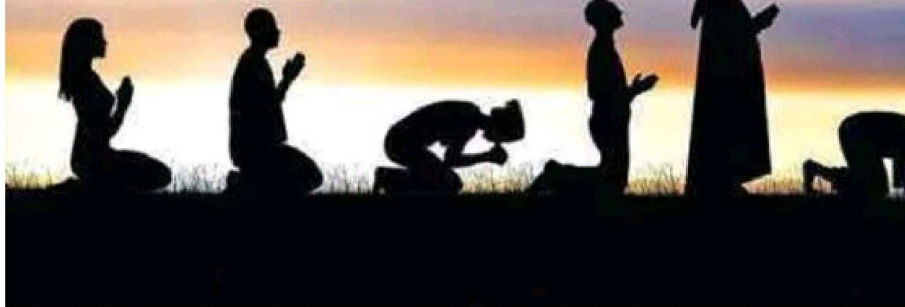


# Religious secularism



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**R**eligion is described as the beliefs, values, and practices related to sacred or spiritual concerns. Émile Durkheim defined religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things"

Toward the end of our current century, one of the striking current trends is the large number of people who, professing a belief in God by whatever name, are moving away from the institutions which have traditionally intermediated divine worship and provided blessings on births, deaths, and everything important in between. In so doing, many of these people have by no means abandoned spirituality; they have found outlets for their spirituality in small-group practices that "search for God" in ways that are genuine alternatives to traditional practices in churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues.

Human mind is freedom loving and best expression of this can be seen in his imagination about the unknown God. It is from (or through) this very imagination of some fertile minds that various religious texts, rituals and ideas have sprouted.

Data suggest that membership in "mainline" religious denominations is already down by approximately 25% from earlier peaks. Amongst the dropouts, there are people who drop out of "organized religion" while actively searching, in New Age or other environments, for personal or small-group ways to express their natural spirituality. There may also be more "shopping around" and switches of allegiance between organized religions than ever before; the growth of Islam in the United States is one example. These trends thus do not betoken a veering away from "spirituality."

"Human beings often seem naturally to reach out for more satisfying belief systems. In the absence of settled certainty, every organized religion is bound to be a "temporary home" to a good many restless spirits in its constituency.

The growth of "unorganized spirituality" certainly complicates the interaction between organized religions and the institutions of governance (governments, but also corporations, associations and the many other elements of "civil society"). Among the people who don't feel the need for spiritual guidance from large established human institutions will be a good activists on secular issues such as human rights, environmental protection, or economic fairness – who will nevertheless present their case as motivated by spiritual concerns with wide political appeal. Teachers, preachers, and therapists representing hundreds of varieties of specialized inspiration are spreading wherever freedom of speech, freedom of communication, and freedom of peaceable assembly are protected.

## Social Functions and Dysfunction of religion

Social scientists have analyzed religion in terms of what it does for the individual, community or society through its functions and dysfunctions. Malinowski, saw religion and magic as assisting the individual to cope with situations of stress or anxiety. Religious ritual, according to him, may enable the bereaved to reassert their collective solidarity, to express their common norms and values upon which the proper functioning of the community depends.

Religion can also supplement practical, empirical knowledge, offering some sense of understanding and control in areas to which such knowledge does not extend.

Kingsley Davis argues that religious beliefs form the basis for socially valued goals and a justification of them. Religion provides a common focus for identity and an unlimited source of rewards and punishments for behaviour.

Robert King Merton, introduced the concept of dysfunction. Talking about religion, for instance, he pointed out the dysfunctional features of religion in a multi-religious society. In such a society religion, instead of bringing about solidarity, could become the cause of disorganization and disunity.

Marx regarded religion as a source of false consciousness among the proletariat, which prevents the 'class for itself' from developing. It prevents them from developing their real powers and potentialities

## Religious Secularism

Even in highly secularized Western societies civil religion exists. It consists of abstract beliefs and rituals, which relate society to ultimate things and provide a rationale for national history, a transcendental basis for national goals and purposes.

Religion takes different forms in apparently secular societies: it is more individualized, less tied to religious institutions. The character of modern industrial capitalist society, particularly its rampant individualism, is thus seen to be expressed in the differentiated character of religion in a society like the USA.

Although seemingly having little basis for integration, the celebration of individualism is itself an integrating feature of such diverse religious forms. Moreover, new and distinctive forms of religion may perform latent functions for the system by deflecting adherents from critical appraisal of their society and its distribution of rewards.

In anti-religious societies such as some communist States this argument cannot hold, but here it is claimed that functional alternatives to traditional religion operate. Other systems of belief such as communism itself fulfill the same role as religion elsewhere. National ceremonial, ritual celebration of communist victories, heroes, etc., meets the same need for collective rites, which reaffirm common sentiments and promote enhanced commitment to common goals.

## India's case

India has been distinctly characterised by high religious quotient and spirituality. Yet religion in India is mixed baggage of hopes and despair. In 21st century India, people are more religiously secular. We have modern gadgets in our wrist along with a religious amulet underneath.

Religious ceremonies, in the form of communal dancing, singing, rituals promotes unity and harmony and functions to enhance social solidarity and the survival of the society. Religious beliefs contained in myths and legends of ramayan and mahabharat, express the social values of the different objects which have a major influence on social life such as food, weapons, day and night etc. They form the value consensus around which society is integrated.

In post modern society, religion seems to both divide and integrate the masses. In India, modernity is not antithetic to traditions or religion. Rather it helps to reinforce traditionalism in the masses through modern means of mass and communication such as shadi.com, sanskar tv channel etc.