Chapter 1

Introduction

Theoretical Perspectives

Informal study of society, social Institutions, organisations and relationships is as old as mankind. But the formal study of sociology as a scientific discipline started only in the 19th century with the work of Comte, known as the father of sociology. Several conditions were necessary for the emergence of sociology and other social sciences. Eisenstadt has offered four factors, as responsible for the emergence of sociology. First of all there had to be a clear separation between the transcendent and mundane. Secondly, there had to be a separation between the political and the civil. As long as the society was considered as governed by the transcendent there was no need to go beyond the scriptures. In the same way, as long as polity was identified by society there was no need to go beyond the study of state. According to Eisenstadt these were aided by the discovery of new societices and cultures and a concern for improvement of the society by improving the environment. In this, the development of Protestant Ethnic, Capitalism, Industrialization and Technological Development played an important role. (Eisenstadt, S.N. in International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences vol. 15 1968 P. 23-24).
Sociology of Religion:

Study of religion is as old as mankind. Scholars like Sorokin and Parsons have held religion to be a crucial factor in the emergence of human society. The scientific study of religion had to await the 19th century. The early sociologists and anthropologists felt that religion would eventually vanish with the development of Industry and Science. According to Comte's Law of Three Stages, society would pass through; Theological stage, dominated by priests and ruled by military men, Metaphysical stage (Middle Ages and Renaissance) under the sway of Churchmen and Lawyers and Positive stage governed by Industrial administrators, scientists and moral guides (Coser, Lewis, 1971, P. 8)

According to Herbert Spencer there have been four stages in the development of society:

(1) Worship of ghost or an cestors.
(2) Polytheism
(3) Monotheism
(4) Agnosticism

Anthropologist Sir James Frazer had three stages of development: Magic, religion and science.

It was the two great founding fathers of sociology: Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Max Weber (1864-1920) who provided masterly analysis of religion with a wealth of data and methodological rigour. Dismissing the view that religion was a fantasy or tissue of superstitions, Durkheim asks "how could a vain fantasy have been able to fashion the human consciousness so strongly and so enduringly?" He further went on to question. "What sort of a science is it whose principal discovery is that the subject of which it treats does not exist?" (Durkheim, E. 1912, P. 69-70).
Max Weber wrote extensively on religion. In his famous work 'Protestant Ethic and Capitalism' (1905), he tried to show that Protestant Ethic led to the development of Capitalism. To support his thesis further, he carried out three outstanding studies viz. The Religion of China, Ancient Judaism and the Religions of India. He also studied charismatic, traditional, and rational authority, evolution of religion, relationship of religion to other spheres of life, attitudes of different strata to religion, religious roles and finally, the consequences of rationalisation and bureaucratization.

**Definition of Religion:**

Definitions are necessary and useful if they bring out the essence of the phenomena defined and demarcate the phenomenon from other phenomena. There are several dichotomous types of definitions.

1. Real and nominal.
2. Substantive and functional.
3. Inclusive and Exclusive.

Nominal definitions have played a very important role in the development of physics, where the phenomena studied are objective requiring measurement and quantification. Real definitions refer to the intrinsic nature of the phenomenon. Substantive definitions also define in terms of intrinsic qualities. Functional definitions on the other hand define the phenomena in terms of its functions. Inclusive definitions broaden the field whereas exclusive definitions narrow the range. In the present case a good definition should be real or substantive and exclusive. The very phenomenon of religion poses many problems for definitions because of the variety of religions and diversity of beliefs and practices. We note below a few major definitions of religion.
The most famous one is Durkheim's: "a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church all those who adhere to them. (Durkheim E. 1912, P. 47).

Clifford Geertz: 'Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating concepts at a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic' (Scharf, Betty, 1970, P. 33).

Thomas O'Dea: Religion is man's response to breaking points at which he experiences the ultimate sacred power. Out of this experience religious organisations, ritual practices and beliefs and values evolved .... As breaking points 'they raise questions which can find answers only in some kind of beyond itself. (O'Dea, Thomas, 1969 P. 5).

Roland Robertson: Religious culture is that set of beliefs and symbols (and values derived directly therefrom) pertaining to a distinction between the empirical and the super empirical, transcendent reality; the affairs of the empirical being subordinate in significance to the non-empirical. Second, we define religious action simply as: action shaped by an acknowledgment of the empirical-super empirical distinction." (Robertson, Roland, 1970 P. 47)

Robert Bellah: Religion [is] as set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence (Robertson, Roland, 1969 P. 263)

Peter Berger: "Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established" (Berger P. and Luckmann. 1963, P. 34).

Milton Yinger: "Religion is a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problems of life. It is the refusal to capitulate to
death, to give up in the face of frustration, to allow hostility to tear apart one’s human associations.” (: Yinger M. 1957, P. 9)

A few definitions of religion which view religion negatively as alienation, fantasy or illusion may also be offered if only because they have had a profound influence on human consciousness.

**Ludwig Feurbach** views `Religion as the projection of human wishes and a form of alienation' (Bottomore, Tom, 1983, P. 171).

**Karl Marx** views religion negatively. He wrote, `It (religion) is the imaginary realization of the human essence because the human essence poses no true reality. In the words of Marx, Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creatures', the sentiment of the heartless world and the soul of the soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people.' (Bottomore, T.B. 1963, P. 43-44)

We need not take seriously the definitions of religion which believe religion to be an aberration and likely to vanish. Thus the definitions of Feurbach, Marx, Freud and Lenin do not serve as a basis for scientific study. This is not to deny their value as powerful critiques of religion.

Religion has basically two aspects. One is the individual aspect and the other is the group aspect. **Paul Tillach’s** definition `Religion is that which is of ultimate concern' (Scharf, Betty, 1970, P.32) emphasises the individual’s existential problems.

Purely functional definitions enlarge the scope of definition. This is because religion performs certain functions which are necessary for the survival of society. All those institutions which perform these functions have to be identified as religion or it’s substitute. In other words religion or it’s substitute in one form or other has to be there.
Definitions of Durkheim, O'dea, Roland Robertson and Geertze combine both substantive and functional definitions. In the case of Durkheim, the substantive aspect refers to the sacred. In the case of O'dea ‘the beyond’, Robertson ‘supernatural beings’ and C.Geertze ‘system of symbol’. All of them emphasise in their definition the social consequences of these and not the psychological consequences for the individual.

Durkheim’s definition is extremely satisfactory. The only short coming is in his definition of the sacred where Durkheim tried to eliminate the transcendental element. He felt that inclusion of the transcendental would exclude such a great religion as Buddhism. However, many writers have pointed out that his reading and interpretation of Buddhism was not correct.

Definitions serve a useful purpose. However, in view of the enormous complexity of sociological phenomena, no definition is bound to be totally satisfactory. Instead of preoccupying ourselves with further analysis of definition we may distinguish religion from other phenomena, so as to clarify what is religious phenomena.

1) Magic and religion have been so closely associated that to distinguish between religion and magic becomes difficult. Malinowski defines magic as the use of supernatural means to secure empirical ends. (Johnson, H. M., 1982, P. 412) William Goode has noted many similarities between magic and religion. As concrete phenomenon, both are concerned with the non-empirical, supernatural, both are pervasively symbolic, dealing with non-human forces; both have skilled practitioners, etc.
In any concrete phenomenon both magic and religion may be involved. Therefore, Goode offers a polar ideal type approach. That is, we can construct an ideal type of magic and an ideal type of religion. According to Goode:

(i) Religious goals are general and psychological.

(ii) Propitiatory attitude is common in religion and magic is characterised by manipulative attitude.

(iii) Religion also focuses on group ends whereas magic focuses on individual ends.

(iv) Relationship between magician and the praetioner is a professional kind of relationship, whereas in religion it is shepherd-flock or prophet-follower relationship. There are several other differences. For our purpose, we can say that magic is basically instrumental and impersonal as compared to religion.

(Goode, William J., 1951, P. 50-54)

2) **Ideology**: Religion has been compared to nationalism and communism and many have drawn parallels, particularly between religion and communism. In fact, the famous book edited by Richard Crossman containing personal narrations of ex-communists titled 'The God That Failed' (Crossman, Richard, 1951) has emphasised the empirical basis of ideology. Ideologies are less concerned with the existential problems of life, suffering and death. Though they created powerful groups sharing common values they were short lived. The persistence of religion in countries like Russia and China clearly shows that ideology can not be equated with religion. They can at best be called as ‘quasi-religions’ or as ‘religious surrogates’.
3) Religion needs to be distinguished from humanism. Humanism, though a very laudable value and objective, has a very limited sphere. It does not come to grips with the existential problems and only tries to offer a solution. It has never led to organizations as in religion or communism. As a critique and corrective to religious fanaticism it is most welcome.

4) Religion needs to be distinguished from science. The reason is, because of the prestige of science, attempts are made to present their respective religions as sciences. Now we have Isalmic Physics, Hindu Chemistry, Mathematics etc. Both science and religion are concerned with truth. However science deals with empirical phenomena whereas religion deals with transcendental phenomena. Science is objective, demonstrable and scientific studies can be replicated. Religious truths can not be objectively verified. However, in recent years science and religion are coming nearer to each other. Capra has pointed out that the concepts of modern physics are common with many of the concepts of eastern religions (Tao of Physics, 1974, in Chatterjee, Parvati, 1988, P. 27D). The world view of science is a powerful alternative to the world-view of religion. But when it comes to existential matters science is helpless. MacIver stated long back ‘the question why, the first question of childhood, the last of age science can not answer.’ (Mac Iver, 1952, P.15).

The best way to study a phenomenon is to specify it, that is, divide it into different elements or dimensions. This makes scientific study possible and fruitful. We may, now, note the different dimensions of religion.
Functionalism:

Modern sociological theory has been profoundly influenced by functional analysis which became very popular at the turn of the Twentieth Century. Functional analysis has become the principal reigning paradigm of contemporary sociology with more adherents than any other mode of sociological analysis or social thought.

"Functionalism is simply a view of society as a self-regulating system of interrelated elements which structured social relationships and observed regularities. It is a sociological perspective with seeks to explain social elements or cultural patterns in terms of its consequences for different elements as well as for the system as a whole." (Abraham, F., 1982, p. 72)

Functionalism tries to relate one part of a social system to another part. We tried to apply functional analysis in our study. Religion, a major institution in our society is linked to other institutions like family, marriage, property, economy and polity. In this study of Women and Religion we have tried to emphasize this aspect.

Premises and Propositions of Functional Analysis:

1. A definite emphasis on the primacy of the system over its elements.

2. Society is perceived as a system of functionally interrelated components each of which, like an organ, performs a function essential for the survival of the system.

3. Every element of the system has a function which contributes positively (eufunctions) to the continued operation of the system or negatively (dysfunctions) towards its disintegration and change.
4. Every system is a well-integrated configuration of elements that constitute an organic whole.

5. The functioning of a social system depends on consensus of its members on common goals and values related to the basic needs of the society.

6. Social system depends on consensus amongst its members on common goals and values related to two basic needs of the society. The entire social system rests heavily on shared values.

7. The dominant condition of society is order, reinforced by stability and consensus and not conflict based on coercion and dissensus.

8. There are certain functional pre-requisites that must be met if a system is to survive viz. The four functional pre-requisites are:

1) Goal Attainment, i.e. pursuit of socially approved goals.

2) Adaptation, i.e. economic activity suitable to the physical and social environment.

3) Integration, i.e. unity among members of the social system so that they live in peace.

4) Pattern maintenance and Tension management, i.e. normative stability.

George Homans a leading functionalist, insists that functional analysis is a method, not a theory.

According to Merton, functional analysis seeks to describe the consequences of a cultural usage or social elements, explain the persistence of an observed pattern of behaviour and analyse specific contribution of a part of some whole to other parts and to the whole.

Bredemier summarized the methodology of functionalism as follows:
1. Productive analysis begins with a statement of the kind of action necessary to maintain some system of inter-relationships, namely the system of which the observed uniformity is a part.

2. It states the motivational conditions which are necessary to produce that action (the normative criteria of gratification which will yield the relevant action).

3. It describes the motivational patterns actually operating so as to produce the uniformity under analysis.

4. It seeks to find the source of those patterns (to isolate the normative criteria responsible for the observed actions).

5. It compares the consequences of the operating motivation with the motivations described as necessary including the deviant modes of adjusting to frustration of efforts to meet the criteria in question.

6. It finally assesses the role played by the uniformity in question in contributing to the system of which it is a part (Bredemier, H., April 1955, p. 173).

   Every element of a system has a function which contributes positively to the continued operation of the system or negatively towards its disintegration and change.

   In this exploratory thesis we wanted to find out the impact of religion on women and also look at the dysfunctional aspects of religion which contributed to social change in society. Hinduism basically, gave subordinate position to women which was dysfunctional to them. The impact of feminism, education and urbanization produced tremendous changes in religious practices.
Feminism:

According to Kamla Bhasin and Nigah Said Khan feminism does not derive its conceptual base from any single theoretical formulation. "There is therefore, no specific abstract definition of feminism applicable to all women at all times. The definition does change because feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete reality and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions. Feminism can be different from one situation to another."

Feminism can be defined as "an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at work and within the family and conscious action by women and men to change this situation." Feminists recognize the existence of sexism (discrimination on the basis of gender), male domination and patriarchy and fight against it. Any action to challenge male domination is a feminist agenda e.g. women's decision not to be humiliated or educate herself and pursue a career or her refusal to be restricted by purdah or her decision not to have children are some of the feminist actions. Present day feminists are fighting towards emancipation of women besides legal reforms to end discrimination. Feminism includes women's subordination to the male within the home, against exploitation by the family, against their low status at work, in society and in the culture and religion of the country, against their double burden in production and reproduction. Feminist fight against discrimination but also for emancipation and liberation from all forms of oppression by society, by men and by religion. Feminists want a just and egalitarian society for both men and women in society. (Bhasin Kamla, Nighat Said Khan, 1986, p. 2-3).

In Indian Society religion controls the life of individuals through its dos and don'ts. Hinduism is a way of life which is based on patriarchy, male domination and subordination
of women. These are perpetuated by religious ethics, codes of conduct which restrained
women and forced them to accept subordinate position.

According to Dorane Jacobson, “Women are active religious practitioners but they
have little religious authority - legitimate, textually sanctioned religious power - which is
limited to a small group of men. Paradoxically, however, at the popular level, women are
prominent religious participants, both as specialists and non-specialists. (Jacobson, Dorane
and Wadley, Susan, 1986, p. 126). Hindu religious activity is not based solely on vedic
rituals. The dominant form of ritual activity is ‘Bhakti’ or devotion to a deity. Today we find
Pooja (devotional ritual) is the principal form of ritual activity in India. Vedic rituals are
reserved for males such as the opening of a new temple. Females are also becoming religious
specialists and conduct life-cycle rites even though males are temple-priests and leaders of
most public rituals. Hindu women have considerable religious involvement. Women alone
perform a large number of calendrical rituals, women’s participation in the life cycle rites is
definitely a part of the Little Tradition. The sexual segregation of Hindu society also
articulates with the role that religion plays in drawing women together. Female solidarity is
continuously reinforced through religious practices. This is the function of religion for
women.

However, Mother Goddesses who protect most villages in rural India are worshipped
by both men and women. In this thesis we looked at the influence of feminism on women and
also the articulation of women in changing the role of religious specialists. Women are in fact
becoming religious specialists - priests.

We shall now discuss briefly the status of women in Hinduism through the ages
before discussing the dimensions of religion in general and Hinduism in particular.
Status of Women in Hinduism through the Ages:

We are giving the salient features of the status and privileges Hindu religion accorded to women. In Hinduism religious rites and privileges were valued most highly taking precedence over political and property rights. The social status of an individual was crucial and was connected with the place which religion accorded to him or her in the rites and rituals. According to Altekar, “Privileges accorded are denied to women will therefore throw valuable light on their position in society.” (Altekar, A.S., 1959, p. 194)

A cursory survey of the Vedic literature reveals that women enjoyed greater freedom in the field of education than of marriage. In vedic age, women enjoyed all the rites and privileges which men possessed. Women in the Vedas were referred to as co-partners of men in all activities of life. Women received vedic education and there are instances to show that some women were referred to as Brahmavadinis i.e. the highest literary talent who even composed some slokas in vedas. Some women, specially unmarried ones, are seen offering vedic sacrifices all by themselves. Women also were intiated into vedic studies after Upanayana and all of them offered sacrifices to Fire God (Agni). Marriage was the ideal recommended by society and the vedic religion. Women's co-operation was essential in all religious rites and ceremonies and a man could not go to heaven without begetting a son. These two factors were responsible for giving equal status to women with men. If the husband was away on a journey, the wife alone performed the various sacrifices. There were some sacrifices which could be offered by women alone till 500 B.C. viz. Sita sacrifice to promote rich harvest Rudrabali for ensuring prosperity, Rudrayaga to secure good luck for maidens in marriage, etc.

In the early history of man we noticed that women were excluded from religious services because as men considered them as unclean at the time of menstruation. In the
Aryan era, Hindu society regarded women as impure and untouchable. Even the sight of their person and sound of their voices were avoided. At the time of child-birth also women were considered as impure and it was also apprehended that evil spirit haunted them at this time.

When the earlier Aryans migrated from Asia Minor, they had to fight with the native habitants of India. So the women used to produce the tools for waging war. But when the Aryans settled in India, they found surplus labour forces in the form of vanquished natives. The Aryans due to scarcity of women, intermarried with the native Dravidian women who were not educated like the Aryan women. The Aryans, afraid of contaminating the religious rites by their illiterate wives, prohibited all women from participating in the religious rites. The vedic education which had a bias for religious rites was not found necessary for women.

Upanayana for girls in the Upanishadic period became a mere formality which was dispensed with by Yagnavalkya who prohibited the Upanayana ceremony altogether in the case of girls. A theory was started that marriage ritual in case of women served the entire purpose. Service of husband was made equal to performing sacrifices. Manu prescribed a code of conduct for women and made them subordinate to father, husband and son in the course of their life and serving them was considered equivalent to all religious rituals for the women. The prohibition of upanayana amounted to spiritual disenfranchisement of women and produced a disastrous effect on their general position in society. This reduced them to the status of Sudras.

By 2000 B.C. a school of thought advocated that a wife should not even be associated with her husband in the performance of vedic sacrifices. By the time of 500 A.D. Bhakti and Puranic schools of religion became prominent. Women became the de-facto custodians of religion, they visited temples regularly and observed fasts.
The Hinduism of the Srutis and Smritis changed to the Hinduism of Puranas wherein women became devoted followers and patrons. These illiterate women could not understand vedanta and relied mostly on faith and devotion. With the advent of Muslims in India, for Hindus, the chastity of their women became a crucial factor in retaining the purity of the society. Hinduism became Brahmin (Dwija) centered and women as well as all other castes were excluded from vedic education.

In the Puranic era, girls were married off at the early age of eight or so which thereby excluded them from any kind of education. The status of women in this era reached it’s lowest level. Hinduism assigned the lowest level of fasts, vratas and performance of rituals which were devoid of any philosophy. Women performed rituals and fasts not for their own welfare but for the prosperity of husband, sons and brothers. Many obnoxious practices such as Sati, child-marriage, prohibition of the remarriage of widows became the order of the day. These obtained the sanction of the religion through Brahmin priests. Women lost their right to property, right to adoption and became chattels of the patriarchal joint families.

In the British period, some of the pernicious practices were abolished and secular education was advocated for girls.

The post independent era saw various laws promulgated to ameliorate the adverse effects of religion. However, these laws were not effective because of the stranglehold of religion on society.

During the British and the post-independent era social-legal equality was given to women through constitution, education and employment. However, religious equality could not be enforced by the state because of its policy of secularism and non-interference in religious matters. Patriarchal values and male domination still persists to a large extent in Indian society due to the religio-cultural influences.
During the last ten years there is a social movement in Pune to bring women's religious status equal to that of man. This is seen in a small way by actively training women in priesthood.

**Belief Dimension:**

A religion is distinguished mainly by its beliefs. Even the practices have a belief content in them. Myths and symbols which are fundamental to religion are also components of religious beliefs. In view of the wide variety of beliefs and practices we are presenting beliefs and practices mainly pertaining to great religions.

1) There is the belief in the transcendentated reality. There is a fundamental belief that behind all this creation there is a self-existing eternal God or Force. This God or Force is conceptualized differently in different religions - Jehova in Judaism, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Jesus in Christianity, Allah in Islam, etc.

2) There are creation myths regarding how the world was created, for example, in Christianity, God created the world in six days.

3) There are beliefs regarding the purpose or aim of creation.

4) There are beliefs, regarding what happens after death - salvation, Moksha and Rebirth.

5) There are beliefs regarding the cause of suffering - original sin in Christianity.

6) There is an explanation of evil - 'Satan' in Christianity, 'Shaitan' in Islam.

7) There are concepts of merit, demerit, pious acts, etc.

8) There are beliefs regarding the nature of human beings, particularly men and women and their respective status.

9) Every religion has many myths which cover various aspects of life.
10) There are beliefs in the form of moral codes.

11) There are beliefs regarding sacraments and symbols.

12) There are beliefs regarding prophets, saints and various other religious persons.

13) There are also beliefs about the nature and status of different groups.

14) There are beliefs regarding the believers and heretics.

15) Over a period of time beliefs and symbolism developed to cover various aspects of life including food and clothing.

16) As organizations develop there are beliefs in the sacredness of the organizations and the positions occupied, for example, Church, Bishop, Cardinal, Pope, etc.

**Religious Practices**:

The second major dimension is religious practices. Durkheim has highlighted the role of religious rites and rituals which creates psychological states and also unites people. It is the common practice in Sociology of Religion to divide these rites and rituals into rites of passage and rites of confirmation. The former refer to the rites performed during one’s journey from womb to the tomb. The confirmatory rites may be called as yearly cycle rites. The distinction is not very sharp and they can not be always clearly distinguished.

Rites and rituals are not confined only to religion. There are secular rites which are very much visible in the field of law. Symbols used show how much rites are part of secular and religious life irrespective of whether they are religious or non-religious.

**Rites and Rituals have several aspects**:

1) In religion language used is often archaic, for example, Latin, Sanskrit, Hebrew.
2) It requires specialized persons, priests etc.
3) It may also call for a particular kind of dress.
4) Certain ingredients will be required and they may have symbolic value-water, fire, crucifix, etc.
5) Some words may be considered to have extra ordinary power-incantations (mantras)
6) There may be an appropriate time.
7) A ritual may consist of several rites, the whole forming a structure.
8) The rites and rituals of great religions may be numerous. Over a period of time they also show change.

**Ethics:**

Ethics is a very important part of religion. Without some kind of ethical life no human society is possible. According to Parsons, religion has been one of the evolutionary universals. Many writers including Talcott Parsons have claimed that the modern values of individual freedom, equality, rationality can be traced to religion. In other words, these values have become generalized, no longer confined to the religious sphere. All the same, religion and ethics can not be identical. Ethics considers basically 'oughtness' and is based upon rational, humanistic considerations. Religion derives its values and ethics from it's prophets and scriptures. Yinger has noted that there can be four positons in the relation between religion and ethics.

1) They are identical. This is not valid.
2) They have nothing in common. This too again is an extreme position.
3) Religion is primary and ethics is secondary.
4) Ethics is primary, religion is secondary.
The third position seems to be quite common. In some respects, religion has endorsed unethical practices. Often religions treat people of other religion as non-believers and have a different set of morality in their relationship to them. Further, within the religion itself there may be discrimination and even ill-treatment, for example women, serfs, people suffering from diseases such as laproxy, in matters of chastity, etc. Presently, there is considerable pressure on religions to revise their moral code to make it more humanitarian and egalitarian.

**Organization:**

Religions are institutionalised to different degrees. Between 10th and 13th century Catholic Church was supreme and most organised. It had power over both the transcendental and mundane spheres. Religious organization was known as ecclesia. Even today it is the most institutionalised religion. Western writers speak of religious organization as Church, denominations, sects and cults. (Johnson, H. M., 1982, P. 419).

**Experiential Dimension:**

Every religion promises a transcendental experience which its adherents such as saints and others claim to have had or glimpsed. One of the earliest scientific works in the field of religion was ‘Types of religious experience.’ (Wach, Joachim, 1951, P.32-33) In practice we may note there is mundane experiential dimension, people claming material benefits because of religious observances.

**Knowledge Dimension:**

In the modern world knowledge is considered as a desirable value. In the empirical studies of religion researchers have tried to assess the knowledge or understanding of the religious beliefs, scriptures and practices.
Relationship with other areas of life:

Religion, being a sub-system of society, influences other systems like economy, polity and in turn is influenced by them. Weber's classical study has brought out the crucial role of Protestant Ethic in the rise of Capitalism. Marx, on the other hand, has pointed out how forces of production affect religion, making religion a tool of exploitation of the masses. Many have noted economic aspects in the formation of sects. The famous study of Swanson (The Birth of the Gods) brings out the influence of the wider society on religious beliefs and practices. (Robertson, Roland, 1970, P. 60)

Various studies have pointed out the relationship between economic class and religious beliefs. Similarly there are studies which correlate religious beliefs with political beliefs. In fact religion has played a very important role in polity and continues to do so at least in some countries. The rise of fundamentalism is a factor that has influenced particularly the developments in Islamic countries like Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Religion also influences other areas of life like sports and recreation. Often books, films, etc. which are supposed to have denigrated religion or go against religious ethics are often banned. On the other hand, the powerful media with its advertisement supports lifestyle which go against the spirit, if not the letter, of many religions, an example is emphasis on sex in the media which is practically not consistent with any religion.

Hinduism:

Revealed religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam with their scriptures are easier to deal with. Though they have undergone change and divisions, several common elements persist and the following can be identified: they are better institutionalised and organised. However, when one comes to Hinduism, the diversity and difference in beliefs and practices
overwhelm not only the laity but the social scientists as well. Consequently many text books of Sociology of Religion deal with Hinduism scantily or totally bypass it.

In the backdrop of the various dimensions of beliefs in world religions in general, we we will now examine the particular aspects of beliefs in Hinduism.

We have dealt with some of the theoretical aspects of religion and the we shall now pursue the aspects in Hinduism. Hinduism is the prevalent religion of the majority of men and women in India.

India's eminent philosopher - statesman Dr. S.Radhakrishnan has captured the dilemma in a vivid rhetoric "To many it seems to be a name without any content. Is it a museum of beliefs, a medley of rights or a mere map, a geographical expression? Its content, if it has any has altered from age to age, from community to community" (Radhakrishnan, S. 1974, P.11).

The word Hindu was used to designate people living beyond the Sindhu river. It did not convey any specific doctrines. Over a period of time it became a residual term for those who were not Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians (parsees), Jews, Tribals etc. Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs occupy a marginal position as they share certain common characteristics of Hinduism. Legally also, they have been treated as Hindus for certain reasons. Throughout history, there have been interactions between certain groups and traditions. Though it derives significantly from Aryan culture and Vedas, etc, it is also drawn from Dravidian and other cultures.

Hinduism is known traditionally either as Sanatana Dharma or Varnashrama Dharma. The word Sanatana means eternal, i.e. ancient as well as everlasting.
The characteristics discussed below are neither exhaustive nor define the practices of each community that goes by the name Hindu. However they do represent the Brahmin community which is the focus of this study. Here too, of course, there are ambiguities and ambivalences:

God:

i) God is considered both as *Nirguna, nirakara* (without attributes, formless) and *saguna, sakara* (with attributes and having form).

ii) There is Ishwara, creator, who manifests in three forms: Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the sustainer and Shiva, the destroyer.

iii) There are a large number of Gods, some major ones like Rama, Krishna, Ganesha, Hanuman, Kartikeya etc. and some minor deities. According to a traditional belief there are thirty-three crore Gods and Godesses residing in the body of a cow.

iv) There are various goddessess, viz. Saraswati, Laxmi and Parvati who are consorts of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh respectively and who represent knowledge, wealth and power. Durga, Kali, Chamundi, etc. are forms of shakti who are both benevolent and malevolent.

v) All these Gods, Goddesses and minor deities are invoked in the relevant rituals

vi) Divinity pervades everything. God is not only transcendental but also immanent

vii) God's incarnate-Vishnu, the famous among the trinity, has already incarnated himself nine times.

Creation:

i) There are various myths of creation and the view of life is basically cyclical: Creation, sustenance and destruction are ever going on.
ii) In this sense, creation is considered *anadi* and *ananta* it is without beginning and end.

iii) Creation is conceived as *Leela*, a play. Any compelling desire would put limitation on the divinity.

iv) Creation basically consists of God, soul in bondage (*Jeeva*) and world (*Jagat*).

The nature of these three and the relationship between them is differently conceptualized in different philosophies.

**Scriptures:**

i) Three scriptures *Brahmasutras*, *Upanishads* and *BhagavadGita* are together known as *Prastanatreya*. *Bramhasutras* constitute the highest speculations on the nature of *Brahman*. Based upon *upanishads* they have been stated by sage *Vyasa*. *Upanishads* are the end portions of *vedas* and deal with the ultimate questions of existence. *Bhagavad Gita*, the song celestial, containing the dialogue between Lord *Krishna* and *Arjuna* on the battlefield of *KuruKshetra* is the most popular Hindu scripture and the most widely studied. The *vedas* consist of hymns and Ruchas sung by *Rishis* in superconsciouss state.

ii) These are known, therefore, as *shrutis* i.e. heard ones.

iii) Then there are *Smritis*, the remembered ones which are the works of law givers *Manusmriti* and *Yajnavalkyasmriti* are well-known.

iv) The epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, have a tremendous influence on people. They set up certain ideals and discuss *Dharma*. *Bhagvad Gita* is a part of
Mahabharata and Shantiparva of Mahabharata contains profound observations on Dharma.

v) Then there are eighteen puranas (ancient works) - mythologies, the most famous of which is Bhagvat Purana.

vi) There are works of great commentators particularly the five great acharyas, Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha and Nimbaraka. In addition, of course, there are songs and writings of saints like Dnyaneshwar, Purandardasa. There are Shaddarshanas, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga Mimamsa and Vedanta. The word darshana means envisionment of the soul, direct perception of the soul. These are religiophilosophical works which recognize the vedas as authority. They are called Astinka (orthodox) as against Charvaka, Jain and Buddhist philosophy which do not recognise the vedas. Mahadevan states, "Indian philosophy has maintained a close alliance with religion. Not intellectual curiosity or wonder but the desire to realise the highest value in life was the principal spur for the philosopher's search. Man's supreme end was generally regarded as Moksha, spiritual freedom and this was the fulcrum on which both philosophy and religion turned" (Mahadevan, T.M.P., 1974, P. 9).

vii) In addition, there is a vast literature of founders of different sects like Mahanubhava, Swami Narayana, Lingayat etc. Some like Lingayats claiming not to be Hindus.

There is a vast body of works of saints, both philosphical and poetical. Among the great are Tulsidas, Dyaneshwar, Tukaram, Purandardasa, etc.
Human Life:

Human life is considered as a great boon. Human beings alone have the free will and freedom to realize the highest - moksha.

The jeeva is trapped in samsara, the whirlpool of life and man has to get release from it.

Animals are programmed and they act through instincts. Man alone has the freedom and reflective consciousness. He alone has the capacity to discriminate between the transient and the eternal, good and evil, truth and falsehood, etc.

Though the ultimate aim is moksha, the joys of material and sensual are not denied as long as they are consistent with dharma. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha are the Purusharthas - aims of life. Dharma is a very profound concept with an ethical core.

Hinduism is also known as varnashrama dharma. The four varnas - Bramhana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra are supposed to have been born from the mouth, arms, thighs and feet respectively of the creator (Purushasuktha - Rigveda). The Geeta claims them to be based on Guna and Karma. The earlier issues of ‘Contribution to Indian Sociology’ have deal with the concept of Varna in a very analytical way. M.N. Srinivas has analysed the concept of Varna and Caste and has brought out the ambiguities and ambivalences in the concept and its complex relationship with caste. A marginal group, hot officially part of the Varna system known as avarna or panchama varna emerged as untouchables. They constitute the ostracized group. Many writers and thinkers, particularly Phule and Ambedkar, have vigourously attacked Hinduism for this.
Hinduism and Other Dimensions:

With this introduction we may turn our attention to the various dimensions of religion.

Belief dimension:

1. Nature of God: We have already noted the different concepts of God from the 'सूर्य' (with attributes) concept to the 'निर्गृह' (without attributes, Formless, 'ब्रह्म')

2. Samsara: Literally 'samsar' means a cycle of birth and death which is basically sorrowful and aim of life is to cross the samsara, i.e. attain freedom from birth and death.

3. Hinduism does not believe that one's life can be only good. Good and evil are part of life and to attain liberation one has not only to transcend the bad but also the good.

4. The concept of 'Karma' is one of the central concepts which explains the cause of suffering and also the means of liberation. Only the human being has the ability to discriminate between the good and the bad, Papa and Punya (sin and merit) and the transient and the permanent. No individual can ever be free from karma. A distinction is made between Sanchit, Prarabdha and kriyaman karma, i.e. the total stored karma, the karma which is brought into the present life and the karma one does in the present life. Karma is also classified as Nitya karma which one must practice, kama karma which one does for certain fruits, objectives, Naimitika karma which one performs on certain occasions and Nishiddha karma which is undesirable and objectionable. Karmayoga constitutes an important marga (path) for Moksha (salvation). The Bhagavad Geeta clearly states that one should do Nishkama karma, i.e. do karma without a binding attachment to the
fruits thereof. A karmayogi performs actions with a particular objective in view but cheerfully accepts whatever the consequences as 'prasad' (God’s grace). Karmayog has been considered as a precondition for Jnana yoga, as with out Antah Karana shuddhi (freedom from desires), one will not be able to discriminate between the transient and permanant. At it’s lower level Bhakti is Karmayoga and at it’s highest level it is 'Jnanayoga. There are, of course, different interpretations put on these yogas by different scholars and acharyas.

(5) Purushartha - The concept of purushartha is central to Hindu view of life. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha constitute the four purusharthas or the aims of life. Dharma plays the most crucial role because it is the means for the other three purusharthas. It is desirable to discuss at some length the concept of Dharma. The word ‘Dharma’ is a part of definition of Hinduism- Varnashramdharma, Sanatandharma, etc. The concept of ‘Dharma’ is at the heart of Bhagavad Geeta which is a dialogue between Arjuna, who is confused about Dharma ‘(धर्मसमूहवेत्ता)’ and Lord Krishna. Both the great epics Ramayana and Mahabharatara deal with Dharma, providing a philosophy, illustrations and role models.

(6) Yoga - Yoga is a darshan by itself and it is consistent with all the three margas. Ashtang yoga of Patanjali, the author of ‘Yoga Darshan’- yoga sutras of Patanjali, has been an important force in influencing contemporary spiritual consciousness. Asana(postures), Pranayama (control of life force through proper breathing exercises) and Dhyan (meditation), particularly on transcendental meditation, there has been tremendous amount of research which have been published in some of the most prestigious journals of different sciences.
The etimological meaning of Dharma is 'that which supports, sustains'. Dharma supports and helps those who have 'fallen', are 'falling' or who may 'fall'. Dharma is a cosmic law, it is both prescriptive and proscriptive. In other words, it provides do's and donts. Moksha is not possible without Dharma. Unlike in some other religions, the pursuit of Artha (money and security) and kama (pleasures of life) are not forbidden. Artha and kama have to be carried out in the frame work of Dharma. King Janaka was a realised soul who conducted the affairs of the kingdom. Most Indian Rishis have been married. Even Artha and kama are pursued by Gods or granted by them. In other words, Dharma helps in this world for mundane pleasures (preyas) and it helps in attaining Moksha, spiritual life (shreyas).

Perhaps, a distinctive feature of Hinduism is the variability of Dharma from group to group and individuals to individuals. In other words, Dharma is not a uniform and standardised code. Thus we have varieties of Dharma depending upon Varna and Ashrama. Each varna has certain duties, it's own dharma. Similarly each Ashrama has its own Dharma.

There are four sources of Dharma

(1) Shruti (divine revelations)

(2) Smruti (sacred tradition given by the law givers)

(3) Shistachar (life of saints and virtuous people)

(4) Swadharma (code of behaviour according to one's conscience). This last one brings an element of creativity because many saints and realised persons have not followed blindly the shastras. In Maharashtra, the father of the great Jnaneshwar married on the advice of his Guru, though he had taken the vow of sanayas.

Dharma also takes into account the emergencies and exigencies of situations. The concept of Apaddharma 'आपद्धर्म' allows one to violate the codes in exceptional
circumstances. Radhakrishnan has emphasised the protein significance of the concept of Dharma. Firstly, it notes that all human beings are not at the same level of evolution and thus it admits of diversity. Secondly, Dharma is a very optimistic concept because it protects and aids one both in material and spiritual pursuits. Thirdly, it is a very profound and noble concept which pervades the whole existence. Dharma characterises the constituents of all the creations. Lastly, Dharma is a guide for living and Bhagavad Geeta has been considered as a guide par excellence in this respect.

Of course it has been criticised among others by Agehananda Bharati. (The Ochre Robe), Nirad Choudhary and B.R. Ambedkar. Arun Shouri has also been critical of certain aspects of dharma. The criticisms centre around inequality and exploitation, lack of clarity, justification of outmoded and inhuman traditions, etc.

**Artha and Kama** - Hinduism recognised the need for Artha, money and security and Kama, pleasures of life. These experiences gained through the pursuit of Dharma lead one to appreciate their limitations and give rise to Viveka-(discrimination). Hinduism does not believe in preparation according to its protagonists. It is through ‘Dosh Doorshana’ (knowing the defects) and through gaining the higher that one gives up the lower.

**Moksha** - The concept of Moksha is interpreted differently by different schools. Being a state which is transcendental it can not be adequately expressed. In the expression the individual and cultural elements gets mixed up. However all the schools agree that it is a supreme state of bliss and should be the aim of one’s life.

Karma and Dharma are two sides of the same coin. They are closely related and it is enjoined upon one to do one’s karma as per one’s Dharma.
(7) **Rebirth** - Rebirth is also central to Hinduism and is associated with karma. An individual may pass through thousands of births before attaining Moksha. Rebirth along with karma explains one's present status by birth. At the time of death the subtle body survives the gross body which is consigned to flame or buried and depending upon it's 'Vasanās' (unfulfilled desires) it takes a new body. Good karma leads to a good birth which facilitates one's evolution. Associated with rebirth is the concept of reincarnation or *Avatara*. The difference is, Gods will their own birth and they are not bound by karmas, whereas an individual’s rebirth is because of his karma. Rebirth of both human's and God's can take any form viz. plants, animals, human beings, etc.

The time of birth plays a very important role in Hindu life. The names are chosen on astrological considerations. Various rites and rituals are performed on astrological advice. Traditionally, no marriage was possible without the suitable matching of the horoscopes of bride and the groom.

(8) **Gunas** - Gunas are the basic constituents of *Prakriti*. Creation starts only when a disharmony starts among the three gunas *Satwa, Rajas* and *Tamas*. Various combinations of Satwa, Rajas and Tamas take place in all spheres of life, including food, activity and worship, and play a very important role. According to Bhagvad Geeta Varnas have been created on the basis of gunas and karma.

(9) **Purity and Pollution** - Purity and pollution are fundamental to Hindu concept of life. HNC. Steevenson has analysed the Hindu pollution concept. Purity and pollution characterise objects-gold and iron, plants basiel (Tulsi) and ashwatha and toddy trees, bodily emissions like spit, menstrual blood, urine, rituals (vedic, puranic), (Steevenson, H.N.C. 1954, P. 45-65 in International Encyclopedia of
Social Sciences, Vol. 1 and 2, 1968, P. 339-44). Dumont in his Homo Hierarchicus has analysed pure and impure in detail as they are the very root of the caste system (1988, P. 46-64). A caste has its own level of purity-impurity in relation to other castes. As Mckim Marriott has shown, the ranking of the caste may be disputed and attributional theory can not explain the ranking by itself. Earlier M. N. Srinivas in his study of Coorgs has shown that some meat-eating castes ranked higher than many vegetarian castes.

(10) **Sacredness** - As in other religions, sacredness is at the core of Hinduism. It is closely related to purity and it permeates all areas of life and existence. There are sacred books (*Vedas, Geeta*) sacred prayers, sacred incantations (mantras), sacred rivers (particularly *Ganga*) sacred mountains (*Kailas*), sacred places (*Badri, Kedar Tirupati*), sacred rites and rituals, sacred ethics (*Dharma*), sacred individuals (saints and Gurus), etc. A distinctive feature of Hinduism as it is practiced is a recognition and worship of individuals as reincarnations of God (*Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Satya Sai Baba*), sacred experience, sacred organization and sacred knowledge and beliefs. The sacredness permeates the sacred body. Different parts of the body, house, Gods and Goddesses, the common early morning prayer says that Goddess Laxmi resides on the tip of the fingers, Goddess sarswati at the root of the palm and Lord Vishnu in the centre of the palm.

**Rites and Rituals:**

Since Hinduism is a way of life, rites and rituals permeate the entire life. We have the Nitya Karmas which one has to practice, failing which the individual incurs sin. These include *Panchmahayagnas*. Then there are rites and rituals connected with life cycle and
yearly cycle activities. The former are known as samskaras which must be performed. The yearly cycle rituals consist mainly of celebrations, fasting, vows, baths, etc. The Kamyakarmas are for securing specific results, for fulfilling specific desires.

**Organization:**

Hinduism is the least institutionalised religion. It’s nature of institutionalisation is loose and it differs significantly from other religions.

**Ethics:**

Dharma constitutes Hindu ethics. It is central and a uniting factor. There are certain basic values like the five _yagnas_, which can be treated as mahavratas. However, the rules of morality vary from caste to caste. A Brahmin is not supposed to work for money and indulge in drinking while a vaishya can accumulate money and a shudra can drink. As we go up on the caste hierarchy the ethical expectations increase. A Brahmin is supposed to be pure in all his dealings whereas the same is not expected from the Shudra or Panchama.

As in other religions, ethics and Dharma may not always go together. In some respects, for the same crime, different punishment is meted out to different castes. If we look at the Hindu religion from the point of equality, we find that the corner stone of caste system is inequality. Apart from the castes, the treatment of women, particularly widows and unmarried women is marked by inequality.

**Knowledge:**

Hindu philosophy is distinguished from Western philosophy in one major respect. "The aim of Hindu philosophy is not mere apprehension of reality but an intuitive realization of it." Says T.M.P. Mahadevan. (1974, P. 7).
The six systems of Indian philosophy are therefore called as ‘Shatdarshanas.’ The Indian discourse has focused on self-realization. Vedanta as expounded by Shankarcharya is a subtle, logical and a profound analysis of the existential reality. Yoga, which follows Sankhya in many respects, is also an intellectual exposition but it also offers certain techniques for realizing the Reality. At present both in India and abroad, there is tremendous interest in Vedanta and Yoga.

Experience:

In India everything is subordinate to experience. There is considerable writing on spiritual experience. Some of the experiences go by the name of Samadhi, awakening of the Kundalini or the fourth stage of consciousness. Common to all Indian philosophies is the existence of soul (Atman) which constitutes the fourth stage of consciousness. The soul is unbounded and eternal and in a state of bliss. It is ‘काल्वात्तीत’ (beyond past, present and future), ‘देहवात्तीत’ (gross, subtle and causal body) ‘अवस्थावात्तीत’ (sleep, dream and waking), etc. There is a belief that not only certain practices but saints and Gurus can bless one with this experience.

Apart from various types of spiritual experiences there are also mundane experiences which are claimed to be the result of religious practices. Yagnas, vows, etc. are supposed to fulfill material wishes such as birth of child, cure of disease, attainment of wealth, getting a groom of one’s choice, etc. In fact, there is tremendous sophistication as regards rites and rituals pertaining to Kama karmas. Perhaps to fulfill every desire there is a rite or mantra. Hinduism however, disapproves of certain practices which are Tamasik and which are condemned as Vama marga (wrong path).
In sociology it is very difficult to pass judgments on phenomena whose range and breadth is very vast. This is because there are a large number of elements and contexts and criticism or appreciation is likely to be affected by self selection and assumptions implicit or explicit. This becomes particularly relevant when we discuss Hinduism which is ancient and diverse, and which has also developed by accretion. Therefore, we will be just bringing out observations which appreciate Hinduism and observations which are critical of Hinduism. We will also not be going into details and justifications as it will be space consuming and distract from the basic thrust of the thesis.

1. Hinduism is very ‘Catholic’ as Swami Vivekananda called it in the Parliament of Religions. It is the mother of all religions. Even Jesus, and Mohammad would be respected as prophets.

2. Hinduism’s emphasis is on acceptance of different beliefs. Hence, unlike other religions, it is not a proselytising religion.

3. There is a tremendous ecological concern in Hinduism which goes beyond consideration of pollution. The view is one of a prayerful approach. Animals, plants, rivers and mountains are worshipped in Hinduism.

4. Hinduism believes that divinity pervades the whole creation, 'Ishavasya Idam Sarvam.' Thus, in a sense, ideally it believes in fundamental equality of all individuals and groups.

5. Varnashramadharma along with Purusharthas provides a blue-print for living which has been justified on the basis of socio-psychological needs.

6. Hinduism, by permitting relativity of morals, has allowed individuals and groups to evolve in their own way and at their own pace. There is no regimentation.
7. By recognizing explicitly Artha and Kama, it affirms the world. The verve and enthusiasm, the colour and gaiety with which sacraments and festivals are celebrated is a proof of this.

8. The spiritual content of Hinduism has a very formidable intellectual dimension which has attracted eminent intellectuals like Aldous Huxley, Schopenhaur, Arnold J. Toynbee and others.

9. In yoga certain techniques and philosophies are offered which cover the whole gamut of Human life-physical, physiological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual.

10. Properly interpreted, the doctrine of karma is not fatalism but a call to action.

**Criticism:**

1. Inequality and exploitation are characteristics of Hinduism. It legitimizes various types of exploitation.

2. The karma and rebirth doctrines lead to fatalism. We have very few uprisings against the caste system. Through its overemphasis on salvation and its concept of Maya it has become ‘other worldly.’

3. It is over tolerant and accepts all kinds of behaviour including nakedness of saints, Tantricism with it’s emphasis on sex and sacrifice of human beings.

4. It is dominated by Brahmin priests who had the monopoly of the knowledge of scriptures. It has given rise to various kinds of beliefs and practices rooted in superstitions.

5. Hinduism has glorified poverty and asceticism.
6. By barring re-conversion it has done injustice to those who had left the Hindu fold against their will.

7. There is not much concern for public institutions and facilities. Though the houses are clean the roads are littered with garbage, though river Ganga is worshipped it is a very polluted river.

Hinduism is marked by vagueness, contradictions and paradoxes.

**Hinduism and Women:**

In some respects Hinduism differs much from the three great monotheistic religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In these religions the Gods and prophets are invariably male. Let us see the various aspects of Hinduism pertaining to women.

1. Hinduism has a large number of Goddesses who preside over the major affairs of human beings. The examples are Saraswati, Laxmi and Parvati.

2. Hinduism has a philocentric view of Gods. The goddesses are worshipped by their consorts and other male Gods. An example is the ‘Saraswati stotra’ where the famous trinity-Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh-worship her.

3. Hinduism recognised divinity everywhere including woman.

4. Hinduism has a God *Ardha Nari Nateshwar* where God is depicted as being half male and half female a concept which should please women and feminists.

5. The Hindu goddesses have a role in puranas and myths which portray their strength and power.

7. The Vedantic concept of Brahman according to which the Reality is one and the differentiation is 'Mithya' (illusion).

8. Women portrayed in Puranas, Ramayana and Mahabharata are very strong personalities.

9. In the Ashrama scheme women have been confined mostly to Grihasthashrama.

10. Chastity among unmarried women and fidelity among the married women are integral part of Hindu religious beliefs. Time and again the power and glory of wife devoted to her husband- Pativrata have been emphasised. During the vedic times women were entitled to Upanayana and a few were gifted. We have women rishis like Lopamudra and thinkers like Gargi and Maitreyi.

11. As many writers have pointed out the treatment of wife as distinguished from mother is different. Wife is fully subordinate to husband whereas mother is quite a powerful figure. Goddesses are worshipped as mother.

12. There are contradictory statements regarding the nature of women and the mode of treatment. Manu for example states at one place 'where women are worshipped Gods are pleased. (यज्ञ जार्यसं पूजिते तत्र रमते देवताः:) At an other place he is critical of woman and categorically states 'she does not deserve freedom.' (न स्त्री स्वातंत्र्यम् आहिति).

13. The concept of purity and pollution often lead to the image of woman as unclean and impure.

14. Woman has been accorded the status of shudra with all the attendant consequences, i.e. they cannot study scriptures and undergo Upanayana.
Rites and Rituals and Women:

Scholars have pointed out that there are very few rites performed for woman for her own sake. The rites and rituals performed by women often glorify the husband and are performed for the welfare of husband children and male members of her natal family.

Belief system and women:

Death ceremonies are very important and only a son can perform them and secure a place for parents in heaven. The birth of a daughter was considered by some as a misfortune.

The seductive nature of woman has been emphasised in the scriptures. They are even depicted as destroying the tapascharya of rishis. Often woman is depicted as weak and deserving of protection.

There is a clear discrimination against women in life cycle rituals. A woman is denied Upanayana and consequently her status is that of a Shudra. A. H. Salunkey has pointed out that in almost all the life cycle rituals there is discrimination against women. (Salunkey A. H. 1989 P 10-11)

The position of unmarried woman in Hinduism is very low. In fact, to get daughters married in Bengal (Kulinsim) young girls were married off to aged men either widowers or even those having several wives. Similarly, the position of widow was very low. She could not remarry and had to live life as an ascetic with her head shaven.

1. Women are considered as weak, prone to insanity and being ‘possessed’.
2. When a woman marries, if things go wrong in the husband’s house it is attributed to her qualities, known in Marathi as ‘पणचुंग’ harbinger of bad luck.
3. Woman has been identified with nature as Prakriti giving her a more passive role.
Yearly cycle rituals and Women:

These are marked by feasts, vows, fasts, ritual baths, etc., most of them being for the welfare of husband and children.

A wife's presence was necessary for most major rituals, however, man had more freedom than woman in performing rites and rituals. Social life of women was characterised by Haldi-kumkum ceremonies, from which widows were debarred. As guests on auspicious occasions only married women were invited for meals.

Ethics and women:

(1) Though woman was glorified as mother, as goddess, and as a ‘pativrata’, we find clear discrimination as regards ethics. In matters of sex, men’s promiscuity was condoned, if not approved. Strict chastity and fidelity were enjoined on women whereas men were permitted to have concubines even of lower castes!

(2) Among the higher castes, a widow could not remarry even if she was a child-widow.

(3) Compared to men, women enjoy less freedom and upper caste woman’s life was confined to her home.

(4) The punishment for adultery was more severe for the woman, often she was ostracised by the caste council.

(5) In matters of property and adoption women had very few rights.
Organization and women:

(1) The Indian monasteries have been headed by sanyas is. Without upanayana and study of scriptures and sanayasa women could not become heads of Mutts.

(2) All the great acharyas have been males. Women could not become priests and the role of women was often confined to cleaning, preparing ingredients for worship, cooking, etc. The higher Hindu organizations have been patriarchal, even the official worship of Goddess was done by a male priest.

Knowledge and women:

(1) Since women were not permitted to study sacred scriptures, naturally, their knowledge had a limitation. It was based upon puranas, the various discourses, kirtans and Bhajans.

(2) However, like others, they also had some understanding of basic concepts in Hinduism like Karma, Dharma etc.

(3) Though women did not know about the mantras they had some knowledge regarding modus operandi of rites and rituals. In fact, often women had more understanding of this than men.

(4) Women saints and even ‘virtuous women’ had religious experiences.

(5) As regards mundane experiences, women revel in performing various vrathas. These dimensions which form the subject matter of the thesis have been studied and they are discussed in the different chapters.
Sociological Perspective:

Various sociological theorists have offered their own theories regarding religion and its impact. Normally these sociologists have come to these conclusions by observation, collection and analysis of data. We felt that respondent's views regarding these formulations could give us some precise information.

Table No. 1:1 A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Respondents Opinions Regarding.....</th>
<th>Yes F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Can not say F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Religion is the opium of the masses</td>
<td>074</td>
<td>24.67</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>64.00</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Religion makes masses fatalistic</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>38.67</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>54.00</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Following of religion is childishness or foolishness</td>
<td>019</td>
<td>06.33</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>88.67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Religious festivals and ceremonies unite people</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>92.33</td>
<td>019</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Moral values &amp; ideals are sustained in society because of rituals</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>83.00</td>
<td>039</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Rituals help in conquering adversities, lessening frustration</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>53.33</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>40.67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marx views religion as the opium of the masses. 24.67 percent agree with this perception. Freud considers religious behaviour as 'Immature' and religious rituals as 'Collective Neurosis'. Barely 6.33 percent agree with this viewpoint. In India, Hinduism with its karma theory is seen as making people fatalistic - 38.67 percent agree.
Durkheim is of the clear view that society is sustained because of moral ideals, values and rituals. 83.00 percent support this view point. Durkheim clearly emphasises the behavioural dimension of religion and how it unites people. 92.33 percent felt that religious festivals and ceremonies unite people. Durkheim also felt that religion helps to conquer adversities and misfortunes. Only 53.33 percent agreed with this view (Table No. 1:1 A).

Table 1:1 B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Yes F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Increases will power</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>98.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Gives mental support</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>62.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Gives guideline to overcome</td>
<td>084</td>
<td>52.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table No. 1:1 C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Yes F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Can not say F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Happiness is increased due to rituals</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>81.33</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15.67</td>
<td>009</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Life becomes more meaningful due to religion</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>67.00</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>018</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Religious beliefs, rituals have scientific basis</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>75.33</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>026</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Asked to explain their views, 81.33 percent stated that religious rituals increase happiness, 67 percent felt religion makes life meaningful, 98.75 percent felt it increases will power, 62.50 percent felt it gives mental support and 52.50 percent said it offers guide lines
to overcome difficulties. For an overwhelming majority (75.33%) religious rituals and beliefs have a scientific base (Table No. 1:1 B and C).

Religion is viewed in a positive way by most of our respondents, though a significant percentage is aware if it’s adverse impact on the masses. They dismissed Freud’s view that religious behaviour is immature and appreciate the role of religion in uniting the people and promoting happiness. The Weberian view of meaningfulness is also accepted by a large number.

**Feminism and Women’s Lib:**

Shoma Chatterji states ‘people generally hold that feminists are man-haters and that they are home breakers, that they espouse the cause of free and permissive sex, that they defy the norms of society and family life, that they go about with sling bags on their shoulders, unkempt hair and slipshod clothes, that they smoke and drink and so on and so forth. Feminism is not a physical manifestation of silly ideas as mentioned above. It is a philosophy that is based on ‘historically and culturally concrete realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions,’ in the words of Kamala Bhasin and Nighat Said Khan.

*A Feminist believes in a woman’s movement which aspires to:*

1. Equality in employment
3. Reproductive freedom
4. The same rights, privileges and opportunities as men in the labour force.
5. Safe and voluntary assistance for day-care so as to facilitate the better functioning of work and motherhood.
6. The right to control their own bodies.
(7) The right to decide whether a pregnancy should or should not be terminated. (Chatterji, Shoma, 1993, P. 112-13)

There is considerable discussion in the press and the media regarding feminism known in Marathi as 'त्रिपणूत'. The feminists have, as we have seen earlier, their own views regarding religion which is by and large considered as patriarchal. We asked the respondents about their awareness of feminism.

**Table No. 1:2 A**

**Knowledge About Feminism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Whether Respondents have any knowledge about feminism</th>
<th>Yes F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Can not say F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>50.67</td>
<td>004</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48 percent were aware of it, whereas 50.67 percent were ignorant of the feminist movement. (Table No. 1:2 A).

**Table No. 1:2 B**

**If Yes, Opinion About Feminism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Yes F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>They are extremists</td>
<td></td>
<td>071</td>
<td>49.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>They are active about womens rights</td>
<td></td>
<td>060</td>
<td>41.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>No need of feminism</td>
<td></td>
<td>003</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Any other</td>
<td></td>
<td>013</td>
<td>09.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those who were aware, that is 144, 71 (49.31%) consider feminists as extremists, while 73 did not agree. In other words, the opinion was almost equally divided. A greater number of them, that is 84, did not consider feminists as being active about women's rights, whereas 60 considered them so. Significantly 141 out of 144 agree that there was need for
feminism. Only 3 did not agree with this, only a small minority (13) added other qualifications regarding feminism. (Table No. 1:2 B).

### Table No. 1:2 C

**Respondents Opinion Regarding …**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Yes F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Can not say F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Feminists oppose religion</td>
<td>018</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>42.00</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>52.33</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Whether Respondents have any knowledge about Women’s Liberation Movement</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>79.67</td>
<td>060</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>001</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 18 felt that feminists oppose religion though only 48 percent of the respondents knew about feminism. 239 (79.67%) had knowledge of Women’s Liberation Movement. (Table 1:2 C).

### Table No. 1:2 D

**If Yes, Whether Respondents Support Women’s Lib**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>48.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>077</td>
<td>32.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>To some extent</td>
<td>047</td>
<td>19.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>239</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It will be noted here that in Maharashtra and particularly in Pune, there are scores of women’s organizations. Only 115 supported women’s liberation, 77 opposed it and 47 extended limited support (Table No. 1:2 D).
Table No. 1:3

Respondent’s Views About Next Birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Can not say</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Will marry if she is given a chance to live life again from the beginning</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>81.67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Would like to have children</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>81.67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>If will get chance of rebirth, whether she feels that it should not be of a ‘woman’</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18.67</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>78.00</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>104*</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Is happy as a woman</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>93.67</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 4 = Do not want rebirth

Some of the feminists have portrayed the life of women as an unending agony. We wanted to find out what the respondents would do given a chance to live again. 81.67 percent stated that they would marry and would like to have children. Only 6 percent took the opposite stand. In India the concept of rebirth is well rooted. We felt that if the woman’s life was very oppressive they might prefer to be born as men in their next birth. But 78 percent stated that they would like to be born as woman only whereas 18.67 percent would prefer birth as men. An overwhelming majority (78%) felt that it is worth being reborn as woman. Over all it appears that an overwhelming majority are happy as women. In fact 93.67 percent stated so (Table No. 1:3). One thing is clear they do not have an identity crisis though they would like equality and freedom.