
UNIT 3 THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION -I

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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.

Nature and Origin of Religion

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 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 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 to 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 the 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 a result of 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 the 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; whereas 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 on 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.

3.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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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.