much heroic bravery. This was the work of ten men trained by terrorist groups across the borders.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) Define terrorism.

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2). What are the factors that contribute to the spread of terrorism?

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3. Explain the outlook of modern philosophers on 'religion.'
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2.7 LET US SUM UP

There is no great ferment taking place in the world of religious ideas, beliefs, and rituals, or any marked increase in the sum of human spirituality. What we are witnessing today is less the resurgence of religion than of communalism, where a community of believers has not only a religious affiliation but also social, economic, and political interests in common. These may conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers sharing the same geographical space. The basic reason for supposing that religiously inspired reform movements may be gaining momentum in our time is that perceptions of inequity in human affairs and the tangible realities that provoke those perceptions are on the increase. Population growth on the one hand, and advanced means of communications on the other, more often than not disrupt accustomed ways of life. They help to create personal uncertainty, isolation, and disappointment. The resulting distress can and often does find expression in fundamentalist movements that attempt to counteract uncertainty, isolation, and disappointment by forming supportive communities of fellow believers. It is no accident that these movements are based in countries where the continuation of old village ways is becoming impossible for a majority of the population, where urban-based mass communications, by penetrating the villages, have begun to erode an age-old framework of peasant life. The problem in India is that the nation continues to keep religion and the state intertwined. In a country that has many religions, the government and the people must realize that religion and the state have to be separate. Mixing the two has never worked, and it never will. The stability of the state system depends critically on the state's role in balancing and mediating relationships between thousands of separate communities. Such balancing requires careful and measured degrees of impartiality, neutrality, syncretism, and tolerance. What has bound communities to each other has been the manufactured mechanisms and symbols of the secular state. These structures, while supportive of local religious and sectarian institutions, had to remain impartial, neutral, or secular. Future conflicts will be those

of communal survival, aggravated, or in many cases caused by, environmental scarcity. These conflicts will be sub national, meaning that it will be hard for states and local governments to protect their own citizens physically. This is how many states may ultimately die. As state power fades, peoples and cultures around the world will be thrown back upon their own strengths and weaknesses, with fewer equalizing mechanisms to protect them. The coming decades will see us more aware of our differences than our similarities. To the average person, political values will mean less and personal security more.

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

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

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

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

We have but one choice, the path of secular humanism based on the principles of logic and reason. Our founding fathers gave us a nation founded on the principle that power belongs to the people and set us on the path of a secular democratic state that respects religious freedom and human dignity. This alone can offer us the hope of providing every citizen with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of excellence. Peace (Shanti in the Indian Scriptures) is fundamental to the Hindu way and view of life; in Islam beneficence and mercy (Rahman and Rahim in the Koran) are the main attributes of God. With such profound similarities in mind, all Indians- Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and non believers- must re-examine their past, which can give them valuable clues on how to realize a more peaceful and cooperative future.

2.8. KEY WORDS

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

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

Antagonism : Feelings of hatred

Beleaguered: Experiencing a lot of criticism and difficulties.

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

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

Conviction: A strong opinion or belief.

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

Incursions: Invasions, especially sudden or brief.

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

Inequity: Injustice.

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2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Fundamentalism refers to a belief in and strict adherence to a set of basic principles (often religious in nature sometimes as a reaction to perceived doctrinal compromises with modern social and political life. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

“All fundamentalisms follow a certain form. They are embattled forms of spirituality, which have emerged in response to a perceived crisis.” (Karen Armstrong)

2. In fundamentalism there is denial, rejection, withdrawal into its own stronghold of conviction that the “old” is the only truth, the only good and that all that contradicts it is evil. So it can even be seen as a struggle between good and evil, good and evil on a cosmic scale. This “Good and evil is to be defined absolutely in terms of the group with no scope for compromise.” Such a struggle has often turned violent and is in some degree the root of World Wars. Karen Armstrong suggests that all fundamentalists’ movements have certain common characteristics: fears, anxieties and desires that they are a reaction against scientific and secular culture. Fundamentalism often leads to terrorism which is the greatest threat to the peace and development of society in the present century. Greed for power, wealth and fame are the fuel that feeds violence in the 21st century and these are often disguised as religious movements, movements of social concern and justice.

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. Religious fundamentalism is a common phenomenon to all religious denominations in some degree, differing in intensity at different time and in different places, depending largely on social and political conditions. It is protective of basic truths and practices and suspicious of innovations except those they find convenient.

Religious fundamentalism, as a phenomenon came about in opposition to the challenges of the liberal theology to Christianity. At that very beginning Christian Fundamentalism was a movement against narrowing the role of religion in both public and private spheres of social life, it was not in favor of the ‘secularization of society’ or the so called’ privatization of religion’.

Later religious fundamentalism as a concept used to describe various religious movements in different places all over the world.

Answers to Check Your Progress 3

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

Answers to Check Your Progress 4

1. “Terrorism: the systematic use of terror or unpredictable violence against governments, public groups or individuals to attain a political objective.”

(Encyclopedia Britannica 1999 on terrorism)

Terrorism has been used by political organizations both right-wing and left-wing, by nationalistic and ethnic groups, by revolutionaries and armies and the secret police of governments themselves.

2. The modern Indian Philosophers are very liberal and dynamic in outlook. They do not believe in sectarian religion. They advocate for cult less, non-dogmatic and non-ritualistic religion. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Tagore, Gandhi and Dr.Radhakrishnan visualizes a catholic religion, which is open, dynamic, universal and all embracing. Thus Mahatma Gandhi says, “ My religion is Hinduism, which for me is religion of humanity and includes the best of all religions known to me.” Ramakrishna Paramahansa emphatically says that all religions are true and they all serve as different pathways to the realization of God. The same truth runs in the heart of all religions. There is essential unity in all religions and yet there is diversity. While the renascent leaders have faith in the truth of all religions , they all hold that one particular religion should not be engrafted on another religion. Each religion has its value and serves society in a

particular manner. The solace and satisfaction can be derived from religion only when it develops on indigenous lines. There should be growth in all religions and they should flower independently on their own pattern. It will be harmful to reduce all religions to a colorless form of one particular religion.

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



UNIT 3**INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE****Contents**

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Concept of Plurality as a Way of Life
- 3.3 The Idea of Dialogue
- 3.4 The Dawn of Religions
- 3.5 The Imperative of Dialogue
- 3.6 How Does Dialogue Happen?
- 3.7 Let us Sum Up
- 3.8 Key Words
- 3.9 Further Reading and Reference
- 3.10 Answers to Check your progress.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

Diversity or Pluralism is everywhere. It shows in the way different people live, dress, communicate, celebrate events in life, worship, etc. Sometimes these differences are so sharp that they lead to war and tension. The Middle East (Israel and the Arabs) has been on the verge of a major conflagration for half a century and an all out war is a perennial possibility. The so called "clash of civilizations"(Islam and the Western world) between two cultures that even have a common origin(Christians, Muslims and Jews hold Abraham as their prophet), is the other biggest danger of erupting in a world wide conflict. The objective of this study to is understand that even in the midst of deep differences that affect the way we live and communicate with each other, there is always a way to solve the differences. War and clashes is the only alternative. There is another alternative, the alternative of Dialogue. People to worship, dress and live differently can sit down and discuss together the issues that separate them and find a solution. This is called Dialogue. This is particularly important about religious differences. Religion has been one of major reason why people have fought and killed each other for several centuries. Sometimes such tensions take different shapes and affect even areas where religion is

the issue at all. This unit helps throw light of the existence of Dialogue as way of settling problems among people but more than that shows the way Dialogue is perhaps the best way for religions to live together without suspicion and hatred.

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

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

3.1 INTRODUCTION

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

In recent history, 9/11 or the attack on America's Trade Towers in September 2001 where more than 3000 people were killed, was a major milestone of violence which is recognized as one that changed the course of history and is considered as the beginning of the clash of civilizations. Clashes and wars have given birth to new nations like Bosnia Herzegovina, Kososvo, Croatia, etc. Hindus and Muslims have fought on the mere excuse of a cricket match, the carcass of an animal or a religious procession. In Sri Lanka too, the 30 year conflict that

caused so much bloodshed was primarily a religious -cultural conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Such conflicts although in a different settings are existent in Afghanistan, Iran, Chechnya, Philippines, Indonesia and there is no sight of any resolution of the conflict soon!

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

Amidst this incidents of violence that sometimes have reached huge proportion that seem to indicate that there is no hope for peace, a creative movement is slowly visible. This creative movement or school of thought is leading a new way of thinking, a new way of doing things or a new *global consciousness*. As part of this transformation the human race has drawn itself closer to each other, more than ever before. Distance, language and communication barriers no longer appear so frightening, although narrow groupings still continue to exist. And gently but steadily there is a great urge for spiritual experiences, for a taste of the spiritual.

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

One of the major outcomes of this new quest for meaning and seeking answers to issues that affect our lives, is the bold affirmation of pluralism which has become a widely accepted perspective of life. No longer is one form of expression, culture or way of life, accepted as a

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

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

3.2 THE CONCEPT OF PLURALITY AS A WAY OF LIFE

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

The astronauts who traveled into outer space and looked back on the earth were overwhelmed by what they saw! For the first time in history, humans actually saw the earth as a whole. They saw the earth's clouds, oceans, and continents, but not as distinct from the blue planet. The blue

planet they saw, was a borderless planet with the clouds, its oceans as one new reality. It was an entirely different one from what we can see on the horizon with its limited vision. What they saw was an interrelated, organic whole--a single globe of remarkable beauty and unity. It is striking that at the very moment in history when culture is becoming globalized, we have obtained our first time impression of the earth as a single globe. This image of the beautiful blue globe, shining against the black background of the universe, moving in its orbit in space can concretely symbolize the emergence of global consciousness on the eve of the twenty-first century.

History has left a pattern of philosophies and religious movements from vastly distant and different areas of the world, that responded to the world's needs almost in a similar fashion. If we look at our world, during the first millennium B.C.E.(Before the Christian Era), we observe a remarkable phenomenon. From the period between 800-200 B.C.E., peaking about 500 B.C.E., a striking transformation of consciousness occurred around the earth in three geographic regions, apparently without the influence of one on the other. In China, we see two great teachers, Lao-tze and Confucius, from whose wisdom emerged the schools of Chinese philosophy. In India the cosmic, ritualistic Hinduism of the Vedas was being transformed by the Upanishads, while the Buddha and Mahavira ushered in two new religious traditions. Farther west, we discover a similar development in the middle eastern region. In Israel the Jewish prophets--Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah call for a new moral awareness from their people. In Greece where Western philosophy was born, Socrates rouses the moral consciousness of the Athenians and Plato and Aristotle make the first metaphysical forays of the western world, leading into a perspective that is universal against the particular and empirical.

Half a century ago, Karl Jaspers, the German philosopher, made a significant point in his book *The Origin and Goal of History*. Referring to this period from 800-200 B.C.E. he stated "it gave birth to everything which, since then, man has been able to be." It is here in this period "that we meet with the most deepcut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short, we may style this the Axial Period'." Jaspers' perspective of history seems to materialize in the fact that humankind underwent a radical change in the way it saw itself and in the way it (mankind) understood its role in the world. This radical perspective of itself, that

mankind steadily developed affected every culture of the world, be it China, India, Europe and the Americas. Almost simultaneously we see the rise of great empires in Egypt, China, Mesopotamia, etc. who adopt more refined cultural forms, although largely similar.

Prior to this important period of 800 – 200 B.C, most cultures and religious movements can be easily identified with belief forms that are tribal, ritualistic, mythic and of cosmic nature. All early religious movements were built around visible objects and symbols, and were heavily dependent on rituals (things are done as part of religious practices, including sacrifices, fasts, poojas, etc). Another aspect of early religions and still prevailing among tribals is the myths (beliefs that are based on assumptions, and legends created around that legend, hence called Mythic). This is the characteristic to all primitive communities. From the subsequent development of these tribal, ritualistic, mythic and cosmic nature (making the natural phenomena like sun, moon, earth, seasons, etc part of worship and cult), it becomes clear that the consciousness of these primitive communities had a clearly underlying undercurrent of creative harmony of the world of nature that was celebrated through myths and rituals. Just as they considered themselves part of nature, so also they experienced themselves as part of the tribe. This web of inter-relatedness sustained them psychologically and energized their lives. To be separated from the tribe threatened them with death, not only physical but psychological as well. However, their relation to the collectivity often did not extend beyond their own tribe, for they often looked upon other tribes as hostile. Yet within their tribe they felt organically related to their group as a whole, to the life cycles of birth and death and to nature and the cosmos.

Check your Progress I

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

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

1) What is diversity or plurality?

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

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3.3 THE IDEA OF DIALOGUE

The Period of 800-200 B.C. which Jaspers names, the Axial Period ushered in a radically new form of consciousness. There is a clear and definite shift from tribal, collective consciousness to an individualistic perspective of life. The Greek philosophers and thinkers speak of reflection, "know thyself", the Upanishads teach of the "Atman" reflecting the transcendent within. Gautama Buddha preaches individual enlightenment and the Jewish prophets call for an individual moral responsibility. This period is marked by its complete departure from the tribal and the nature linkage to individual identity as distinct both from the tribe and the nature. From this flow other characteristics: consciousness that is self-reflective, analytic, which can be applied to nature in the form of scientific theories, to society in the form of social critique, to knowledge in the form of philosophy, to religion in the form of mapping an individual's spiritual journey. This self-reflective, analytic, critical consciousness stood in sharp contrast to primal mythic and ritualistic consciousness. The self reflective "*logos*" (word, reason) replaced the "*mythos*" (myth). It cannot however be denied that mythic and ritualistic forms of consciousness still survive today, but they are often considered as sub-altern.

The paradigm shift from the primal to the Axial period severed the harmony between nature and the tribe, and it empowered the individual with his identity although without organic harmony with nature and the community. This delinking from nature and life enabled him to question the social structures, and launch himself into the discovery of the abstract laws of

nature and their manipulation, as well venture into the beyond through metaphysics. This new way of life was decisive for the emergence of the traditional major religions and their departure from their tribal predecessors. The great religions of the world as we know them today are the product of the Axial Period. Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Judaism took shape in their classical form during this period; and Judaism provided the base for the later emergence of Christianity and Islam.

3.4 THE NEW DAWN OF RELIGIONS

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

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

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

According to Teilhard in spite of this global consciousness towards convergence, there will be divergent movements, that will seek to cluster among themselves, which he calls creative unions. The specificity of these creative unions will be, that they will admit plurality within their unions. His concept of diversified unity is beautifully articulated through what he calls the law of "complexity-consciousness" and "union differentiates." The humankind's consciousness according to Teilhard has become more and more aware of its unity in spite of and amidst its complexity, with the result that it creates a new paradigm of pluralities within unity. At this point of history, because of the shift from divergence to convergence, the forces of planetization are bringing about an unprecedented complexification of consciousness through the convergence of cultures and religions.

3.5. THE IMPERATIVE OF DIALOGUE

In the first Axial Period (800-200 B.C.) the world religions began on differentiated lines in several geographical areas and were driven by the forces of divergence and as a result developed their consciousness on differentiated lines, from where they began. This produced a remarkable richness of spiritual wisdom, of spiritual energies and of religious-cultural forms to express,

preserve, and transmit this heritage. Now that the forces of divergence have shifted to convergence, the religions must meet each other in center to center unions, discovering what is most authentic in each other, releasing creative energy toward a more complex form of religious consciousness.

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

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

of the consciousness of the collective and cosmic spirituality of the primal peoples rooted in the earth and the life cycles.

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

3.6 HOW DOES DIALOGUE HAPPEN?

What does this mean for religions of the twenty-first century? It means that they have a double task: to enter creatively into the dialogue of religions and to channel their energies into solving the common human problems that threaten our future on the earth. It means that they must strip away negative and limiting attitudes towards other religions. They must avoid both a narrow fundamentalism and a bland universalism. They must be true to their spiritual heritage, for this is the source of their power and their gift to the world. They must make every effort to ground themselves in their own traditions and at the same time to open themselves to other traditions. In concert with the other religions they should commit themselves to creating the new complexified global consciousness mankind is experiencing.

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

not adopt an exclusively secular attitude, for their unique contribution is to tap their reservoirs of spiritual energy and channel this into developing secular enterprises that are genuinely human.

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

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

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

Dialogue should focus on specific topics and have specific aims (even sensitive topics such as democracy, human rights, education, globalisation, ecology and religious tolerance, rights of

women, commitment to cultural diversity); dialogue cannot remain an exchange of superficialities. Differences should be discussed as well as similarities and commonalities - the aim of dialogue is not necessarily to adopt what the "other" believes or follows, and dilute what one believes, (which could be understood as syncretism or amalgamation), but rather develop a respect for the difference.

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

Check your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answers.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What are the primary requisites for religions to enter and sustain genuine inter-religious dialogue? What attitudes are essential?

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2) What do you understand by "culturisation" and "confessionalisation". Why should dialogue go beyond these two?

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3.7 LET US SUM UP

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

Although the principles of inter-religious dialogue appear to be philosophically clear, the task of real dialogue is extremely different. To commence and sustain dialogue between different religions and cultures, it is absolutely indispensable for us to adopt new methodologies of understanding the "other", which is different from any other existing model of communication. When we know we have a limited perception of a reality, which is outside us, it is possible to

discuss this perception with others, since the perception of others about the reality is also limited. We can use commonly accepted categories and symbols that can help us communicate in the same level.

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

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

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

to all. In order to release our full potential, the advent of *global consciousness* should allow for the total elimination of the social problems that inhibit the equality of humankind.

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

3.8 KEY WORDS

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

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

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

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3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress - I

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

2. Because although in the last 50 or more years more and more wars and clashes have taken place that appear only to be getting worse, more and more people and greater efforts are being made to bring people together through globalisation, communication, travel, more equal distribution of goods, creating more and more bodies where consensus and conversation take place. More and

more people see the needs to talk, negotiate, understand, etc in order to bring about peace and harmonious living.

Answers to Check Your Progress - II

1. In order to be able to dialogue one must first of all understand his own religion and draw strength from one's own beliefs. It is there that he will be aware of his own limitation and the need to find it. Dialogue begins with the willingness to question, and to be questioned, while realizing that mutual understanding and working together toward common goals requires accepting differences. In part, dialogue is an effort to comprehend the inherent value of difference and commonality, for the sake of learning and living together--as well as for the sake of increased productivity and peace in a viable and sustainable human society. Interreligious dialogue provides us with insights into each other and a successful methodology can be found in the experience of thousands of years of our human existence.

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

UNIT 4 RELIGIOUS TRENDS OF POSTMODERNISM

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Modern and Postmodern
- 4.3 Shifting Religious Trend and Postmodernism
- 4.4 Multiple Implication of Spirituality
- 4.5 Postmodernism and Religion
- 4.6 Postmodernism and the Decline and Fall of Reason
- 4.7 Ways of Being Religious in the Postmodern World
- 4.8 Postmodern Religion
- 4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.10 Key Words
- 4.11 Further Readings and References
- 4.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0. OBJECTIVES

Postmodernism is commonly understood to have emerged from a politics of the left. But when the concept was first used, postmodernism had a traditionalist meaning. It was a reaction to political, cultural and artistic movements whose perceived extremes were understood to be symptomatic of the cultural decline of the West. The first reference to postmodernism can be found in the year 1926 in the work of Bernard Iddings Bell entitled *Postmodernism and Other Essays*. Bell's postmodernism embodied ideas he believed to be superior to those associated with the modern era, such as the modern faith in the power of reason to free the human spirit from bondage arising out of ignorance and prejudice. Postmodern ideas would supersede modern ones. And they characterized the era that would follow on from the modern age; they defined the post-modern age. When Bell spoke of postmodernism, he referred to something that was both ideological and historical. It was a body of ideas and a new epoch. Bell considered postmodernism to be an intelligent alternative to the two rival ideologies that dominated Western

Societies in the 1920's; ideologies that, regardless of their fundamental differences, shared values that he believed made them quintessentially modern. The main objective of this Unit is to give a feel of postmodern religious trends without going to its intricacies. In this unit we shall try to understand contemporary religious trends from a postmodern point of view. Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of postmodern religion
- to differentiate it from traditional understanding
- to relate it with contemporary times
- to understand the postmodern concept of God

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Down through the centuries, there have been different ways of looking at the socio-politico-religious realities of the world. What is imperative is to engage in conversations and discourses that attempt to bring out some sort of a perspective about the contemporary world. On a higher level, these might be discourses, which synthesize sciences as a whole. In the contemporary world, one of the dominant 'buzzwords' in operation is 'postmodernism'. The term 'postmodernism' has been used for a wide range of economic, educational, social, political, communicational and cultural phenomena and there have been different perspectives to the same. Postmodern is of great interest to a wide range of people because it directs the attention to the major transformations taking place in the contemporary society and culture. The term postmodernism is at once fashionable and elusive. Philosophically, postmodern thought may be seen to demonstrate a suspicion to all-embracing systems of thought as Jean-François Lyotard called 'Les gran récit' or plainly addressed as meta-narratives or grand-narratives or master-narratives of Western thought. Postmodernism as viewed by Lyotard also stresses on the heterogeneity and fragmented character of socio-political and religious-cultural realities. Postmodernism refers to a paradigm shift in the way of thinking in the contemporary time.

Postmodernism is now a much debated topic, though one with rather fuzzy edges. Associated with so many different cultural phenomena, this fashionable subject seems to lack clear

definition to establish precisely what it is. Perhaps it is part of the open-ended, reflexive and deeply doubting nature of the postmodern predicament itself that exact boundaries are difficult, if not impossible, to determine. In Jean François Lyotard's influential work, *The Postmodern Condition*, originally published in French in 1979, postmodernism represents a radical break with the recent past, a condition which calls in particular the nature of modern knowledge and its effects on contemporary culture and consciousness into question. Lyotard views postmodernity as an incredulity towards metanarratives or grandnarratives, meaning that in the era of postmodern background, people have rejected the impressive theories such as universal stories and narratives, paradigms such as religion, conservative philosophy, political ideologies etc. The changing status of scientific knowledge, the exponential growth of information, the new means of communication have all led to the dissolution of long-established certainties and thus created a crisis of legitimating and representation.

4.2 MODERN AND POSTMODERN

At one level one can argue that postmodern simply means something that is *no longer modern* but comes after it. It is not all that long ago that sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers focused much of their work on defining the characteristics of modernity in contrast to traditional with its premodern features of society and consciousness. The word modern is said to derive from the Latin word *modo*, meaning 'just now'. Thus, modern signifies belonging to the present or to recent times. It also implies the progressive economic and administrative rationalization and the differentiation of the social world. It emphasized experimentation and the aim of finding an inner truth behind surface appearance. The sociologist Peter Berger has been much concerned with understanding modernity and its challenge for religion, which he has described as the necessity, the imperative, to choose. He has said "in premodern situations there is a world of religious certainty, occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast, the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation...modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative".

Philosophically speaking, postmodernism denotes the limits of reason, especially of instrumental reason so sure of itself in modern science and technology. As a movement of ideas, the postmodern critique is bound up with the decline of the belief in progress and the rejection of scientism as a narrow, one-sided over-rating of the benefits of science to the exclusion of other human experiences. Thus the modern emphasis on subjectivity and rationality is profoundly questioned, and so is the perception and representation of 'the other' and of other cultures and traditions. Postmodernism is the name for a movement in an advanced consumerist culture. There is a sense in which if one sees modernism as the culture of modernity, postmodernism is the culture of postmodernity.

4.3 SHIFTING RELIGIOUS TRENDS AND POSTMODERNISM

The term postmodernism has been in widespread use for three decades, but the story of its spread through culture is fairly complex. Whatever it may be, postmodernism invites critical reflection and sustained debate. It is probably a specifically Western, rather than a universal global phenomenon, but its effects can be felt around the whole world. Postmodernism has been described as a process involving the fragmentation of modern Western culture. A highly ingenious collage, it is a celebration of a particular, a condition that calls everything into question, a radical challenge that has to be met. However, most writers on postmodernism are primarily concerned with the dominant feature or contemporary culture and public life without considering the relationship of postmodernism to religion. But if postmodernism is such a pervasive condition, what can possibly be its meaning of the faith traditions of the world? And what is the place of faith of large human communities and innumerable individuals related to practical concerns in a world marketed by division, doubt and ever greater uncertainty?

What is the role of religion and faith in contemporary pluralistic society? Does religion or faith make a difference in politics and economics? Does it affect attitudes to the environment? Does everybody need a religion to live by? What difference is there between a human faith, a religious faith, a critical faith, and a deeply spiritual faith? How far does religious faith still provide an important focus for national, ethnic and cultural identities? And is faith different for women and men, is linked to specific sexual identities? Can faith heal and make us whole, strengthen our

resolve and responsibility, and help us build a human community of greater peace and justice? Have the different religions the resources for the development of a postmodern ethic for both personal and public life, so much needed today?

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What is your understanding of postmodernism?

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2) How is modern different from postmodern?

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4.4 MULTIPLE IMPLICATION OF SPIRITUALITY

In our contemporary time, spirituality has become a fashionable word used in widely different contexts, but it is often unclear what is meant by this term. The concept is used in both religious and secular contexts, in debates about religious education in schools, in debates among theologians outside the Western world, in discussions among feminists, ecologists and peace workers, among people of different faiths and of none. Reflecting on ‘ the extraordinary popularity of the idea of spirituality and the proliferation of its use in courses, conferences, discussions, journals and books’, a British scholar of religious studies commented on ‘the widespread and radical differences that exist over the use of the term, its possible meanings and significance. For some it represents the move of phenomenological studies of religion into a new key, stressing subjectivities and experience as over against dispassionate objectivity, the soul rather than the form of religion. To others it signifies an escape from the unnecessary confines of

religion into the more inclusive realm of our common humanity, rendering any necessary reference to the transcendent obsolete. To yet others its obscurities and ambiguities render it an empty and misleading slogan'.

Many feel indeed uneasy with references to spirituality or the spiritual, because they interpret it in a dualistic way where the spiritual is conceived of in contrast to the material, the physical, the body and the world. Yet the concept of the spiritual is not always shunned; sometimes it is preferred to the concept of the religious, because it is less clearly linked to specific religious institutions and thus possesses a more diffuse meaning. From yet another perspective, the spiritual is not so much seen as diffuse than as more centered, as the very heart and depth dimension of religion, especially realized through religious and mystical experience.

The widespread interest in religious conviction today is linked to the modern emphasis placed on the subject, on the discovery of the self and a more differentiated understanding of human psychology. Although many religions do not possess a precise word for 'spirituality', this term is now applied across different religious traditions; inside and outside particular religions as well as in many interfaith and secular contexts. In contemporary secular society spirituality – whatever it's meaning – is being rediscovered as a lost or at least concealed dimension in a largely materialistic world.

In the postmodern culture our approach to human beings is primarily pragmatic. But such an approach denies the need for self-transcendence, for a deeper, more reflective and contemplative awareness, for the discovery and exploration of a revered dimension which a perspective of faith sees as integral to all human beings. How far are our whole cultural ethos and our education able to make us into true human beings? How far are we not *under-humanized* or *de-humanized* in modern society rather than encouraged to develop our human potential to the fullest? a question which the French scientist and mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin asked with great poignancy.

In the earlier age when Western religious ideals still informed the entire culture of the West, the human being was primarily understood in relation to the divine, to God. The naturalistic-scientific approach of modernity tends to relate the human being primarily to the animal and life

worlds of the biosphere. These different approaches – to the world of our natural environment, to the depth dimension within us, to the fullness of the Spirit, to the life of God – need to be combined and linked with each other in a way that is new and culturally transformative and creative. How can we develop a wholesome, truly world-affirming and culture-transforming spirituality? Perhaps it is the very questions and problems raised by modernity, and the new possibilities opening up with new, postmodern perspectives, that will also provide us with the opportunities to develop a truly holistic and transformative religion.

Today, when we speak about the postmodern religious trends contemporary spirituality is at the crossroads. The knowledge and presence of eastern religions in the West, the rise of new religious movements, the development of atheistic and agnostic humanisms have all contributed to the questioning of traditional spiritualities in their specifically religious contexts. To achieve a new religious breakthrough, a genuine transformation of both consciousness and society, it is no longer enough to return to the past and revive ancient spiritual ideals and instructions. The increasing process of globalization affects the interchange of virtuous ideals as much as anything else and makes us conscious that humanity possesses a religious and spiritual heritage whose riches are indispensable for the creation of a much needed global virtuous consciousness.

Will the rise of such a consciousness lead to a new flowering of creed in an age of postmodernity? This is a difficult question to answer but one can speculate about it. There are numerous current signs of a growing interest in spirituality, not only at the level of practice, in the growth of retreat houses, the increasing number of spiritual counsellors and spiritual writings, but also at the theoretical level of critical debate and new understanding. That the topic of spirituality attracts so much attention is part of the postmodern configuration where the previous trust in certainty, rationality and objectivity has broken down and the modern dominance of the rationalist-mechanistic thought patterns governing a positivistic science and technology has come under heavy criticism. The frequently mentioned paradigm shifts which are so characteristic of postmodern thinking are also important in spirituality, for in contemporary society spirituality is reflected upon the practiced in a new context.

4.5 POSTMODERNISM AND RELIGION

Writers on religion, ethics, theology and spirituality have come rather late to a serious consideration of the postmodern predicament and its effects on our world. But even a cursory search soon reveals that, since the early and mid-1990s, publications, conferences and journals have been increasingly concerned with the discussion of postmodernism. While the advent of postmodernism has created much fluidity and decentredness, and also highlighted the disponibility of all culturally created ideas and things, its influence on religion must not be judged only in a negative light, for postmodernism can also be seen positively as a challenging task, an opportunity, even a gift for religion in the modern world. The postmodern view of the self raises fundamental questions about the nature of personal identity and throws light on the process of 'the decreation of the self', that is something so important in the human approach to the Divine. The modern and postmodern world seems haunted by the absence of God, and yet in some curious way this absence can at the same time become transparent for a new kind of presence. In criticizing the individualism and dualism of modernity, postmodernism makes room for a more holistic and organic understanding of human existence with its personal, communal and ecological dimensions linked to the inviolability of life.

The creative postmodern approach to language also opens up new possibilities in interpreting the ambiguities of our relational language about God, and in articulating different styles of spirituality. Contrary to the modern assumption of the pervasiveness of nihilism, recent studies illuminate 'the striking affinity between the most innovative aspects of postmodern thought and religious or mystical discourse', and thereby open up new religious possibilities. Postmodern religion rejects modernity's pushing God to a transcendent position outside of our world in a manner that has led to the ultimate atheistic denunciation of God's very existence. Postmodern God is the presence of the divine in the world and with human beings.

4.6 POSTMODERNISM AND THE DECLINE AND FALL OF REASON

Do we live in a postmodern age? Such an age has been characterized by Lyotard as one in which there are no grand metanarratives, no total explanations, no overall structures of meaning, no universal foundations of knowledge. As a matter of fact, this age is virtually the first in history in

which there is something like a universal foundations of knowledge and metanarratives which covers the whole of the universe. The narrative is the evolutionary history of the universe from the Big Bang to the catastrophic crunch, and the total explanation is the theory of everything, the grand unified theory, which may be just round the corner.

In contrast, it has become much harder to believe in God and in revelation; a narrative which never succeeded in its aim of conquering the world, and has now settled uneasily into partial dominance in a number of more or less clearly demarcated geographical areas. This is for a number of reasons – the growth of critical history and of scientific knowledge about the universe, the relative lack of overwhelming arguments for the existence of a particular God, and a distrust of claims to exclusive and inerrant revelation. There has certainly been a religious fragmentation, as old structures of authority have broken down, and people have become aware of a bewildering number of alternative views on religious matters. Religious faith has to a large extent been privatized and pluralized. That is, in modern developed and developing countries a person's religious beliefs are very much their own private affair, and they may well be a mixture from a number of oddly assorted traditions, Eastern and Western. Very few would maintain that there is a defensible and widely accepted coherent set of religious doctrines, worthy of acceptance by all rational persons. We are well aware of how flimsy many of our own beliefs on religious topics are, and how disputed all of them seem to be. Even those who do think they possess a coherent and plausible narrative occasionally realize that they are in a tiny minority, which seems a bit strange, if they are right.

But all this is just the obverse side of the development of the grandnarrative of evolutionary science, which seems to have undetermined classical religion bit by bit over the last three centuries. We might well say that the hypothetico-deductive method of natural science has been triumphantly vindicated as the sure road of knowledge, and as for ancient dreams of liberation, we are on the threshold of taking charge of human nature itself, through genetic control, and directing it towards a more hopeful future, free from disease and suffering.

Science does not have its mysteries and puzzles. Perhaps many scientists are now less self-confident about being able to provide an answer to every problem than they were some years

ago. But it would, be quite mistaken to think that the scientific narrative is at a closing stage. If science is modernity, then modernity is still very much in cultural control. But a problem has arisen. It is very difficult for the narrative to include an acceptable account of such late arrivals on the evolutionary scene as consciousness, freedom, truth, moral obligation and religious belief.

The tough line to take is that these arrivals are illusory appearances, which can be dispelled by a cold hard scientific stare. Consciousness is a set of brain-states; freedom is lack of constraint by external causes; truth is a matter of the survival value of beliefs that have enabled organism to adapt to their environment; obligation is programmed social behavior which has also passed the test of evolutionary fitness; and religion is a projection founded on psychological needs and insecurities. Human reason itself, on such a scientific account, turns out to be the outcome of change mutations which have had some survival value, but its workings are wholly subject to impersonal and non-purposive laws of nature. Science remains committed to reason, and its exponents often show a quasi-moral commitment to the rigor of its methods and the heroic acceptance of its less palatable truths. But the conclusions of science have undermined the authority of reason, by showing it to be a pragmatically useful aid to survival in the unending struggle for life in an arena of scarce resources.

A central fault line appears in the scientific narrative. It presents itself as the only rational basis of knowledge and values, the revealer of the truth about the cosmos and the way to human well-being. Yet what it reveals is that there is no purpose, that human life, like everything else, is driven by blind selection pressures and impersonal natural processes. What we call reason and truth are the appearances of brain processes which are as fragile and contingent, as accidental and transient, as all other complex organic events. It is tempting to say that, once we see through the illusion, we are free to vary the conditions of rationality and truth as we will - that is the postmodern option. There are only belief systems, forms of life, without foundation or justification beyond themselves. Even this, however, is a legitimacy claim. There is no escaping from truth, and there is no living it either. That is the unhappy consciousness of the hard scientific narrative.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1) What is postmodern spirituality?

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2) How can metanarratives be explained in postmodernism?

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4.7 WAYS OF BEING RELIGIOUS IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

The purpose of our study is to discuss the impact of the postmodern trends on religion. The arguments of postmodern scholars are difficult to categorize. In general, they question every all-embracing paradigm and frame of reference. They reject the primacy given by modernity to reason and human progress. For postmodern thinkers this project has failed. This is very evident when Jean François Lyotard very emphatically stated in his famous work *The Postmodern Condition* that “I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences”. For him, metanarratives meant the established systems of thought, and established religions. Consequently, they question the globalization caused by modern science that has produced domination, marginalization and a culture of consumerism. This has *objectified* or commodified human life and relationships. Life is now felt almost like simulated cinematic images and symbols where human identity is defined by exterior appearances and make-up; pretensions are viewed as the *norm-ality*. Postmodernity proposes a new way of life more adequate for today’s society: an inclusive style that appreciated pluralism, differences and multilateralism.

Many snub postmodernism seeing it as 'a mood' that does not deserve scholarly attention. Postmodernism helps us to acquire a different spirit that moves away from the style modernity gave to humanity. It provides a new godliness bringing fresh air into the religious world of today. In fact, the postmodern project retrieves values of the spiritual/religious life that modernity caused us to lose. What we reasoned here is the trajectory of human progress from early modernity to postmodernity. Modernity displaced faith and replaced it with rationality. Not by belief, but by reason and technology, modernist claimed, we shall achieve progress and development. Postmodernists say: this was a failure. The project of modernity has failed and we need to enter into postmodernity. They assert that neither pre-modern belief nor modern reasons are able to achieve the type of progress they propose. Postmodernists, most of them French intellectuals, rebelled against the Enlightenment project that promised universal human emancipation through the application of reason powered by technology, science and democracy. The grand narratives of progress suggested by Marxism, the Enlightenment and established religions remain, in the view of postmodernists, sheer verbosity. They suggest a world view in which there are no foundational values that are objective and universal. Nobody can represent anybody else, since representation is a form of domination. Instead, we need to see the context and respect the differences: everything must have a space for its way of life; everybody's view must be respected.

4.8 POSTMODERN RELIGION

Postmodernism sees religion as an experience which cannot be explained by proposition. It has to be lived in spirit and truth. It is love of God: loving God in spirit and truth. It is not knowledge, not cognitive and epistemic information, but truth that is shared in narratives. Religious truth lies in the question of how it does, not what it is. It is praxis, not an idea. In the postmodern view there is constant change in reality. Every society is in a state of constant flux and no one can claim absolute values: only relative ones. And there are no absolute truths. This privileges the individual religious impulses, but weakens the strength of 'religions' which claim to deal with truths that are presented from 'outside', and given us objective realities, that is 'from above'. In the postmodern world view, there can be no universal religious or ethical laws. Cultural contexts, the particular time, place and community shape everything, not any universal

laws. In a postmodern world, individuals weave their life by their religious impulses, selecting various spiritualities that vibrate with them. They construct for themselves their own internal spiritual world. The priest is unemployed and his place of worship is empty. The fact is that religion is an entirely human-made phenomenon.

Postmodernists reject religion as an institution for moral policing. In a world where there is no objectively existing God “out there” and where the elaborate sociological and psychological theories of religion do not seem to ring true, the idea of religion as the totality of religious experiences has some appeal. Religion in this theory is not given but created, altered, renewed in formal interactions between human beings. Images and ideas of God are manufactured in human activity, and used to give specialness to particular relationships or policies which are valued by a particular group. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ religion – no sanctifying agency. There are as many as there are groups and interaction, and they merge and join, divide and separate over and over again. Some are grouped together under the brand names of major faiths, and they cohere with varying degrees of consistency. Others, although clearly religious in their particular way, reject any such label.

In a postmodern world, religions should function as systems of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. Postmodernist let everyone follow his/her own religion; they do not need an agent from outside. Religion, in postmodern sense, is a personal experience in the processes of human life. It is love of God, not love of religion. There is no one true Religion, but rather true religions. Different people in their cultures experience the impossible and share that experience with others. They are ‘unique and irreducible repositories of their distinctive ethical practices and religious narratives, representing so many different ways to love God, but without laying claim to an exclusive possession of ‘The Truth’.

For the postmoderns religion is love of the impossible. Despite the advancement achieved by the use of reason and technology, human beings realize time and time again that they are finite, fragile and unfinished. This causes a deep longing for the unlimited within every human being.

This longing is temporarily satisfied by the people they love, the positions of power they hold, and the scientific inventions they make. Yet they face limitedness in the form of death and natural disasters. There is a gap between what we are and what we aspire to be. What we are is that we are limited and fragile beings. But we aspire to overcome this by inventing machines and innovation in science and technology. But at the end we fail to overcome. Then we are left with the choice: either to fight for the impossible and unlimited; or to submit to it. The people who fight against the fragile of humanity end up in frustration. The people who surrender to it develop an interior modification that enables them to lead their fragile existence meaningfully. The interior modification is 'spirituality'. For the postmoderns this is the core of religion.

The faith of a postmodern is love of supernatural being. But when we 'love God' what we really love is the Impossible in us. A passion for love is a fundamental experience that every normal human being goes through. For postmoderns this passion for love is equal to passion for God. The pre-modern approach to this basic experience of love was theological and dogmatic. Modernists look at it with secularizing reason and limit the discussion within reason alone. Both looked for knowledge, for the Final Word. But postmoderns looked at the experience of love as a condition of human existence. And they remove the capital letter in knowledge. They see it as truth without Knowledge or Reason. They know that they do not have any firm foundation or absolute knowledge. They have the conviction that we are not able to gain anything absolute. They see the love of God as love of truth, goodness, and beauty that are fundamentals of life. For as human beings we do not comprehend ourselves fully. Simply, 'we do not know'. Despite our innovations and inventions we do not know when we die and how we die. There are many mysteries that we face every day. In such unpredictable reality we need conviction and optimism. We can never discover the really Real. We should look for the hyper-real, beyond reality: love for truth (= 'God'). The postmoderns do not see any reason why we should have a definite object for the passions of/for love. That idea belongs to the moderns who seek to totalize and universalize experience.

The postmoderns' mission is to evolve a new 'shape of living', a way of facing the fragility and limitedness of humanity. The status of postmodernity is a spiritual status, not philosophical, "in which belief and behaviour come together in the shape of an embodied spirit". In it there is no

pride in human reason and human progress, as modernity had. That pride made them view others who did not fall within their frame of reference as weak, aliens or untouchables. Postmoderns bring them into the fold with an ethical concern that everyone is unique and precious.

Therefore, for postmoderns God is a 'how', not a 'what'. God is the passion of life, the passion of my life, the passion of my unknowing my passion for the impossible. God is served in spirit and in truth. For postmoderns God is not a thought, but a deed. Love of God is not shown in solemn ceremonies, in fantastic theological arguments or in rites and rituals, but in love that does justice. Those who love and serve justice love and serve God.

By the help of postmoderns we develop openness to the future, realizing the fact that we can never master anything and frame absolute truth. Modernity developed a habit of mastering anything through human manipulation. It put science above love, but ended up longing for love. By relying on reason and science the modern mind commodified life and relegated God ('love') to the margin. The postmoderns retrieve the marginalized. They help to turn to the repressed. Religion is not to be repressed inside the 'totalizing' system of modernity. Religion, for postmoderns, is a movement of love that provides the shape of life.

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) Explain the religious trends in postmodernism

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- 2) What is the objective of postmodern religion?

4.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to give a rough idea about the religious trends in postmodernism. Though postmodernism is an emerging trend in philosophy, in our contemporary time we cannot do away with postmodernism. It is incredulity towards all established systems of thought, ideologies and religions but at the same time they do not rule out the possibility of having a new trend, a new religion. That too in the course of time turns to become another metanarrative. Postmoderns are trying to create a new religion where human beings occupy a predominant place rather than any celestial beings that used to be. Religion, for postmoderns, is a movement of love that provides the shape of life. And for them God is not a person but a presence.

4.10 KEY WORDS

Postmodernism: Postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. Whereas modernism was often associated with identity, unity, authority, and certainty, postmodernism is often associated with difference, separation, textuality, and skepticism.

Metanarrative: A metanarrative is a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. It is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.

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1.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The term 'postmodernism' has been used for a wide range of economic, educational, social, political, communicational and cultural phenomena and there have been different perspectives to the same. Postmodern is of great interest to a wide range of people because it directs the attention to the major transformations taking place in the contemporary society and culture. The term postmodernism is at once fashionable and elusive. Philosophically, postmodern thought may be seen to demonstrate a suspicion to

all-embracing systems of thought. postmodernity as an incredulity towards metanarratives or grandnarratives, meaning that in the era of postmodern background, people have rejected the impressive theories such as universal stories and narratives, paradigms such as religion, conservative philosophy, political ideologies etc.

2. The word modern is said to derive from the Latin word *modo*, meaning 'just now'. Thus, modern signifies belonging to the present or to recent times. It also implies the progressive economic and administrative rationalization and the differentiation of the social world. Modern gives emphasis to experimentation and the aim of finding an inner truth behind exterior appearance. Postmodernism denotes the limits of reason, especially of instrumental reason so sure of itself in modern science and technology. It is a movement of ideas. And as a movement of ideas, the postmodern appraisal is bound up with the decline of the belief in progress and the negation of scientism as a narrow, one-sided over-rating of the benefits of science to the exclusion of other human experiences. Thus the modern emphasis on subjectivity and rationality is profoundly questioned, and so is the perception and representation of 'the other' and of other cultures and traditions. Postmodernism is the name for a movement in an advanced consumerist culture.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. For some postmodern spirituality represents the move of phenomenological studies of religion into a new key, stressing subjectivities and experience as over against dispassionate objectivity, the soul rather than the form of religion. A genuine transformation of both individual consciousness and society that is the need of the hour. Postmodern spirituality focuses on the betterment of the person in his totality rather than any religion. To others it signifies an escape from the unnecessary confines of religion into the more inclusive realm of our common humanity, rendering any necessary reference to the transcendent obsolete.
2. Jean Francois Lyotard was the first one who used the word 'metanarrative' in his work *The Postmodern Condition*. Any theory claiming to provide universal explanation is a

metanarrative. Most religions offer a similarly all-embracing explanation of human history to fit their particular schemes. Lyotard states that in our contemporary time we have lost credibility in the metanarrative. Therefore all the metanarratives have to be rejected. The established ideologies, religions, cultures etc. all failed to give meaning that it has promised. Therefore they claim that we live in an age in which there are no grand metanarratives, no total explanations, no overall structures of meaning, and no universal foundations of knowledge only petty narratives.

Answers to Check Your Progress - III

1. Postmodernity proposes a new way of life more adequate for today's society: an inclusive style that appreciates pluralism, differences and multilateralism. It helps us to acquire a different spirit that moves away from the style modernity gave to humanity. It provides a new godliness bringing fresh air into the religious world of today. In fact, the postmodern project retrieves values of the spiritual/religious life that modernity caused us to lose. What we reasoned here is the trajectory of human progress from early modernity to postmodernity. Modernity displaced faith and replaced it with rationality. Not by belief, but by reason and technology, modernists claimed, we shall achieve progress and development. Postmodernists say: this was a failure. The project of modernity has failed and we need to enter into postmodernity. They suggest a world view in which there are no foundational values that are objective and universal. Nobody can represent anybody else, since representation is a form of domination. Instead, we need to see the context and respect the differences: everything must have a space for its way of life; everybody's view must be respected.
2. In a postmodern world, individuals weave their life by their religious impulses, selecting various spiritualities that vibrate with them. They construct for themselves their own internal spiritual world. Postmodernists reject religion as an institution for moral policing. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' religion. In a postmodern world, religions should function as systems of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and

clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. Postmodernist let everyone follow his/her own religion; they do not need an agent from outside. Religion, in postmodern sense, is a personal experience in the processes of human life. It is love of God, not love of religion. There is no one true Religion, but rather true religions.

The postmoderns' mission is to evolve a new 'shape of living', a way of facing the fragility and limitedness of humanity. For postmoderns God is a 'how', not a 'what'. God is the passion of life, the passion of my life, the passion of my unknowing my passion for the impossible. God is served in spirit and in truth. For postmoderns God is not a thought, but a deed. Love of God is not shown in solemn ceremonies, in fantastic theological arguments or in rites and rituals, but in love that does justice. Those who love and serve justice love and serve God. Religion, for postmoderns, is a movement of love that provides the shape of life. And God is not a person but a presence.

