



**Block 3**

**Social Institutions and Change**

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## **BLOCK 3 INTRODUCTION**

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The third, block **Social Institutions and Change** tries to focus on the topic of family, marriage and kinship in India. We have provided different approaches and theories to explain these concepts with suitable examples Religion being one of the most sensitive but very significant institution of society has been sociologically analysed and explained to you so that society in India, being a plural society, can be understood.



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## **UNIT 6 FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND KINSHIP\***

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### **6.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- define the concept of family, marriage and kinship;
- list the main characteristics of family, marriage and kinship;
- discuss the functions of family;
- explain the significance of marriage;
- describe the rules of marriage and degree of kinship; and
- discuss the types of family and marriage found in India.

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### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous Block 2: Social Structures and Practices, you learnt about the aspects of Indian Society, such as, tribes, caste, and class in India. Here in this

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\* Adapted from BDP ESO-12, Society in India Block 2 by Archana Singh

Block 3: Social Institutions and Change we are going to further explain to you some more aspects of, Indian society such as, family, marriage and kinship and religion.

The present unit focuses on the major social institutions of all societies like, family, marriage and kinship. A student of sociology knows that these three institutions are at the core of all communities; learning about the main characteristics of these institutions; their definitions and social significance becomes a must to understand any society, especially society in India.

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## 6.2 THE INSTITUTION OF FAMILY

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The word ‘family’ has been taken from the Roman word, ‘famulus’, which means a servant and the Latin word ‘familia’ meaning ‘household’. In Roman law, the word denotes the group of producers and slaves and other servants as well as members connected by common descent. The family is one of the most primary groups in society. The family is a universal and the oldest among the other social institutions. The family is an institution in this sense that it gives the framework of relationship which is guided by certain rules and procedures which are at the root of the family. The meaning of family we can understand better by understanding the following definitions:

- i) Family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without children.
- ii) It is a group of persons whose relations to one another are based upon consanguinity (i.e. those kins who are related by blood, such as, mother and child) and affirms (those kins who are related by marriage e.g. sister's husband) who are therefore kin to one another.
- iii) Family is a group defined by a sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children.
- iv) It is a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction.
- v) Family is a biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children.
- vi) Family is the basic primary group and the natural matrix of personality.
- vii) Family is a system of relationships existing between parents and children.

Broadly speaking, it refers to the group comprising parents and children. It may also refer, in some places, to a patri-or matrilineage or to groups of cognates, that is, persons descended from the same ancestor. In some other cases, it may refer to a group of relatives and their dependants forming one household. All this refers to the compositional aspect of this institution. Another aspect is that of the residence of its members. They usually share a common residence, at least for some part of their lives. Thirdly, we can also speak of the relational aspect of the family. Members have reciprocal rights and duties towards each other. Finally, the family is also an agent of socialisation. All these aspects make this institution different from other units of social structure.

Family is one of the most important social institutions. Most of the world's population lives in family units. The specific form and behavior patterns found within a family have shown variations through time across countries of the world and even within a country. Sociology looks at the institution both in terms of an

ideal type and a reality. He/she ascertains the ideals of the family system partly a set of norms which are passed from one generation to another. A sociologist also studies the actual way in which a family is patterned and re-patterned within a society, in a particular group through time. She will also try to identify the forces, which have been responsible for changing certain aspects of the family units in a particular manner. (IGNOU: 2017 ESO-12, Family, Marriage and Kinship, pp. 6)

### 6.2.1 Salient Features of Family

The salient features or characteristics of the family in society are as follows:

- i) *Universality* : Family is a universal social unit and existed in every age and in every society. Every person is a member of one family or the other.
- ii) *Financial Provision* : Every family makes some kind of financial provision so that all the basic requirements of the family can be met of the members of family.
- iii) *Limited Size and Nucleus* : Family is considered to be smallest kinship group and basically made up of a husband, wife and their unmarried children. It is limited in size and its membership is confined to those who are related by either marriage (these are also referred to as affianes or by blood ties (called consanguine). There are joint families or extended families, as well, which have at least three generations of parents and their children along with their own elderly parents and sons and their spouses living together.
- iv) *Emotional Basis* : The members of family are emotionally bound to each other and share pleasures and pains with one another. The integration of bonds in a family is mutual affection and blood ties and they provide love, care and protection to each other.
- v) *Social Regulations* : In a family, the members are trained through socialization to follow social norms, customs and social conduct in the process of socialisation. Among the family members interrelationship and interactions are guided by social and legal regulations.



Nuclear Family



Joint Family

- vi) The nuclear family of husband wife and their unmarried children grow into a joint family when the children grow up and get married and have their own children. The family then becomes joint till the children leave or parents die.
- vii) *A Fixed or common Habitation* : Every family has a fixed place of habitation and members usually share a common residence in which husband, wife, their children and other relatives live together.

### 6.2.2 Functions of Family

Sociologists have tried to divide functions of family differently. Ogburn and Nimkoff divided function of family into six categories. These six categories are:

- 1) Affectional function, 2) Economic function, 3) Recreational function, 4) Protective function, 5) Religious function, and 6) Educational function.

#### These functions are

- 1) *Satisfaction of sex needs or Biological Functions* : The first and foremost biological functions of family is the satisfaction of sexual desire in a greater degree between husband and wife in an orderly and socially approved manner.
- 2) *Production and rearing of children* : The next important biological function of family is procreation. Family is an institution par excellence for rearing of children and gets a new generation which inherits the family legacy.
- 3) *Provision of home and minimum basic facilities or Economic Function* : Family fulfils some basic facilities and needs of its members to a certain extent by providing them food, clothing and shelter.
- 4) *Giving love and sympathy or Psychological Function* : All members of family are supposed to provide each other emotional support, sympathetic and caring attitude, stability and security to its members. For example, children require love and affection from their parents, husband and wife want love from each other, love and affection to the elderly from the family members and so on.
- 5) *Socialization* : The most important function of family is socialisation. Through the family, a child is able to learn language, customs, traditions, etiquette, norms and value, beliefs and social roles of the society. It is the family that socialises the new generation and transmits the moral ideas of group to its members.
- 6) *Protection of young* : The essential function of family is to protect and give physical care to every member formally right from the new-born baby to the elderly without their facing any risk and danger.

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## 6.3 TYPES OF FAMILY

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Normally the basic unit of social structure contains the two primary links of kinship. These are of parenthood and siblingship (see Figure 10.0). In simple terms, a family usually comprises various combinations and permutations of



these relationships. In the Indian context, we generally speak of the contrast between nuclear and joint family types.

A classification of families into joint and nuclear types is usually based on the way in which families are organised. For instance, the most popular definition of a nuclear family is to refer to it as a group consisting of a man, his wife and their unmarried children. The joint family is commonly defined as the nuclear family plus all kin belonging to the side of husband, and/or wife living in one homestead.

Frequently, the term 'extended' family is used instead of the term joint family to indicate that the combination of two or more nuclear families is based on an extension of the parent-child relationship. Thus, the patrilineally extended family is based on an extension of the father-son relationship, while the matrilineally extended family is based on the mother-daughter relationship. The extended family may also be extended horizontally to include a group consisting of two or more brothers their wives and children. This horizontally extended family is called as the fraternal or collateral family.

In India, the family whether extended vertically and/or horizontally is called the joint family, which is strictly speaking also a property-sharing unit. Thus, the concept of joint family in India has legal and other references as well. This will be discussed further in the following sections.

### **6.3.1 Nuclear and Joint Family**

The above definitions of the nuclear and the joint family are limited in the sense that they do not say anything more than the compositional aspect of the family. When we look at the wide variations through time in patterns of family living based on region, religion, caste and class in India we find that the nuclear and the joint family organisation cannot be viewed as two distinct, isolated and independent units but as a continuum, as something interrelated in a developmental cycle.

### **6.3.2 The Continuum of Nuclear and Joint Family Systems**

We say that the nuclear and the joint family systems have to be viewed as a continuum. This means that these two types of family systems have to be looked at as something interrelated in a developmental cycle. The structure of a family changes over a time period in terms of size, composition, role and status of persons, the family and societal norms and sanctions. There probably is rarely a family in India, which remains perpetually nuclear in composition. Often additional members like an aged parent or unmarried brothers and sisters may come to live with a man, his wife and unmarried children. The nuclear family then, is a stage in a cycle with other structural types of families. Even when certain forces have enjoined the establishment of nuclear household, for a relatively long period of time, the ritual, economic and sentimental link with relatives who compose a joint family are often maintained. We shall discuss about these forces and impact of these forces in the next section.

While discussing the nature of nuclear family in India, Pauline Kolenda (1987) has discussed additions/modifications in nuclear family structure. She gives the following compositional categories.

- i) **Nuclear family** refers to a couple with or without children.
- ii) **Supplemented nuclear family** indicates a nuclear family plus one or more unmarried, separated, or widowed relatives of the parents, other than their unmarried children.
- iii) **Subnuclear family** is identified as a fragment of a former nuclear family for instance a widow/widower with her/his unmarried children or siblings (unmarried or widowed or separated or divorced) living together.
- iv) **Single person household**
- v) **Supplemented subnuclear family** refers to a group of relatives, members of a formerly complete nuclear family along with some other unmarried, divorced or widowed relative who was not a member of the nuclear family. For instance, a widow and her unmarried children may be living together with her widowed mother-in-law. In the Indian context, it is easy to find all these types of family. However, in terms of societal norms and values, these types relate to the joint family system.

Much has been written about the joint family system, especially the Hindu joint family system. The **patrilineal, patrivirilocal** (residence of the couple after marriage in the husband’s father’s home), property owning, co-residential and commensal joint family, comprising three or more generations has been depicted as the ideal family unit of Hindu society. M.S. Gore (1968: 4-5) points out that ideally, the joint family consists of a man and his wife and their adult sons, their wives and children, and younger children of the paternal couple. In this ideal type the oldest male is the head of the family. The rights and duties in this type of family are laid down to a great extent by the hierarchical order of power and authority. Age and sex are the main ordering principles of family hierarchy. The frequency and the nature of contact/communication between members vary on the basis of sex. A married woman, for instance works in the kitchen with her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. Younger members are required to show respect to the older members and can hardly question the authority or decision taken by elders even when it directly concerns them. Children of the joint family are children of all the male members in the parental generation.

Emphasis on conjugal ties (i.e. between husband and wife) is supposed to weaken the stability of the joint family. The father-son relationship (filial relationship) and the relationship between brothers (fraternal relationship) are more crucial

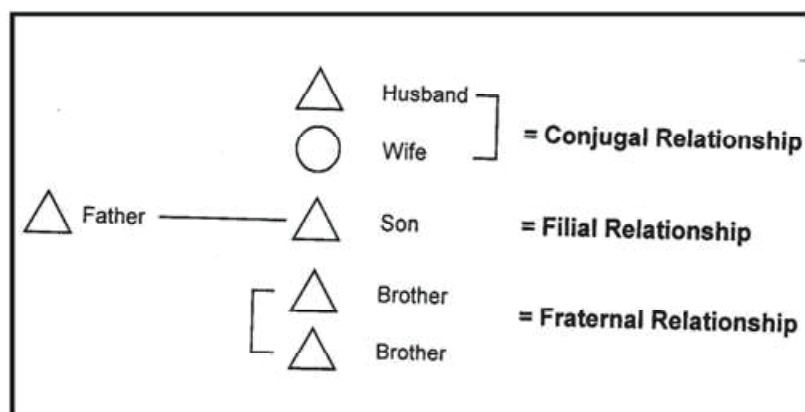


Fig. 10.0: Family relationships



for the joint family system than the husband-wife or conjugal relationship. The conjugal, filial and fraternal relationships can be expressed in simple kinship diagrams in figure 10.0: family relationships.

In a nuclear family the husband and wife relationship is important for the survival of the system. Hence, in M.S. Gore's view, it would be inappropriate to look at the joint family system as a collection of nuclear families. Having said that joint families are not merely a collection of nuclear families we must examine what constitutes jointness. For this purpose, in a separate section we will discuss the nature of joint family in India. This will also make it clear how and why Indian society has a continuum of nuclear and joint family systems and not two distinct forms of nuclear and joint family.

### Check Your Progress I

- i) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark T for true or F for false against each statement.
  - a) Joint family in India constitutes a mere collection of nuclear families.
  - b) The nuclear and the joint family can be looked at as a continuum in terms of a developmental cycle.
- ii) List the four major additions/modifications in the nuclear family structure, as suggested by Kolenda.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....
  - c) .....
  - d) .....

### Nature of Joint Family in India

There are two aspects of joint family system in India based on

- i) What constitutes jointness?
- ii) Who constitutes a joint family?

Both the sub-sections will show us how the seemingly nuclear families in India are actually parts of larger family groups, which share the idea of 'jointness'.

### What Constitutes Jointness?

Let us look at what is jointly shared by the members of a joint family. Their jointness is reflected in the factors of **commensality**, common residence, joint ownership of property, cooperation and sentiment of jointness, ritual bonds like worship of common deity. We shall discuss them one by one.

- i) **Commensality:** Most of the studies of joint family use commensality (eating together) as a defining criterion. The joint family is the hearth group; members cook and eat food from the same kitchen.
- ii) **Common Residence:** In some studies the joint family as the residential family group is stressed. Though it is possible to find a joint family having

the same hearth but not sharing the same dwelling or vice versa, by and large commensality and common residence are taken as essential ingredients of jointness (refer to Cohn 1961, Dube 1955, Mukherjee 1969, Kolenda 1968).

- iii) **Joint Ownership of Property:** Some scholars have regarded joint ownership of property or **coparcenary** as the essence of jointness, irrespective of the type of residence and commensality. In legal terms, this is the most crucial factor used for defining a joint family.
- iv) **Cooperation and Sentiment:** Scholars like I.P. Desai (1964) and K. M. Kapadia (1958) point out that jointness should be looked in functional terms. A functionally joint family lays stress on fulfilment of obligations towards kin.

A patrilineal joint family may consist of a number of households headed by males related through the father. They may be located even at distant places and may not even have property in common. But what is common is that they identify themselves as members of a particular 'family', cooperate in rituals and ceremonies, render financial and other kinds of help; and they cherish a common family sentiment and abide by the norms of joint living.

- v) **Ritual Bonds:** The ritual bonds of a joint family are considered to be an important component of jointness. A joint family, thus, is bound together by periodic propitiation of the dead ancestors. The members perform a '*shraddha*' ceremony in which the senior male member of the joint family propitiates his dead father's or mother's spirit, offering it the '*pinda*' (balls of cooked rice) on behalf of all the members.

Another ritual bond among joint family members can be a common deity worship. In many parts of South India, each joint family has a tradition of worshipping a particular clan or village deity. Vows are made to these deities in times of joy and trouble. The first tonsure, donning of the sacred thread, marriages etc. are celebrated in or near the deity's temple. Srinivasa of Tirupathi and Subramanya of Palani are two well-known Hindu deities who have a large number of South Indian families attached to them (Srinivas 1969:71).

Still another important bond is pollution. Birth and death results in pollution and the group observing pollution consists of the members of the joint family, patrilineal or **matrilineal**. The bonds created by ancestor worship, family deities and observation of pollution persist even after the joint family has split into separate or smaller residential and commensal units (Srinivas 1969: 71).

From the above discussion of joint family it becomes clear that common kitchen or hearth, common residence, joint rights to property and the fulfillment of obligation towards kin and ritual bonds have been outlined as the main criteria for defining what constitutes jointness. Many scholars have pointed out that of these dimensions, co-residence and commensality, are the immediately identifiable characteristics of a joint family. Such a consideration, they feel, would also accommodate family patterns found in non-Hindu communities like the Muslims, Christians, etc. It would also accommodate families, which hardly have anything by way of ancestral or immovable property (Dube,1974).

## Who Constitute a Joint Family?

We can look at this issue in terms of

- i) kin relationship between the members
- ii) the number of generations in one unit
- iii) the sharing of common property.

### i) **Kin Relationship between the Members**

We can say that a joint family may consist of members related lineally or collaterally or both. There is more or less an unanimous agreement that a family is essentially defined as “joint” only if it includes two or more related married couples. Also it has been observed that these couples may be related (i) lineally (usually in a father-son relationship or occasionally in a father-daughter relationship), or, (ii) collaterally (usually in a brother-brother relationship/or/ occasionally in a brother-sister relationship). Both these types refer to the compositional aspect of the patrilineal joint family. In matrilineal systems, found in South-west and North-east India, the family is usually composed of a woman, her mother and her married and unmarried daughters. The mother’s brother is also an important member of the family; he is the manager of the matrilineal joint family affairs. The husbands of the female members live with them. In Kerala, a husband used to be a frequent visitor to the wife’s household and he lived in his mother’s household.

Pauline Kolenda (1987: 11-2) presents the following types of joint family on the basis of the relatives who are its members.

- a) **Collateral joint family:** It comprises two or more married couples between whom there is a sibling bond. In this type, usually a brother and his wife and another brother and his wife live together with unmarried children.
- b) **Supplemented collateral joint family:** It is a collateral joint family along with unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives. The supplemented relatives are generally the widowed mother of the married brothers or the widower father, or an unmarried sibling.
- c) **Lineal joint family:** Two couples, between whom there is a lineal link, like between a parent and his married son or some times between a parent and his married daughter, live together.
- d) **Supplemented lineal joint family:** It is a lineal joint family together with unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives who do not belong to either of the lineally linked nuclear families; for example, the father’s widower brother or the son’s wife’s unmarried brother or sister.
- e) **Lineal collateral joint family:** In this type three or more couples are linked lineally and collaterally. For instance we can have a family consisting of parents and their two or more married sons together with the unmarried children of the couples.
- f) **Supplemented lineal - collateral joint family:** In this type are found a lineal collateral joint family plus unmarried, widowed, separated relatives who belong to one of the nuclear families (lineally and collaterally linked), for example, the father’s widowed sister or brother or an unmarried nephew of the father.

**Activity 1**

Classify fifteen families in your neighbourhood into the categories in terms of the relatives who compose it.

**ii) The Number of Generations in One Unit**

A joint family is also seen in terms of generations present in it. Some researchers, like I.P. Desai (1964) and T.N. Madan (1965) emphasise that the number of generations present in a family is important for identifying a joint family. A joint family is commonly defined as a three generational family. For instance a man, his married son and his grand children constitute a joint family.

**The Sharing of Common Property**

Researchers, like F.G. Bailey (1963), T.N. Madan (1961), have advocated the limitation of the term joint family to a group of relatives who form a property owning group, the coparcenary family. M.S. Gore (1968), for instance, defines a joint family as a group consisting of adult male coparceners and their dependants. The wives and young children of these male members are the dependents.

The female members have not been included in the category of the coparcenary. They have rights of residence and maintenance only as dependents. In 1937 an attempt was made to confer the same right, i.e., the right of inheritance of property on a Hindu widow as her son would have in the estate of her deceased husband. The Act enabled her to enjoy the income only from the immovable property of her husband during her lifetime.

Until the passing of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, two systems of inheritance dominated among patrilineal Hindus. In one system (called the Mitakshara school, adopted in most regions) a son has a vested interest in his father's ancestral property from the moment of his birth. The father cannot give away any part of this property to the detriment of his son's interest. Under the other system (the Dayabaga school, adopted in Bengal and Assam) the father is the absolute owner of his share and has a right to alienate his property the way he wants.

Among the patrilineal Hindus, some movable property is given to the daughters at the time of marriage as *stridhana*. With the passing of the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, a uniform system of inheritance has been established. The individual property of a male Hindu, dying intestate (having made no will), passes in equal shares between his son, daughter, widow and mother. Male and female heirs have come to be treated as equal in matters of inheritance and succession. Another important feature of the Act is that any property possessed by a female Hindu is held by her as her absolute property and she has full power to deal with it the way she likes. This Act has also given a woman the right to inherit from the father as well as from the husband. However the benefit conferred on a woman is limited when compared to the rights of the male members who still have rights to coparcenary ancestral property by birth. Daughters are not part of the coparcenary and have no birthrights.

The difficulty of looking at joint family as a coparcenary family unit is that it does not take into account those joint families, which possess little in the form of immovable or moveable property.

### Variability in and Prevalence of Joint Family Living

i) **Variability:** We identified a joint family in terms of what is shared and who shares it. We went through this exercise in this manner so that we can identify and analyse the multitude of factors that make a joint family. But we must remember that a joint family is a composite whole of both the “who and what” components. The exact composition or members and what is actually shared by these members in a particular family will vary through time and will also vary between families.

The following factors relating to the compositional aspect explain these variations within a family and between families.

- a) **The culturally patterned time of break-up:** It differs across caste, community and region. The time, when a married son or brother breaks away to form a separate residential and commensal unit, may vary within a family and between families.
- b) **Demographic profiles:** Based on such factors like average life expectancy, average age at marriage, average number of children born per couple, age of father at the birth of various children etc., we will again find variation in the pattern of joint family living.
- c) **The influence of education, spatial mobility and diversification of occupation** also bring about variation (CSWI 1974: 59).

ii) **Prevalence:** By comparing seventy six studies which included family types across villages, caste communities and other population, Pauline Kolenda (1987: 78) outlined the pattern of prevalence of joint family in India. She observed that (a) joint family both lineal and collateral was more characteristic of higher twice-born castes and least characteristic among the economically poor and the erstwhile untouchables, (b) there are regional differences in the proportion of joint families. For instance, the Gangetic plains showed higher incidence of joint families than Central India, i.e., in Madhya Pradesh, Western Rajasthan, parts of Maharashtra, and (c) there seem to be differences in the customary time of break-up of the joint family in various groups and places in India.

In conclusion, we can say that there is something like a patterned cycle of rearrangement of family living through time. As mentioned before, the family in India has to be viewed as a process, in terms of a developmental cycle. Some studies have described the Indian family types as stages in a family cycle (Desai 1964, Madan 1965, Cohn 1961).

### Check Your Progress II

i) List out the five criteria of jointness. Use two lines for your answer.

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- ii) Name in three lines, the six major types of joint family structures as shown by Kolenda.

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**Emerging Patterns of Family Living**

Today there are varied patterns of family living. In urban areas both male and female members of the family may go for gainful employment outside the home. In some families the parents of the husband may live with his wife and children. While in some others, members of the wife’s family may be living with the couple and their children. With both the husband and the wife going outside the home for gainful employment and with the absence or limited availability of child care facilities, presence of kin members to look after the home and children comes handy for the smooth functioning of the household. Those working couples who prefer to live in nuclear families and who fear or resist interference from kin members, try to organise their household with professional help from outside the family (like cooks, maid servants, crèches).

Aged parents, who formerly used to look towards their eldest son or other sons for support in old age, are now adjusting themselves to the new demands of family life by making economic provisions for their old age. Even within a city parents and married sons may reside separately. Another trend in family life in India is that girls are prepared to support their parent in old age, and it is not impossible to find a widowed mother or parents staying with a married daughter (mainly, in the absence of sons) to help her to manage the household. Measures have been provided at the legal level to ensure that dependant old parents are looked after by a daughter if she is self-reliant even after her marriage. Bilateral kinship relations are more and more recognised and accepted today in many nuclear households in the cities.

Besides the above aspects, emerging patterns of family living include instances of domestic violence, utter lack of social and physical security for unmarried women (see Jain 1996a: 7).

**Check Your Progress III**

- i) What is meant by the cyclical view of family? Use three lines for your answer.

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- ii) List in three lines some of the factors, which have negatively affected the joint family system.

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- iii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Make a T for true or F for false against each statement.

- a) Migration from a village to a city has affected the size of the families in which this migration occurred.
- b) A joint family is totally dysfunctional in industrial towns and cities.
- c) The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 gave women the right to inherit a share of the parental property.

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## 6.4 THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

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Marriage is one of the universal social institutions like that of the family. The institution of marriage and family is closely connected and complementary to each other. Marriage is the institution established by the human society to control and regulate the sex life of man in a legal and customary manner. It has different implications in different cultures. The nature, types and functions of marriage may differ from society to society, but it is present everywhere as an institution.

### 6.4.1 Meaning and Definition of Marriage

The Collins dictionary of sociology mention that marriage is a socially acknowledge and sometimes legally ratified union between an adult male and adult female. Many sociologists have defined marriage in different perspective. According to Horton and Hunt, “Marriage is the approved social pattern whereby two or more persons establish a family”. Malinowski says that marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children. Edward Westermarck defines marriage as a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognized by custom or law; and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of parties entering the union and the children born of it. Lundberg says that marriage consists of the rule and regulations which define the rights, duties and privileges of husband and wife, with respect to each other. Harry M. Johnson defines marriage as a stable relationship in which a man and woman are socially permitted, without loss of standing in the community, to have children. Mark and Young have said that marriage is the institution or set of norms which determines the particular relation of harmony to each other and to their children.

### 6.4.2 Universality of Marriage in India

Marriage is an important social institution. It is a relationship, which is socially approved. The relationship is defined and sanctioned by custom and law. The definition of the relationship includes not only guidelines for behaviour relating

to sex but also regarding things like the particular way labour is to be divided and other duties and privileges. Children born of marriage are considered the legitimate offspring of the married couple. This legitimacy is important in the matter of inheritance and succession. Thus marriage is not only a means of sexual gratification but also a set of cultural mechanisms to ensure the continuation of the family. It is more or less a universal social institution in India.

The religious texts of many communities in India have outlined the purpose, rights and duties involved in marriage. Among the Hindus, for instance, marriage is regarded as a socio-religious duty. Ancient Hindu texts point out three main aims of marriage. These are *dharma* (duty), *praja* (progeny) and *rati* (sensual pleasure). That is to say that marriage is significant from both the societal as well as the individual's point of view. Marriage is significant in that it provides children especially sons who would not only carry on the family name but also perform periodic rituals including the annual "*shraddha*" to propitiate the dead ancestors. Majority of the Hindus look upon son(s) as a support in old age to parents and as the most important source of economic enrichment to the family. Marriage, in the Hindu system, enables a man to enter into the stage of a householder. Both a man and a woman are regarded incomplete without marriage. Even among other communities in India, marriage is regarded as an essential obligation. Islam looks upon marriage as "*sunnah*" (an obligation) which must be fulfilled by every Muslim. Christianity holds marriage as crucial to life and lays emphasis on the establishment of a mutual relationship between husband and wife and on their duty to each other.

The significance attached to marriage is reflected in the fact that only a very small percentage of men and women remain unmarried. The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI 1974: 81) has indicated that only 0.5 per cent of women never marry in India. By and large girls are brought up to believe that marriage is a woman's destiny; married state is desirable and motherhood is a cherished achievement. Only a very small percentage of men and women remain unmarried by choice. Goals of marriage are, however, undergoing changes especially for the urban and educated sections of the population. The older notions regarding large size family, (i.e., large number of children especially sons being the source of status for parents) are being replaced by preference for small size family. Marriage for self-fulfillment rather than primarily for procreation or societal welfare is also becoming prevalent. (IGNOU 2017 (reprint), ESO-12 Society in India, Block 2, Family, Marriage and Kinship, pp.23)

### 6.4.3 Rules of Spouse Selection in Marriage

Every society lays down certain rules to select their life-partners or not allowed to marry whomsoever they want. Members have to abide by the prohibitive and prescriptive rules of marriage while selecting their marital partner. Some such rules are discussed here:

#### 1) Prohibitive Rules

Prohibitive rules are those which put restriction on men and women from entering into marital alliance with a certain category of people. Some of such rules are as follows: Some of such rules are as follows:

- a) **Endogamy**: According to Hoebel, endogamy is a social rule that requires a person to marry within a defined social group of which he is a member. Endogamy is a rule of marriage in which the life-partner become outside the group is prohibited. Marriage is allowed only within the group, and the group may be caste, class, tribe, race, village, religious group, etc.

The purpose of endogamy are for example, to maintain racial purity, geographical separation, religious differences, cultural differences, sense of superiority or inferiority, the policy of separation, the desire to keep wealth within the group, etc.

- b) **Exogamy**: According to Hoebel, exogamy is a social rule that prohibits a person from marrying within a defined social group of which she or he is a member". It is the opposite form of endogamy rule. Exogamy is the practice of marriage in which an individual has to marry someone outside his or her own group. Every community prohibits its members from having marital relationship within the group. Exogamy marriage assumes various forms in Hindu of India such as gotra and sapinda. Gotra refers to a group of families which share or a common mythical marital ancestor and common blood relatives from the parental side. One marrying outside one's own 'gotra' is called gotra exogamy. Sapinda means that persons cannot inter-marry of seven generations on the father's side and five on the mother's side. In some areas of India, such as, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar etc. a girl and boy from the same village are not permitted to marry because the village is considered to be one unit and they have practice of marrying outside their village.
- c) **Incest Taboo**: Prohibition of sex or marital relationship between two persons, who are related to each other by blood ties or, who belong to same family is called incest taboo. In every society, marriage of father-daughter, mother-son, and brother-sister is prohibited. Amongst Hindu, marriage among close kins such as prohibited in North India but in the South it is prescribed to some extent.
- d) **Hypergamy (Anuloma)** : It is that form of marriage in which a boy from upper caste can marry a girl from lower caste. Thus, a Brahmin boy can marry from any lower caste or Varna girl.
- e) **Hypogamy (Pratiloma)** : It is that form of marriage in which a boy from lower caste marries a girl from higher caste. In traditional society such marriage were not encouraged or preferred. Hence, it was not possible for a Brahmin girl to marry a boy from lower caste or Varna and get acceptance from society.

#### Box 6.1

In 1980 the government of India began to take notice of the issue of dowry as oppression against women and took legal action against it. In December 1983 the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act was passed. Section 498-A was added to the Indian Penal Code. Under this Act cruelty to a wife was made a cognizable non-bailable offence, punishable up to three year imprisonment, and a fine. Section 113-A of the Evidence Act was amended so that court

could draw in inference of abetment to suicide (which most dowry deaths are claimed to be) under section 174 of the Criminal Procedure Code. (IGNOU: 2000, WED Programme, WED-01, pp.34)

## 2) **Preferential or Prescriptive Rules**

The rules of exogamy and endogamy may be preferential or prescriptive which give preference to certain types of alliances over other. In certain cases, the individual may choose a marriage partner within a particular kin group or he may be bound to choose only one such kin. Such type of custom which prescribe as to whom one should marry or prefer to marry are called prescriptive rules. Some of these prescriptive rules are as follow:

- 1) *Cross cousin marriage* : The marriage of two individuals who are the children of siblings of opposite sex i.e. a man marries his mother's brother's daughter or his father's sister's daughter it is called a cross cousin marriage. Such type of marriage is practiced among the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh and the Oraon and the Kharia tribes of Jharkhand. Such type of marriage are also found in the Southern part of India. (Hence I 1953)
- 2) *Parallel cousin marriage* : The marriage of two individuals who are the children of siblings of the same sex i.e. a man marries his mother's sister's daughter or his father's brother's daughter it is called parallel cousin marriage. Such type of marriage is seen among Muslims.
- 3) *Levirate marriage* : Levirate is the practice of custom in which a widow marries her deceased husband's brother. It is also known as Natal or Nantra. Such type of practice is prevalent among the Toda of Nilgiri Hills. It is also known as a Natal or Nantra, marriage. It was also found in some parts of Panjab.
- 4) *Sororate* : Sororate is the practice of custom in which a widower marries his deceased wife's sister.

### 6.4.4 **Forms of Marriage**

All the commonly listed forms of marriage, namely, **monogamy** (marriage of a man to a woman at a time), and polygamy (marriage of a man or woman to more than one spouse) are found in India. The latter, that is polygamy, has two forms, namely, **polygyny** (marriage of a man to several women at a time) and **polyandry** (marriage of a woman to several men at a time). In ancient texts of the Hindus we find references to eight forms of marriage.

#### **Monogamy, Polygyny, Polyandry**

In this section, we shall focus only on monogamy, and both forms of polygamy. With regard to the prevalence of these three forms, one has to distinguish between what is permitted and what is practised by different sections of the population through time.

- i) **Monogamy**: Among the Hindus, until the passing of the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, a Hindu man was permitted to marry more than one woman at a time. Although permitted, polygyny has not been common among the Hindus. Only limited sections of the population like kings, chieftains, headmen of villages, members of the landed aristocracy actually practised polygyny.

We may say that those who had the means and the power to acquire more than one wife at a time were polygynous. The other important reasons for polygyny were the barrenness of the wife and or her prolonged sickness. Among some occupational groups like the agriculturists and artisans, polygyny prevailed because of an economic gain involved in it. Where women are self-supporting and contribute substantially to the productive activity a man can gain by having more than one wife. Concerted efforts to remove this practice were made in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century by social reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati and others. After Independence, the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 established monogamy for all Hindus and others who came to be governed by this Act. Some of the 'other' communities covered by this Act are the Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. Strict monogamy is prescribed in Christian and Parsi communities. **Polygyny:** Islam, on the other hand, has allowed polygyny. A Muslim man can have as many as four wives at a time, provided all are treated as equals. However, it seems that polygynous unions have been restricted to a small percentage of Muslims, namely the rich and the powerful.

With regard to the tribal population, we find that the customary law of the tribals in general (except a few) has not forbidden polygyny. Polygyny is more widespread among the tribes of north and central India.

- iii) **Polyandry:** Polyandry is even less common than polygyny. A few Kerala castes practised polyandry until recently. The Toda of the Nilgiris in Tamilnadu, the Khasa of Jaunsar Bawar in Dehradun district of Uttaranchal and some North Indian castes practise polyandry. In the fraternal form of polyandry, the husbands are brothers. In 1958, C.M. Abraham (1958: 107-8) has reported that in Central Travancore fraternal polyandry was practised by large number of groups like the Irava, Kaniyan, the Vellan and the Asari.

The factors that are related to the prevalence of polyandry are:

- a) desire to prevent division of property within a family (especially in fraternal polyandry).
- b) desire to preserve the unity and solidarity of the sibling group (in fraternal polyandry).
- c) the need for more than one husband in a society where men are away on a commercial or military journey.
- d) a difficult economy, especially an unfertile soil, which does not favour division of land and belongings (Peter 1968).

### Prevailing Patterns

What is the position today regarding these forms of marriage? Monogamy is the most prevalent form of marriage in India. However, bigamous (having two spouses at a time) marriages have been reported among the Hindus in many parts of India. It is the man who very often commits bigamy and escapes punishment by turning the loopholes of the law to his advantage. It is the wife who is often unaware of his second marriage, and even if she is aware of it, is unaware of her legal rights and accepts her fate. Social and economic dependence on husband and inadequate social condemnation of the man's actions are some of the reasons for the wife's acceptance of the husband's second marriage.



Among the Muslims it is the man who is allowed to have four wives. Among them men enjoy greater privileges than women. A Muslim woman cannot marry a second time when her first husband is alive or if she has not been divorced by him.

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## 6.5 THE INSTITUTION OF KINSHIP

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The family, marriage and kinship are closely interrelated with each other in terms of social relationship. Kinship is universal and represents one of the basic social institutions. Kinship is a method which provides the framework of social relationship. Kinship means relationship of the individual with the other members based either on marriage or blood-ties. Kinship bonds are very strong and such ties are of fundamental importance in every society all over the world. The husband, wife, son, daughter, brother and sister relationships due to either a bond of marriage or through blood are known as kinship relations. Kinship is that part of culture through which relations are socially recognized through birth and through marriage or adoption.

Murdock says that it is a structured system of relationship in which individuals are bound to one another by complex interlocking and ramifying ties. According to Radcliff-Brown, “Kinship system is a part of social structure and insists upon the study of kinship as a field of rights and obligations”. Robin Fox says that kinship is simply the relations between ‘kin’ that is persons related by real, putative or fictive consanguinity.

### 6.5.1 Significance of Kinship

The kinship system refers to a set of persons recognised as relatives, either by virtue of a blood relationship technically called consanguinity, or by virtue of a marriage relationship, that is through what is called affinity.

Most of us tend to regard the kinship system into which we are born and in which we are reared as natural. It will seem natural and right to us that certain close relatives should be tabooed as marriage and sexual partners, and we feel quite certain that disastrous consequences would follow any infringement of the taboos. We may similarly think it natural that certain classes of persons be preferred as marriage partners, or we may on the contrary think it very unnatural that any persons be so designated.

### 6.5.2 Basic Concepts of Kinship

We have already made the general point that kinship relations are the outcome of the cultural interpretation of relations given in nature, and discussed some of the different ways in which sociologists have looked at the kinship system. In doing so, we have indirectly introduced some of the basic terms and concepts in kinship studies, which we will now set out more systematically. You certainly do not need to memorise this rather overwhelming set of technical terms, but you should try to understand the basic principles and distinctions that these key terms seek to convey.

#### 6.5.2.1 The Principle of Descent

Descent is the principle whereby a child is socially affiliated with the group of his or her parents. In some societies the child is regarded as a descendant equally



of both the father and the mother, except that titles and surnames are usually passed down along the male line. Such a system is termed Bilateral or Cognatic. The individual belongs simultaneously to several descent groups – those of the two parents, the four grandparents, the eight great-grandparents, and so on. This link is limited only by memory or by some conventionally determined cut-off point at, say, four or five degrees removal. In small intermarrying communities, membership will probably overlap, and in case of dispute or feud, the individual might find his or her loyalties divided. There are some cognatic systems where the individual has the right by descent to membership of several cognatically recruited groups, but this right is actualised only if the person is able to reside in a particular group's territory. Modern nationality laws often make this type of requirement.

### 6.5.2.2 Types of Descent

In other societies, by contrast and your own is most probably one of them—descent is reckoned UNILINEALLY, that is, in one line only. The child is affiliated **either** with the group of the father, that is, PATRILINEAL DESCENT, or with the group of the mother, that is, MATRILINEAL DESCENT. Theories of the physiology of procreation and conception often correlate with these different modes of reckoning descent. In the former, the father is often given the primary role in procreation while the mother is regarded as merely the carrier of the child; in systems of the latter type the father's role may not be acknowledged at all.

Additionally, in some societies one finds that the child is affiliated to the group of either parent, depending on choice, or to one parent for some purposes (for instance, inheritance of property) and to the other parent for other purposes (for instance, the inheritance of ritual or ceremonial roles). This is called DOUBLE UNILINEAL DESCENT.

The principle of unilineal descent provides the individual an unambiguous identification with a bounded social group that exists before he or she is born and that has continuity after he or she dies. Members of a descent group have a sense of shared identity, often referring to each other as 'brother' and 'sister' even when no genealogical relationship can be traced. Descent groups are also very often, (though not inevitably), characterised by exogamy. That is, marriage must be with persons outside this group. For instance, traditional Chinese society was divided among approximately a hundred 'surname' groups—you could perhaps call them CLANS—within which marriage was disallowed, and these groups further divided into LINEAGES, whose members claimed to be able to trace their descent, perhaps for several hundred year, from a founding ancestor, and then into further localised SUBLINEAGES and so on down to the individual co-resident families. Sometimes a whole village might be settled by members of a single lineage. The gotras of Indian caste society are also exogamous descent groups, segmented in rather the same way.

#### Activity 2

Interview or discuss with some members of your family and prepare a chart indicating five generation of your family on your fathers' side or mothers' side whichever is relevant to you. Write a note of one page on "The kinship structure of My Family". Discuss your note with other students and Academic Counsellor at your study centre.

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## 6.6 FUNCTIONS OF DESCENT GROUPS

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Apart from the function of exogamy, unilineal descent groups tend to be 'corporate' in several other senses. Their members may often come together for ritual and ceremonial functions, for instance, for collective worship of lineage gods, totems or ancestors. The descent group will have a built-in authority structure, with power normally exercised by senior males, and it may well own corporate property. An individual's economic rights and responsibilities will be defined by his or her position in the descent group. In many societies unilineal descent groups are also jural units, internally deciding their own disputes, and externally acting as a unified group in the conduct of feud, etc. For this reason, lineage structure is often coterminous with the political structure in societies lacking a centralised state structure.

Lineages cannot expand indefinitely in a single locality and often segment into smaller, more manageable and economically viable lineage segments. You can see the lines of segmentation of the ground, as it were. Consider the pattern of land ownership in an Indian village; or at the pattern of village or urban settlement; particular quarter of the village or town may be inhabited by the descendants of a single founding ancestor. Often, the large **havelis** divide among brothers or step-brothers, and these quarters are further divided among their descendants. In case a line dies out, the property would be reconsolidated. Given the range of social functions that descent groups may potentially perform, it is little wonder that concern with the principles of unilineal descent has dominated the work of many students of comparative kinship. However, even these scholars realise that unilineal descent is not the whole story. In ancient Rome, women after marriage severed all contact with their natal group. In certain slave societies, the slave has no 'family' of his or her own. In patrilineal systems, the mother's father, mother's sister, and especially the mother's brother, are important relationships which need further discussion. To take note of the importance of relationships, the scholars have identified another principle. This has been termed the principle of **COMPLEMENTARY FILIATION** which explains the significant ritual and social roles of the mother's brother(s) in the lives of their sister's children. It reminds us that, in most societies, an individual is a child of both parents, however descent is formally reckoned.

### 6.6.1 Inheritance Rules

Rules of inheritance tend to co-ordinate with the reckoning of descent in most societies, but not necessarily in a one-to-one manner. In fact, it is quite often the case that certain types of property pass from father to son, and other types from mother to daughter. In most parts of India, in the past, immovable property such as land and housing, was inherited only by sons. In the absence of sons, except under rare circumstances, by the nearest male relatives on the father's side. On the other hand, movable property in the form of cash and jewellery was given to the daughter at the time of her marriage, with a certain amount of jewellery also passing from the mother-in-law to the daughter-in-law.

In addition to property of various kinds, rights and obligations, esoteric knowledge, crafts and skills, etc., might be passed on in accordance with kinship roles, succession to office to chieftainship, kingship, etc.-and to other social roles and statuses, is also very often determined by kinship criteria. In such cases, the individual's status is said to be 'ascribed', not 'achieved'. It is commonly

asserted that ascriptive status of “modern”, industrial societies. There is a great deal of truth in this statement, but one should not underestimate the importance of kinship connections in modern societies too. Often one finds that in a family if father is a doctor or lawyer the son or daughter is also likely to choose the same occupation. Most of the Indian women who have been successful in the political domain are either daughters, sisters or wives of people who have been active in politics. One such example is the Nehru family of India.

### 6.6.2 Rules of Residence

Rules of residence, meaning residence after marriage, are an important variable in a kinship system, and substantially affect the quality of personal relations within the kin network. If husband and wife set up their own independent home after marriage, as is usually the case in modern western society, residence is said to be NEOLocal. Where the wife goes to live with the husband in his parents’ home, residence is described as VIRILOCAL, PATRILocal, or PATRIVIRILOCAL, and where the husband moves to live with the wife, it is termed MATRILocal or Rules of residence may or may not ‘harmonise’ with the rules of descent. On the whole, patrilineal descent systems correlate with either neolocal or patrivirilocal residence patterns. However, matrilineal descent systems may be combined with all three types of residence. It is also combined with what is called AVUNCULocal residence, that is, residence with the mother’s brother.

### 6.6.3 Patriarchy and Matriarchy

A society is said to have a patriarchal structure when a number of factors coincide, i.e. when descent is reckoned patrilineally, when inheritance of major property is from father to son, when residence is patrilocal, and when authority is concentrated in the hands of senior males. There is, however, no society on earth, nor any society actually known to have existed, whose features are the exact reverse of these. For even in matrilineal, matrilocal systems, which are fairly rare, major property is usually controlled by males. And authority is normally exercised by males, though women may well have a higher status in the family and greater powers of decision-making than in the patriarchal set up. Some anthropologists assert that in societies with very simple technology and minimal property, relations between the sexes are relatively egalitarian, whether descent is formally matrilineal, patrilineal or bilateral, but others insist that women, and children, have played subordinate roles in all human societies.

For this reason, the term ‘matriarchy’, though often found in the literature, is probably a misnomer, best avoided, and there is certainly no conclusive evidence to support the view that matriarchy was a universal early stage in the development of kinship systems. (IGNOU 2017 (Reprint ESO-11 The Study of Society Block 2, pp-25-30)

#### Check Your Progress IV

- i) What is the principle of descent? Explain in one line.

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ii) List the types of descent. Use about three lines for your answer.

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## 6.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have explained the different aspects of the social institutions of family, marriage and kinship. All three concepts are inter-related with each other and form the very core of any community or society. We defined these concepts and described their salient features to you. Also, in this unit we have outlined the significance and functions of family, marriage and kinship. When you interrogate Indian society the different aspects highlighted in this unit form the very core of society in India.

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## 6.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress I

- i) a) F  
b) T
- ii) a) Supplemented nuclear family  
b) Sub nuclear family  
c) Single person household  
d) Supplemented sub nuclear family.

### Check Your Progress II

- i) Commensality; Common Residence; Common Property; Cooperation and Sentiment and Ritual bonds.
- ii) Collateral joint family, Supplemented collateral joint family, Lineal joint family, Supplemented joint family, Lineal collateral joint family, Supplemented-lineal-collateral joint family.

### Check Your Progress III

- i) In the cyclical view the nuclear and the joint family can be viewed as a continuum. A nuclear family develops into a joint family after marriage of a son and coming of a daughter-in-law. After the death of the father the sons may separate to form separate nuclear units. Later on each of these nuclear families may develop into a joint family.
- ii) Factors affecting the joint family system are: (a) western secular education, (b) market cash economy, (c) salaried occupations, (d) laws, and (e) urbanisation.
- iii) a) T  
c) F  
d) T

### Check Your Progress IV

- i) Descent is the principle by which a person traces his/her ancestors.
- ii) The following is the list of the types of descent:
  - Unilineal descent including (a) patrilineal descent (b) matrilineal descent.
  - Double-unilineal descent bilateral or cognatic descent.

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## UNIT 7 RELIGION\*

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### Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Sociological Theories Explaining Relationship between Religion and Society
  - 7.2.1 Emile Durkheim
  - 7.2.2 Max Weber
  - 7.2.3 Karl Marx
- 7.3 Sociological Perspectives on Religion and Society in India
  - 7.3.1 Oriental and Indological Constructions of Religion in India
- 7.4 Some Religions in India
  - 7.4.1 Hinduism
  - 7.4.2 Islam
  - 7.4.3 Sikhism
  - 7.4.4 Christianity
  - 7.4.5 Buddhism
- 7.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.6 References
- 7.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 7.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

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### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

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



every society. Sociologists have tried to understand the meanings that religion offers to people. Its significance in the organisation of social life is immense. It appears to help people in approaching and addressing the crisis situation in life. Scholars have argued that religion gives meaning to the human life to such an extent that it is characterised as the relief to the people who are trapped in the hardships of life. Its impact on human affairs is intoxicating like opium. It does not exist as a fixed phenomenon, but keeps changing its nature according to the broader socio-economic changes in material conditions of society. Sociologists have studied the evolution of religion from primitive to the 'modern' societies. Its role in 'modern' societies is being felt to be eroded or minimised but one may see the expansion of religious identities conflicts and movements. In this backdrop, it becomes all the more important to understand the emergence of diverse religions of India and their contemporary character.

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## 7.2 SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES EXPLAINING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SOCIETY

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

### 7.2.1 Emile Durkheim

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

According to Durkheim there are two basic components of religion i.e. beliefs and rites. He calls beliefs as **collective representations** which are products of the underlying social structures and rites which pertain to the operative part of the belief system i.e. various modes of action produced by beliefs. He reasoned that religion is a group phenomenon as its basic characteristic and unity is given

by the group. In this way he emphasises on the positive function of religion as a force cementing the society together. The **functional theory** of religion as propounded by Durkheim hinders any study of the **dysfunctions** of religion. This explains, for Durkheim, the reason for the ubiquity and permanency of religion. 'Religious force' is only the sentiment inspired by the group in its members. It is projected and objectified in outer world and the consciousness. He classifies beliefs into two separate spheres of '**sacred**' and '**profane**'. He identifies 'sacred' as the most fundamental religious phenomenon. 'Sacred' is that part of religion which is set apart and forbidden and considered holy. 'Sacred' is venerated and placed in higher position to profane things. 'Profane' stands in opposition to 'sacred' and refers to the mundane aspects of everyday life. Durkheim writes that 'all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or radically opposed to one another; i.e. the sacred and the profane.

### 7.2.2 Max Weber

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

### 7.2.3 Karl Marx

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

structure. In this way Marx's thesis on religion is opposite to Weber's understanding.

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## 7.3 SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN INDIA

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

### Activity 1

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

### 7.3.1 Oriental and Indological Constructions of Religion in India

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

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

Indologists conducted studies on the native people with the help of mostly Brahmins. Many of the scriptural texts were translated by Indologists with the help of local Brahmins. Consequently the understanding of religion in India was inspired by the brahmanical view. Bernard Cohn in his celebrated book *An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays* (1987) has offered a detailed description of the brahmanical view of religion in India.

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

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

**Check Your Progress I**

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

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ii) How does Max Weber relate religion with economy?

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

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

### Activity 2

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

## 7.4 SOME MAJOR RELIGIONS IN INDIA

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

Hindu – 79.80 per cent

Muslim – 14.23 per cent

Christian – 2.30 per cent

Sikh – 1.72 per cent

Buddhist – 0.70 per cent

Jain – 0.37 per cent

Other religions and persuasions – 0.66 per cent

Religion not stated – 0.24 per cent

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

### 7.4.1 Hinduism

Sociologically there are debates on whether Hinduism is a religion or not. **Max Weber** in *The Religion of India* (1958) postulates that the term ‘Hinduism’ is a western coinage and it is not a religion. The term ‘Hindu’, according to Weber is



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

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

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

#### **Box 7.0: Concepts of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha**

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



- i) Dharma is honest and upright conduct of righteous action.
- ii) Artha means a righteous and honest pursuit of economic activities.
- iii) Kama is the fulfilment of one's normal desires.
- iv) Moksha is liberation that is absorption of the self into eternal bliss.

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

#### 7.4.2 Islam

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 7.4.3 Sikhism

"Of the great religious traditions of humanity, Sikhism is one of the youngest, being barely 500 years old. (Madan, 2011:76)" Sikhism emerged as a challenge to the feudal social norms in Indian society. It is essentially a religious philosophy

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

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

#### 7.4.4 Christianity

##### **Christian Community: The Spatial and Demographic Dimensions**

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

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

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

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

#### Box 7.1

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

#### 7.4.5 Buddhism

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

The philosophical ideas of Buddhism were innovative and remarkably different from the existing philosophy of Brahmanism of sixth century BC. Buddhism is essentially a rejection of the basic beliefs of Brahmanism thereby challenging

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

**Check Your Progress III**

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

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## 7.5 LET US SUM UP

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

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## 7.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress I

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

### Check Your Progress II

- i) A) d)  
B) c)
- ii) Buddhism was founded by Gautam Buddha during the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC. He was born in a princely family of Sakya clan. This was a period of rapid urbanisation and presence of an extreme orthodox Hinduism. Buddhism came as a protest against caste, as well as, orthodox Hindu rituals.

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