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TOPIC

Race and Religion – Part Two (Religion)

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1.1 Introduction

❖ This world is full of diversities. Living and non-living beings are one of the most glaring diversity and even within living beings we often make differences among plant, animals, humans, etc.

❖ Further, we make differences between man and man, based on many perceptions like race, religion, culture, linguistic, political affiliation, nationality, wealth, etc.

❖ Many social scientists agree that among these criterions cultural differences are probably most profound but it is race and religion which has known to create most controversies and conflicts around the world.

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2.1 Objectives

❖ The present presentation will deal an important aspects of human society- the religion.

❖ Here, we will come to know about concepts of religion, how it has originated, how it has diffused, classification of religion, distribution major world religion and effect of religion on our life.

3.1 Concept of Religion

❖ The word Religion is supposed to originated from a Latin word *re-ligare* which literally means: re (again) + *ligare* (bind) i.e. 'to unite again' or 'to bind again'.

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❖ Though there are different views about how religion has originated but all views incorporates into it some sort of supernatural beliefs.

❖ In the beginning probably puzzling questions before individuals like birth, death, life after death, dreams, etc. has developed some kind of superstition and a belief in spirit has led to the foundation of uncodified primitive religion.

❖ Religion helped them in overcoming these inner weaknesses either by giving some religious explanations of such happenings or gave them some strength through prayer of spirits.

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❖ Latter these uncodified customs/rituals become a regular practice and more advance version of codified religion evolved. This is why religion is also regarded as a way of life. The philosophical investigation of three notions of God- naturalistic, personalistic and impersonalistic, also supports similar views.

❖ In the primitive stage of human evolution environmental determinism was dominant, people have little understanding and control of many simple aspects of nature like fire, rain, forest, etc. These features mostly affect their life and property so they have developed some sort of fear and respect towards them. These beliefs percolated for generations and gave birth to initial form of religion and a belief in naturalistic notion of God.

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❖ Slowly with more accumulated knowledge base man started understanding natural phenomena in a big way but still many of them remain beyond their control. This gave the birth in the belief that some supernatural personality like humans are there to control all these features. These concepts lead into the birth of personalistic notion of God.

❖ Finally, when modern scientific knowledge base developed, man started giving causal explanations for many natural phenomena and also brought hitherto uncontrolled many natural phenomena within their technological ambit. Still there are mysteries like Kant's phenomena and *noumena* and all these gave birth to impersonalistic notion of God.

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❖ These notions are not temporal in context and appearance of one notion not depend upon complete discarding of earlier existing notions.

❖ They depend much upon individual's intellectual capacity. Therefore side by side all beliefs can co-exist in some respect.

❖ This is why naturalistic notion still exist in many tribal societies, whereas most of modern society belief in personalistic notion while few intellectuals belief mostly in impersonalistic notion of God.

❖ Thus religion is a psychological aspect found well interwoven with our daily life.

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❖ Religion is based on our belief in supernatural, metaphysical or moral claims of so called reality; influenced by our association with ancestral history, scriptures, culture or mythology; may manifested by individuals as well as group practice of prayer, moral conduct, ritual, art, music, meditation, symbols and dressings; usually have deep impact on local custom, polity and social institutions and it help in associating followers of common religion and setting them off from followers of other religions.

4.1 Origin of Religion

❖ As discussed religion is a way of life so origin of religion also hinge around evolution of human and its society.

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❖ Further, our talk of religion pertains to religion as perceived by human beings only and not by animals or plant kingdoms.

❖ This explains why out of variety of forms most of common religions are found associated with ancient human civilization of southwestern and southern Asia. Often many geographers consider major ancient civilisations in Mesopotamia and the Nile and Indus Valleys are the site of major 'religious hearth' from where they originated.

❖ Semple (1911) and Huntigton (1951) supported environmental determinism as main factor behind the origin of religion, their peculiar symbols, rituals, etc.

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❖ The cultures of these areas are governed by locale environment which in turn influenced the origin of particular religion. That's why hell is a place of extreme darkness and cold for Eskimo whereas fire for the Jew or why Indians pray Rain God or Egyptians pray River Nile or why tribal pray most of natural things or why the sun is a God in South Asia whereas Arabs respect the moon.

❖ However since actual hearth place of major religion is not at the centre of major ancient civilisation but at the margins of them so role of environmental factors should not be overemphasised. The locale environment definitely had a big hand in the beginning but with the technological advancement of society and diffusion of religion to distant places has minimised its role.

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5.1 Diffusion of Religion

❖ Perhaps there is no person around this world, whether theist or atheist, who is not a follower of one religion or another religion in some way.

❖ The present distribution of different major religions far from their source of origin, their varying numbers and different spatial concentrations has put a natural geographical interest in them.

❖ Park (2004) accepted two kinds of religious diffusion from its source area continuous and discontinuous spatial expansion.

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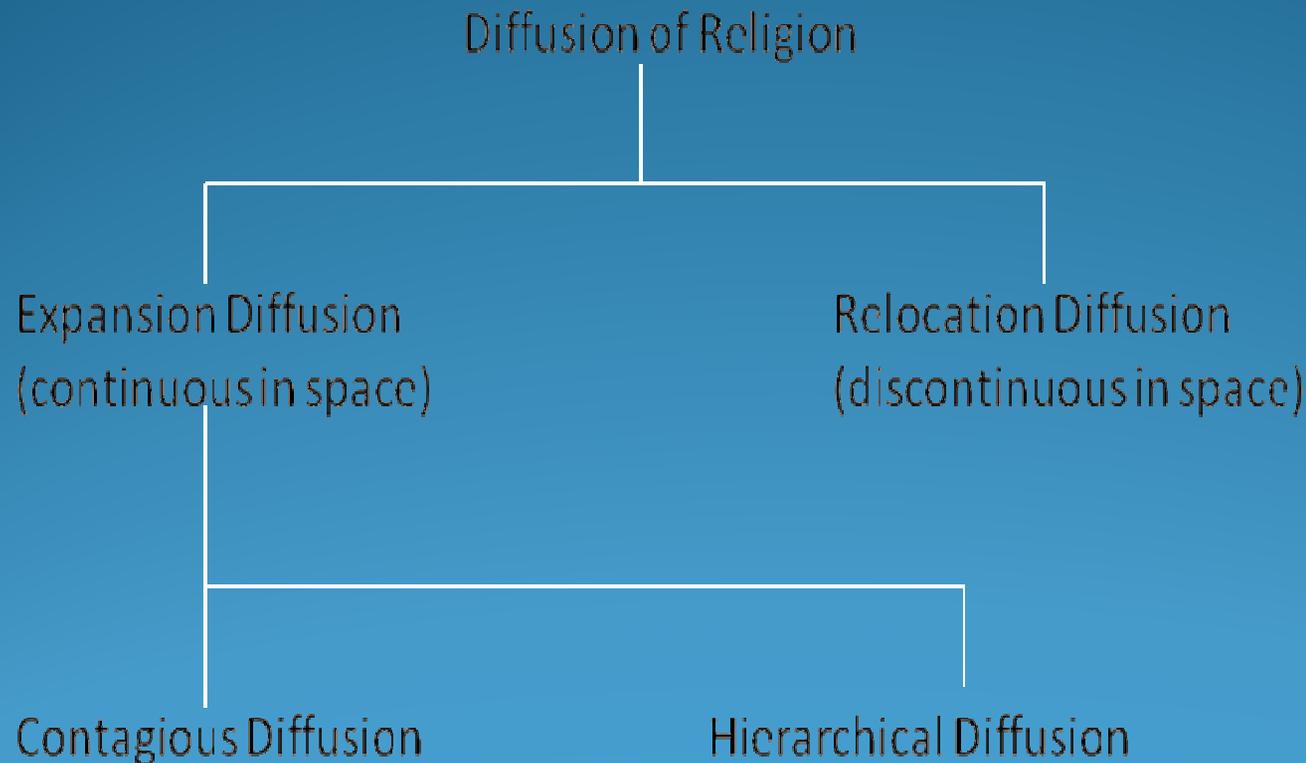
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❖ The first one is continuous in space called expansion diffusion while later is discontinuous in space called relocation diffusion.

❖ Further, he divided expansion diffusion into contagious and hierarchical diffusion.

❖ Contagious diffusion is like a disease spread and it diffuses through personal contact conversion. Thus it is concentric in form from its source area and also shows frictional effect of distance and a time lag.

❖ With more and more technological advancement frictional effect of distance and time lag usually tends to decrease.

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❖ In hierarchical expansion first key persons of a society like kings, tribal leaders, rural heads, religious leaders of other sects, etc. are converted as a role model and other people follow him later.

❖ Most of religious diffusions around this world are of contagious type.

❖ In relocation diffusion people actually migrated to other distant places and with them religion goes there.

❖ Here it may increase as natural growth or as expansion diffusion by converting local people.

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❖ With this modern technological revolution, religious messages can pass one locality of this world to other swiftly without actual visit of religious persons.

❖ However their effects in actually converting people at a distance are limited.

❖ Thus present distribution of any religion around the world is primarily influenced by its source area and the ease or difficulty which this area poses in contacting people of other regions.

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6.1 Classification of World Religion

❖ Based on different parameters what we consider a variety of religion can be identified like theistic versus atheistic religion (based on faith), monotheistic versus polytheistic (based on faith), eastern religion versus western religion (based on area of origin), well organised versus poorly organized religion (on the basis of organisational development), modern religion versus ancient religion (based on time of origin), small religion versus big religion (based on number of followers) and so on. On an average geographer have broadly classified religion into following three type (Husain, 2002; Park, 2004): universal or universalising religions, ethnic or cultural religions and tribal or traditional religions.

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Type of Religion

Universal or Universalising

Christianity

Islam

Buddhism

Ethnic or Cultural

Hinduism

Judaism

Shintoism

Confucianism

Taoism

Tribal or Traditional

Animism

Shamanism

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❖ As the very name suggests, ethos of universal religions are equally applicable to each and every person of this world.

❖ It believes in missionary work through which any non-believers can be bring to its fold by following some rituals.

❖ Thus nationality, ethnicity, race, cast, creed, class, sex, etc. have no significant meaning to them. In this group all types of religious diffusion take place.

❖ Due to their inherent expansive nature some these are major religion of the present world having large number of followers and distributed over a large area. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc. belongs to this group.

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- ❖ In contrast to universal religion, ethnic religions do not believe in missionary and do not proselytise.
- ❖ They are deep rooted in local culture and have a complex way of religious life and so they mostly have continuous spatial expansion from their source.
- ❖ These religions generally have high concentration near their source of origin and the frictional impacts of distance are often noticeable in the form of decreasing concentration of followers from the source region.
- ❖ One can become a member of an ethnic religion by birth or by adopting complex life style and cultural identity and not by simple declaration of faith (Husain, 2002).

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- ❖ Since they are usually confined in a natural region so they may be also found associated with nationality.
- ❖ Further, ethnicity, class, cast, creed, sex, race, etc. differences may exist in ethos of such religion and if so then they are also rooted firmly.
- ❖ Hinduism, Judaism, Shintoism, Confucianism, Taoism, etc. are identified as some common ethnic religion.
- ❖ Further, tribal religion or traditional religions are the special forms of ethnic religions distinguish by their small size, their unique identity with localised culture groups not yet fully absorbed into modern society, and their close ties to nature (Husain, 2002).

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❖ Such religions involve belief in some power or powers beyond humans, to which they can appeal for help (Park, 2004).

❖ Thus usually they are highly concentrated in small area and may have traditionally simple way of life which reflects their close association with the local environment.

❖ This is why these religions are also regarded as animistic.

❖ Animism, Shamanism, etc. belongs to this category of religion.

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7.1 Distribution of Religion

❖ Wherever human are living in this world there exist some form of religious belief and this has made the world full of variety of religion.

❖ To present an account of all religions of this world is not possible here. Therefore selectively a brief account of only some major religions has been presented here.

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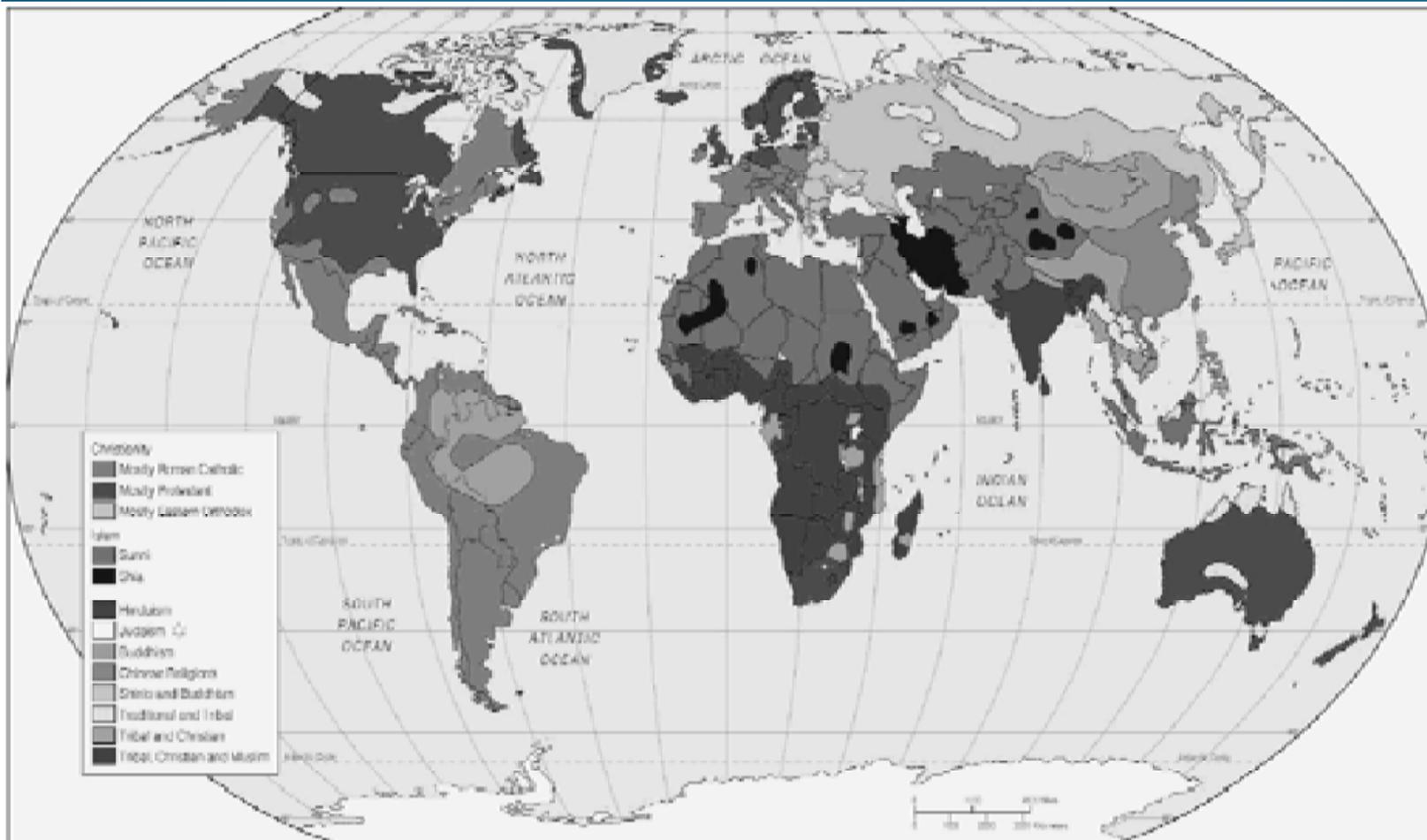
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Distribution of World Major Religion



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7.1.1 Hinduism

- ❖ Hinduism is a major religion of South Asian sub-continent.
- ❖ It is the oldest religion among all major religions of the world.
- ❖ By 25th century BC this religion has a well developed scripture in the form of *Rig Veda* and even around 50th century BC it was in highly developed state.
- ❖ Nobody knows with surety that who propounded this religion and actually when it was evolved.

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❖ Archeological evidence definitely suggests that it had a well developed philosophy, a complex mix of rituals influencing deeply daily life of its followers and polytheistic in practice.

❖ It originated in Punjab area near river Indus and the Persians were first to call followers of this belief as Hindus. It derives its name from the river Indus which is called Sindhu in Sanskrit.

❖ Thus probably it is the first and only religion in the world which got its name from a geographical location.

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❖ Successive waves of immigration of Aryans with relatively advance culture (in terms of agriculture, social structure, language, fire use, etc.) to this area, their interaction with local tribal culture and assimilation of them leads into development of initial form of Hinduism in the area.

❖ Later with each successive immigration of Aryans earlier existing group in the area pushed eastward mainly along the Ganga Valley. This process further continued far eastward towards the Brahmaputra Valley, southward initially through the Narmada and the Tapti Valley and finally far southward through the Godavari-Krishna Valley and the Cauvery Valley.

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❖ These river valley were fertile, suits to present state of technology, provides easy access to water for different uses including communication. Those felt more insecure they took refuge to interior areas of forests and further alienated from mainstream cultural intermixing.

❖ By this time Dravidian culture was also flourishing in southern part of India separately. It interacted well with immigrating culture and finally gave a dominating edge to new culture but with a considerable degree of inputs from it.

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❖ This complex peopling process, their complex cultural assimilation with local tribal groups and a very long distance and time involved partly explains so much complexities, regional variation and polytheism associated with daily ritual life of a Hindu.

❖ This is why Hinduism is not regarded by many as a religion only but also a way of life. Thus many also consider all people residing in this sub-continent as Hindu.

❖ Therefore the initial expansion of Hinduism faith is within the sub-continent and was not the result of effective proselytising but the result of cultural assimilation in which so called Hinduism dominated.

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❖ Trade relations with neighbouring countries helped it to reach there but again in the similar fashion of cultural assimilations.

❖ Thus Hinduism in true sense never attempted for missionary activity though it has attempted to consolidate and reform its tenets.

❖ Later during the spread of imperialism Indian labour was migrated to different tropical and subtropical country to work there and they settled there. Many Indians also migrated to Gulf countries, America, Europe and Oceania in twentieth century in search better opportunity. This leads to development of Indian diaspora in the form of relocation diffusion of Hinduism.

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❖ All this explains very high concentration of Hinduism mainly in Indian subcontinent and a scattered diaspora. Thus presently Hinduism as a religion accounts for about 11.8 per cent of world population concentrated primarily in Asia.

7.1.2 Buddhism

❖ Buddhism is a universal religion originally evolved in 6th century BC as a reformist movement by Gautam Buddha within the Hinduism.

❖ Philosophically he inquired the reason of human sufferings and how life can be made free of it.

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❖ His philosophical teachings and its application to one's life has made his tenets very popular at the place of its origin and nearby areas. Here it remain nearly static for about 300 hundred years but once the king Ashok gave it royal patronage and actively tried to spread it throughout his empire and also to surrounding empires it started rapidly growing. Trade routes and links were also used for this purpose.

❖ The diffusion of Buddhist tenets to distant places were probably in the form of hierarchical diffusion wherein first local influential people were brought under its fold and people followed him.

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❖ After the death of Buddha his followers has given him the status of God and with the passage of time various schools of thought developed within Buddhism.

❖ *Hinayana* and *Mahayana* are the two major schools believed in the salvation philosophy of 'Aapt dipo bhava' or 'do yourself' and '*Bodhisatva*' respectively.

❖ *Hinayana* established in Sri Lanka and South-East Asian countries whereas *Mahayana* developed strong presence in North-East and East Asian countries. Thus India, Bhutan, Tibet, China, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, etc. all were deeply influenced by this religion at one point of time.

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❖ Away from original homeland this religion has also took some inputs from local prevailing beliefs for example, Confucianism and Taoism influenced it in China while Shintoism influenced it in Japan.

❖ Strangely it was reabsorbed by Hinduism in most part of India probably due to presence of strict and difficult code of conduct in Buddhism.

❖ It survived in most of other countries except in some South-East Asian countries where Muslims and Christianity later succeeded in spreading their tenets.

❖ In its original homeland it has three dominant regions.

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❖ Firstly, located along the mountainous regions of Laddakh and Himachal Pradesh; secondly, along Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh and thirdly, in Maharashtra state.

❖ The Buddhist of Maharashtra are basically new converts whereas those of other areas were having this faith since they accepted it first in early stage of Buddhist missionary.

❖ Thus presently Buddhism accounts around 6.1 per cent of world population mostly found in Asia especially in South, East and South-East Asian countries.

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7.1.3 Christianity

❖ Christianity is a universal religion which has largest number of followers and most widely distributed around the world.

❖ Jesus of Nazareth (Palestine) was a Jew who proclaimed himself as a messiah of God and his purpose is to restore rule of God free from any sufferings.

❖ Before the beginning of this religion in the first century A.D. pagan practices and polytheism was common in local people which led to conflict with Christianity. Thus in its early phase especially till Jesus was alive its spread was slow.

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❖ In 4th century A.D. this religion got first official patronage by Roman Empire which helped it a lot in spreading its tenets to the whole Empire.

❖ When Constantinople became the seat of Roman Empire, the bishop at Rome declared supremacy and it led to separation of politics and religion there. Further this led into a well developed hierarchical church system of Roman Catholic.

❖ This well developed hierarchical structure was never welcomed by churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, etc., since they were predecessor of Christianity.

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❖ Between 3rd and 7th century Slavic migrated to Balkan Peninsula. Later they adopted Christianity and this has not only helped in expanding the religion to this peninsula but also to Russia and Scandinavia.

❖ Between 6th to 19th century Christianity spread to different parts of Europe.

❖ To some extent Muslims tried to push them back during 7th to 15th century with the consolidation of Islam in Iberian Peninsula. But ultimately this partial crisis for Christianity ended and they started encroaching African coasts; South, South-east and East Asia; North, Central and South America; Australia, etc. through their missionary.

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❖ It is important to note that as a reformist movement Protestants become a separate sect from Catholics in 16th century with more liberal view accepting primacy of the bible but less importance to church. This sect dominated mainly in north-western Europe and during colonisation where ever these migrants gone they took it with them.

❖ Thus Christians which were only 1 per cent of world population in 1st century rose to about 31 per cent by late 1980s covering widespread area (Husain, 2002; Park, 2004).

❖ The state patronage in 4th century was a boon to it when it expanded as relocation diffusion but in later centuries its diffusion was basically hierarchical.

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❖ Further, when it was established in a locality it propagated its tenets through contagious diffusion.

❖ The success of Christianity is related its strong missionary zeal and incorporating local cultural elements into it to make it more vibrant and attractive to the local inhabitants.

7.1.4 Islam

❖ After Christianity it is Islam which has largest number of adherents and spatial distribution. Like Christianity it is also a universal religion strongly believing in monotheism and thus also supports a strong missionary zeal.

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❖ It was founded by Prophet Mohammed at Mecca, Saudi Arabia around 6th century AD. In 622 AD it reached to Medina by the Prophet itself and since then it started robustly spreading to other parts in first hundred years.

❖ Like Christianity it has also witnessed expansion as well as relocation diffusion of tenets.

❖ In its early days the expansion was mostly expansion diffusion by conquering an area and converting the conquered area into Islam. These were usually forced conversions.

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❖ Those who resisted were overpowered and then converted to Islam.

❖ Those who passively accepted the supremacy of Islam were usually allowed to continue their earlier faith but the unfavourable Islamic law and exorbitant taxes imposed on them have eventually forced many to seek conversion to Islam.

❖ This partly explains why during the golden period of Muslim rule expansion when it expanded from Spain to India, North Africa to Central Asia, etc. not all persons were converted to Islam but majority.

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❖ Further the rapid spread of Islam in the beginning was also on account of location of its core area along the major trade routes.

❖ Further Muslim traders were not involved only in business wherever they went but they were also good proselytisers. This partly explains the early arrival of Muslim faith to the Kerala coast of India and of Bangladesh while the Mughals gained power at Delhi much later. Also the spread of Muslim belief in some South-East Asian countries and in some distant African coasts are explainable partly by this.

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❖ In fact wherever they gone they tried to make their religious core in new area and from here they started contagious diffusion and hierarchical diffusion of their tenets.

❖ Unlike Christianity, Muslims especially those involved in forceful proselytisation and to some extent those involved in this through their trade contacts, gave little importance to ethnic belief found at different places.

❖ This explains partly an introduction of new culture which got amalgamated with local culture to produce a rare blend with a cultural bias usually in favour of the Mid-West. To an extent it explains why Muslims are not much successful in their missionary goals as Christians.

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❖ Thus presently Muslims accounts about 16.7 per cent of the world population with highest concentration in Asia and Africa and to some extent in Europe.

❖ Further they have very small presence in North America, South America and in Oceania.

❖ Recently some Muslims have started migrating from different underdeveloped countries to Europe and North America in search of better job opportunity.

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8.1 Effect of Religion on Our Life

- ❖ Religion and the way it is being practiced have a very close connection with local culture in any region.
- ❖ Though religion and philosophy attached to it may be often regarded as a personal affair but it influences our public life in a very significant way.
- ❖ Our many day to day activity may governed by traditional customs or may related to our clan but it often found that religion helps them in institutionalisation and consolidation.

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❖ Thus in many respect directly or indirectly our social relations, economic pattern, political setup, legal customs, architecture, art, music, etc. may have a profound influence of religion.

❖ Some religions either directly or through scripture, promote/restrict/discourage monogamy or polygamy; patriarchal or matriarchal tradition; nuclear or combined family, etc. For example polygamy is common in Muslims while Samaritanism and Buddhism not support it; Hindus usually follow patriarchy (scriptures have such evidences) or Catholic Popes regard themselves as supreme since they believed to be successor of Peter who was main disciple of Jesus whereas tribal beliefs of Khasi (*Ka Blei* as chief parton-goddess) in Meghalaya have matriarchal tradition.

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- ❖ Religion also plays unifying force and teaches us moral conduct.
- ❖ Muslim brotherhood across the border and Hinduism in India at one point of time was regarded as unifying force.
- ❖ Moral conduct of Hindus which forbid brother-sister marriage but in Muslims it is accepted with some exceptions both have religious backing.
- ❖ Similarly, Easter in Christian, *Lohari* in Sikhism and *Makarsankranti* in Hindus are related to agricultural cycle.

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❖ Further the Protestants have more open and liberal view about nature and favours consumerism while the Catholics do not go in this way and on the other hand Hinduism preaches conservation of nature in the form of *vandevta*.

❖ Similarly, the promotion of secularism in India is probably subscribed to the existence of different religious belief in sufficient number to this land whereas Pakistan declared itself as a religious state due to predominance of Muslims there.

❖ Islamic Bank, Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and some terrorist/extremist organizations around the world may also look to religion for their very existence.

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❖ The practice of *sariat* as law of land in many Muslim country or *manusmriti* influencing Indian Penal Code are the good example how religion can influence legality.

❖ In all religion some places are regarded as sacred and religion promote their followers to visit such places. In many countries it led into well developed tourism industry viz. Saudi Arabia (Mecca and Medina), India (Allahabad, Hardwar, Nasik, Ujjain, Madurai), Israel (Jerusalem), Vatican City, etc.

❖ Often settlement pattern is influenced by the existence of a sacred place usually at the centre and also art and architecture at many places depict religious beliefs around the world.

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❖ Thus religion and religious beliefs are very significant in understanding many day to day activity and different organizations, institutions, etc. around the world.

9.1 Summary

❖ The study of religion is very useful in understanding many phenomena of society. The origin of religion is deeply influenced by human interaction with the environment, both natural as well as socio-cultural. Followers of different religion may or may not be belief in co-existence. Often missionary zeal helped many religion to expand beyond its original source area. Presently there exist no close relation between religion and race and level of development. So, it must be analysed very carefully.

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