

Introductory Sociology
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Lecture - 15
Religion-I: Social conditions and religious thought

Well friends, today we are going to discuss a new topic and that is of religion. Let me tell you that what we have discussed so far, what is sociology, groups, associations, institutions, organization of work that is much more elementary, formal, conceptual and many of those concepts did not apply or you did not see their utility in applying them to real life situations, but now onwards our lectures will be much more interesting because we are going to discuss issues like religion, deviance, social stratification, social change and at the end of the course one or two lectures on theory. We are always applying theories to some or other fact, but it will be a good idea to recapitulate and to have a more general and more formal discussion on theories.

When you open a textbook of sociology Gisbert, Giddens, Haralambos or any other book it starts with defining what is religion, then its goes to discussion of types of religion, then it discusses theories of religion, sociological theories of religion and this discussion is often followed by discussion of sects, denominations, secularization, relationship between religion and society, religion as an instrument or agency of social control and relationship between religion and morality.

I think when you read the books then you can easily understand what they are. I will also cover all of them, but I thought that let me link religion to what we discussed in the previous lecture, work and let me first discuss a particular type of interpretation of religion. It is not that I personally subscribe to that view and I am not advising you also to follow that theory, that interpretation, understanding of religion. We will have other understandings of religions subsequently, and I will also define what religion is. Discussion of religion is a sensitive matter because religious sentiments, religious feelings, faith are the closest things to us.

Most of us believe in some or other religion or something similar to religion. Any mention of or any critical understanding of religion can hurt our sentiments, but then I will only tell you, let sociologists have their own point of view, but these lectures in sociology of religion are not meant to hurt anybody's sentiment and sociologists

certainly are not interested in knowing God. One day I was telling you that if sociologists identify themselves with scientists or with critical enquiry, they are only interested in knowing those things which can be known on the basis of observations, experiments, surveys, discussion, case studies, focus group discussion, personnel one to one discussion which can be studied on the basis of observed facts.

So, whether there is God or you know these issues related to God are part of religion. In sociology of religion we are more interested in what is, what is that? Actually, we do not even know what religion is, but we will make an attempt to understand what do people mean when they talk about religion because something like religion exists in all societies, though the varieties of religions are so different that it becomes difficult for us to develop a concept of religion which applies to all religions all over the world.

When I come to definition of religion we will see what kind of difficulties we get trapped into when we try to define religion, but still we know something like religion exists, we also know that some people are more religious than others. In some societies more people are religious than in others, percentage of people who identify with religion or who have high degree of religiosity is subject to change when society changes, when economic institutions, political institutions, family, social organization of work, when affluence, degree of affluence, when education, when general belief systems change religions also change. So, religion is a fact of society. To follow Emile Durkheim religion is a social fact which can be explained or need to be explained in terms of other facts of society.

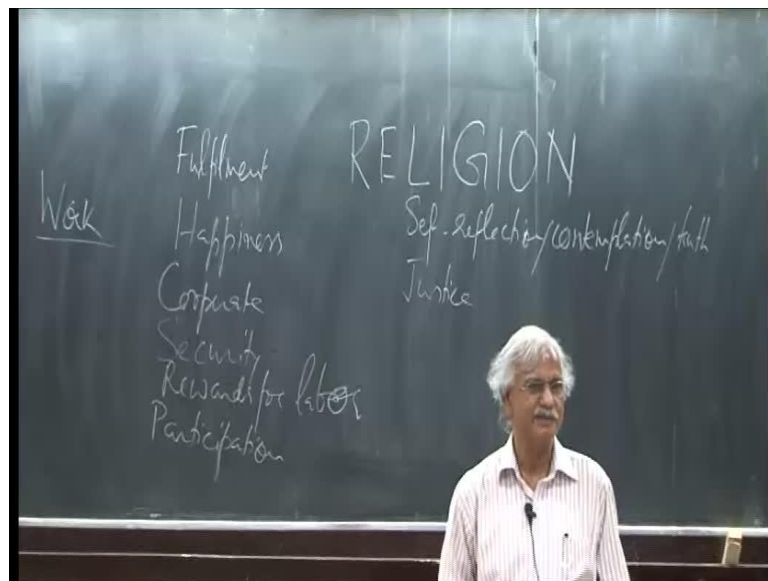
Sociologists are not authorized to say whether Hinduism or Christianity or Islam are right or wrong, scientific or unscientific or have a critical perspective on any specific religion, but they are interested in relating religiosity, religiousness, percentage of people believing in religion to other facts of society. I thought that in place of directly coming to the issue of religion I must illustrate the relationship between work and religion and just before coming to class although I had planned some other way, but just before coming to class I thought that this can be a better way to begin today because this will link the topic of religion to something unrelated work.

We discussed work for two three hours and now we will try to link work to religion. In this respect although I am trying to, I believe that I am trying to say something general

and something which will be acceptable to most of you, but hidden somewhere in this argument are the ideas of Karl Marx. So, I will not be hiding these facts and I will after linking work to religion in a certain manner I will also quote from Haralambos Marxist theory of religion.

You know in human life work is certainly important because through work only human beings survive. Human beings want to survive, they exist, they are born, they grow, they mature bodily, mentally and eventually they die, very simple, in between what happens does not affect whether man will die or not, whether you do B Tech or you do M Tech or MBBS or you become professor or engineer there are certain basic facts of life that we are all born, we grow from childhood to adulthood, we mature, our body diversifies. So, like social differentiation there is differentiation in the body, in physiology in our biology of body, development of new organs, some organs acquiring more strength, continue to function, organs continue to function till we die, some organs get weakened, others survive and at the time of death all organs collapse.

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Now, in this life between birth and death the most important thing whether we realize this or not is work and when I started talking about work I showed how work satisfies all the needs of human beings. Work is essential for survival, work is essential for safety, work is essential for social relations, work is essential for self-esteem and ego and for prestige we want to have in society. It is work through which we self actualize and we

feel that we are doing something good and this is what we wanted to do, through work only.

And one can question Maslow's model of need hierarchy and may use some other model of needs or may refer to some other anthropologist who have studied human needs and needs of society, but we cannot deny the fact that all the needs of human beings and all the needs of society are met through work. There has never been any stage in the development of society when man did not work, whether man had family or not that is debatable, whether man had state or not that is debatable, whether man had religion or not that is debatable, but there has never been any time when men did not work.

Work is very closely associated with man's life, survival, cooperation, development, society developed through work, we develop through work. So, work is central to human life and we expect that work must be self fulfilling, work must make us happy and I am using the term work in a very general sense, not only in the sense of gainful employment, but in a more general sense. So, from that point of view even you are working. According to sociological or sensible definition of work you are not working you are students, but for me from purely, from at least from the perspective which I am applying to work in this lecture we are all working, all efforts and efforts in the context of larger society are part of work. So, study is also work.

We have also known the cases in which man has acquired everything in work itself. Painters like Picasso, scientists like Einstein and our best of musicians, poets Pandit Ravi Shankar, Amjad Ali Khan, our best skilled players hockey player like Dhyan Chand, our politicians like Mahatma Gandhi, they find complete fulfillment in their work. Actually most of them do not even need to go to temple or church or organized yug or pray five times a day or go to a church or to a saint, then they do not need to do all this because in work itself they find complete fulfillment and many of express that through music, through discourses, through painting, through writing poems like Rabindranath Tagore.

In writing poems they are realizing themselves, they are self actualizing, they have known truth. Novelist like Premchand or Sarath Chand Chattopadhyay, they are realizing truth in writing novels. So, work is complete in itself. In normal conditions or in ideal conditions, in normal conditions are work is complete in itself we expect that if there is a

true student or a normal student of physics. Then he likes physics so much that in studying physics, in doing experiments of physics he achieve everything in life, whether he gets a good employment or not that is secondary, he is not working for employment if there is a true student of physics.

The great physicist whom you know by reading text books of physics did not study physics to get good CPI and good employment subsequently, they were like saints, fakirs they they achieved everything when Galileo or Archimedes or Newton, when these people discovered something, found something new they they found what they understood as truth, they reached the same stage which Buddha reached after finding nirvana.

This is work, normally we expect because work is central to human beings and it is expected that man finds everything including the highest order of satisfaction in work. So, before coming to class just now I wrote some points that what do we expect from work and work includes everything. All the social actions done in a social context and that includes even education. So, our expectation is that we must find fulfillment, we must find. If work, if if we are a normal worker, if we are devoted to work and many of us many times when the influence of, corrupting influence of society is not on us we do find that work can be quiet fulfilling.

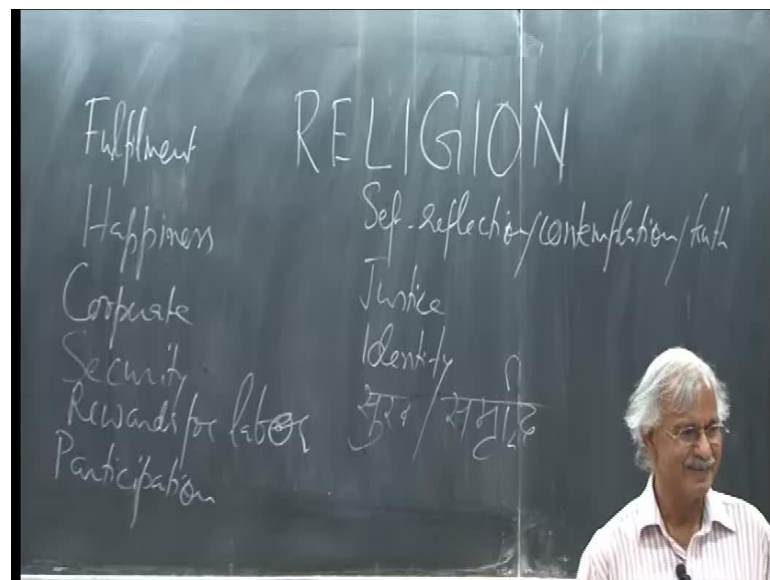
You know it is great to know like for a student of sociology it is a great achievement to know how sociologists look at religion, whether this knowledge will help him in getting admission to a management course or qualifying civil service or immediate aim of getting a pass grade that is secondary. For a real student of you know or in normal times we expect that for students of sociology to learn about theories of sociology of religion should itself be fulfilling.

We expect that work should give happiness, you feel happy by working in the manner artists and craftsmen feel happy, in the manner political leaders feel happy in political action, in the manner spiritual gurus feel happy in spiritual action, in the manner economist feel happy by developing a new theory of economics, work should give us happiness. It is through work that we learn to cooperate. In work we learn to cooperate. We meet so many other persons, so many other workers.

So, when you are doing sociology you are meeting hundred other students and you are learning to cooperate. You tend to develop bonds with a large number of other people involved in that work and these bondages themselves can be quiet self fulfilling, these bondages will continue even when you are not studying sociology. Bondages, cooperation, you learn to cooperate collectively; that work you engage in work as an individual, but you find that work is collective and through work you as an individual and you along with others as society are trying to reach a higher goal, cooperation.

In work you get all other things, you feel secure, you get certain rewards, rewards for labor, efforts made through work you seek participation in larger society, in work you get self reflection, am I right? I ask, am I right? I am, this is my, over the years I have developed this position on this topic, am I right? I ask myself. They are moments of self reflection, reflexivity. Contemplation, there are moments of contemplation, discovery of truth. In work you encounter ideas of justice, fairness, beauty, equality, divinity, humanity and divinity you realize your humanity, you realize your divinity in work. That you are part of a cosmos, a universe and you have a certain relationship with others who are also similar part of the cosmos.

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Quite often through work you develop your identity, what are you? I am a farmer, what are you? I am a carpenter, what are you? I am a software engineer. So, your identity in society in social organization is from your work. In general I like two terms of Hindi and

because most of you understand Hindi I will say that through work you get (()) and (()) that is why you work, happiness and prosperity. That is why you are working, you have worked so hard, you have worked so hard to get very good marks in high school and then in intermediate and then you really struggled out of 24 hours you spent 20 sometimes on just studying physics, chemistry, maths.

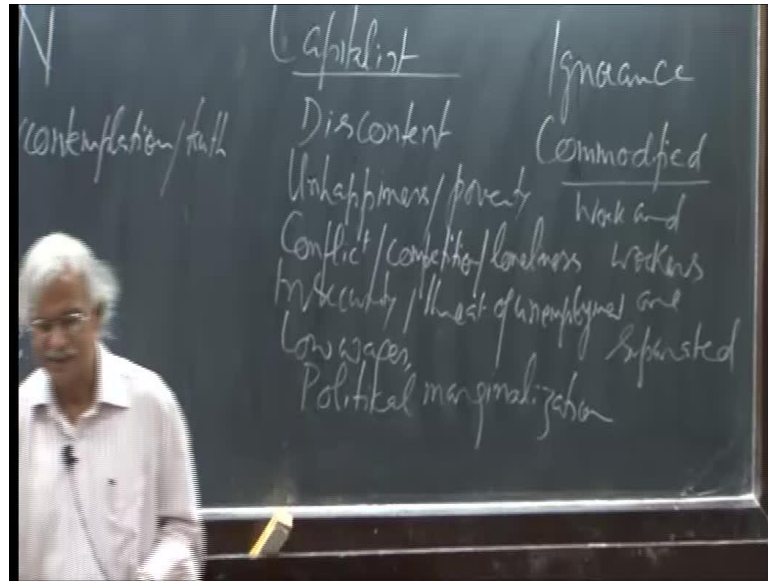
Then you come to IIT, Kanpur again you work and work in different directions. If you do not devote so much time to studies as you should that is simply because of other influences which have corrupted or adulterated your mind. So, somebody says that you see when you go for interviews when companies come to select you, your CPI is important, no doubt. That you must have some minimum CPI, but your leadership qualities, your communication qualities, other qualities are equally important and sometimes more important.

So, you drift from studies and you start spending more time on (()) and (()), hostel events because you have learned this from society. If you had not learned this from society, from other students maybe you would devote more time to your engineering or science education. The goal is (()) whether you devote more time to education or not, you divide your time into education and other things, hostel activities, technical activities, yoga activities, gymkhana, photographic level.

All types of students, in general human beings are looking for (()). If I am teaching here, I came to IIT, Kanpur in the hope of (()). All of us are looking for some or other job for all these reasons and ultimately for (()). I should be happy and I should be prosperous. Sometime, if you deviate from the path, if you grow into a corrupt politician or a corrupt bureaucrat, yesterday our income tax commissioner of Kanpur was arrested by CBI for taking a bribe of 30 lakh.

If this man engages in corruption that is also for (()). He thought that this 30 lakh rupees that he gets from a builder in Kanpur will lead to happiness and prosperity, everybody is working, rightly or wrongly, in right direction or wrong direction, according to norms of society or against the norms of society, the goal is (()). Whether (()) comes or not that is a different issue, to our income tax commissioner (()) did not come from 30 lakh rupees, but he thought.

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So, this is our and there is nothing wrong if we expect these things from work. Work is central, work is always present, everybody will have to work. We cannot envision a society in which people will not have to work from the very early days from paleolithic time to the times this human world will survive people will work and they will expect many things from work, but in industrial society or in capitalism to be more specific industrial society can be capitalist society, can be socialist society, can be communist society, can be mixed economy, can be syndicalist society, can be anarchy.

Industrial society can take various forms, but in a capitalist society in which some people have the possession over means of production and others have nothing except their labor power, what happens to them? In place of fulfillment there is discontent. A clerk is unhappy, discontentment, there is discontentment among bank clerks, there is discontent among bureaucrats, there is discontent among rickshaw pullers, you meet any person, nobody is happy with his work and that is why nobody wants to encourage his sons and daughters to do the same kind of work that he has been doing.

Doctors will tell their sons it is not worth to become a doctor, there is no life, they are discontented, that he better join a technical institution, in four years time you will complete your B Tech and immediately you get a very good job, very good salary and if you want to do something else in life you, that also you can try later, but first you

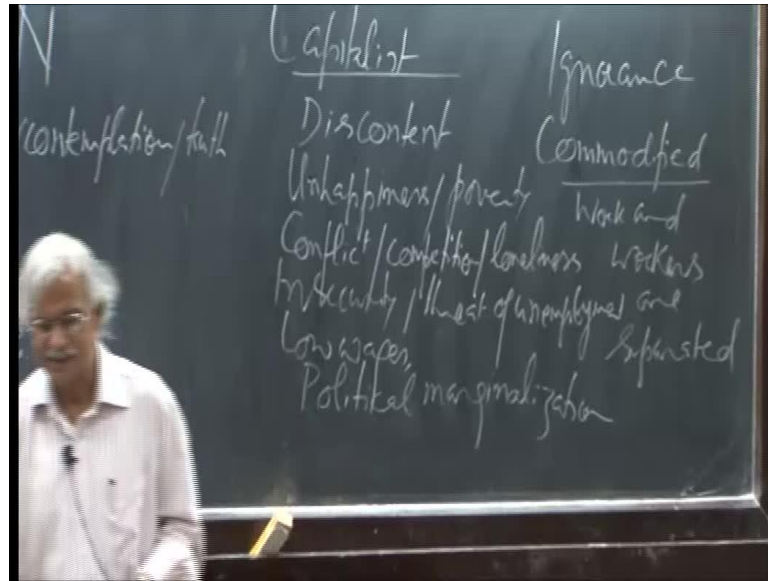
become an engineer because he he is discontented with medical profession. Everybody, in capitalist society everybody is discontented.

Workers are discontented, middle classes; although Karl Marx thought that only workers are discontented, later Marxist writers have developed the idea that even middle classes, upper middle classes, everybody is discontented, everybody is alienated. In place of happiness there is all around more unhappiness. In all capitalist societies unhappiness and there is poverty. In place of cooperation, normally we expect that there should be a cooperation between those who are doing the same kind of work, they can share their experience, they can learn from each other, they can provide motivation to each other, they can help in maintaining their moral, commitment, loyalty, but instead of that in place of cooperation you find conflict.

Conflict, competition, unhealthy competition, loneliness because of this you do not share your notes and PhD students do not talk to each other. Normally, we expect that all those who are doing PhD at least in the same department, at least in the same discipline or subject must talk to each other, learn from each other's experiences, but what is happening in this capitalist society, conflict, each of us treats others as though they are our rivals, all other teachers are rivals to one teacher, all other students are competitors, rivals to students, other rickshaw pullers are rivals to rickshaw pullers, other bureaucrats are rivals to bureaucrats, other politicians are rivals to politicians and there is loneliness, nobody to help me, I am alone, nobody like this, like this. Only I think about such issues.

Then in place of security we have insecurity. In capitalist society we are insecure; there is always a threat of unemployment. As a matter of fact as I was showing yesterday more is the development, more is accumulation of capital, more is declined in proportion of variable capital, it is variable capital or wages which are responsible for all those things happiness, peace and prosperity of workers, but the iron law of capitalist accumulation shows that development of society, modernize, what you call modernization, affluence, rise in per capita income. Now, those things lead to deterioration in the condition of the working classes. Low wages, wages maintained at a level that workers can only survive.

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Karl Marx in with regard to work this is a very important point that Karl Marx explains why wages remain low. Wages remain low for a number of reasons, one that there are certain industries which survive on low wages, bangle making, lock making, household industry, village industry, khadi and village industry in our country, handicrafts and various types of works of artisans. Imagine that a weaver working in khadi and gramodyog, khadi and village industry is given the same salary which a software engineer is given in Bangalore; it will become impossible for most people to wear khadi.

If the textile workers are given, workers are given the same salary if you give 5 to 10 lakh rupees per per year to manual workers in textile industry, it will be impossible for middle classes, forget about poor classes to put on some clothes. Clothes will become so expensive. If we are able to wear clothes, the reason is that there is someone who has been exploited and whose wages are kept at a level that the working class can just survive.

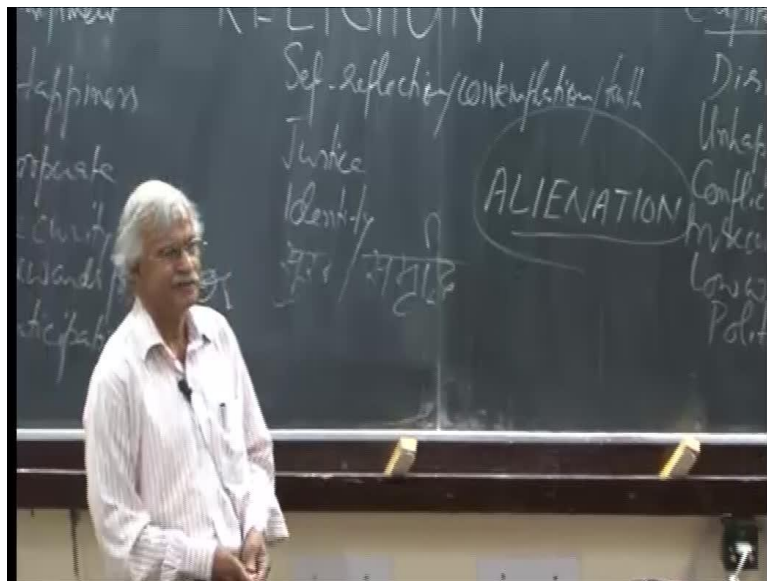
They must survive; if the working class does not survive there will be no manufacturing, no production. So, they have to survive, but their wages are to be kept at such a, such a low level that they can only survive, nothing else. And if the wages of the lowest class of workers or in khadi and gramodyog are raised then obviously those who are considered to be above them, their wages or their salaries will also have to be raised. Then the wages

and salaries of those above them will also have to be raised in capitalist society and so the survival of capitalism which is based on profits will become impossible.

Society cannot run, capitalist society cannot run. So, wages have to be kept low and the workers have to be kept under the threat of unemployment. So, in Gisbert's book that idea of brown, that unemployment is a negative motivation, workers are motivated quite often by giving them not incentive, not raising their moral, but by showing a negative incentive that if you have, if you do not work then you will become unemployed. Then there is political marginalization, no role of workers, no role of workers in political participation in village, in city.

Workers are kept in dark, ignorance about everything, ignorance about the nature of work in which they are engaged, ignorance about society, about political processes, ignorance about judiciary, about state, ignorance about truth in general, all kinds of truth and the work gets commodified which means that work and workers are separated.

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This and it is for this situation that Marx uses the term alienation. To some extent this alienation must have been present in all types of societies, but alienation is maximum in capitalist society. In all class society there is some separation between work and workers, but still the work of hunting because the product of hunting is in principle available to all the members of the tribe or the band. Work and workers are not alienated you know. The

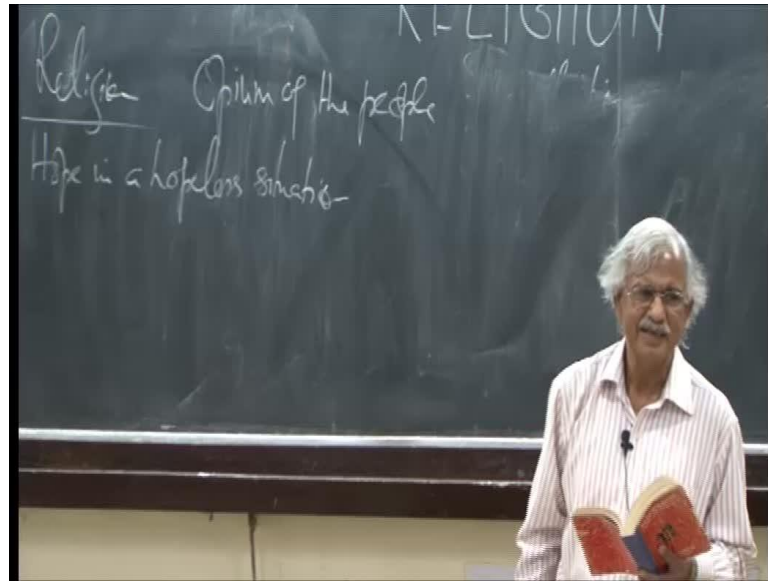
output of work belongs to all the workers, all the tribesmen, all the members of the clan or sub clan.

Even in feudal agricultural society the produce of work agricultural production, wheat, pulses, vegetables, fruits or in crafts, work of craftsmen or in service, work of servicemen is closely associated with the workers. The only thing that happens in feudal society is that a part, actually wheat produced by the peasants belongs to peasants, wheat and peasants are not separated. Only thing is that in feudal society a part of the produce, the part, a part of the wheat, a part of the paddy or a part of fruits and vegetables is taken away by the feudal lords in the form of taxation or sometime by coercion.

According to norms of society a part of that 5 percent, 10 percent depending on whether feudal lords, nobles or the kings or monarchs are good or bad, benevolent or malevolent a part of that will be taken, but what the farmers do with the rest of that, what the farmers do with 90 percent, that is not the concern of kings. And this is one reason why Indian society or societies of this type, civilizations which have existed for thousands of year existed, it did not matter whether who is ruling India, whether some Nand is ruling or some Gupta is ruling or some Mughal is ruling or some British man is ruling, it does not matter.

The social organization of work remained largely unaffected despite so many interventions on the part of the political system, our social organization did not change because there was not so much of commodification, but today work is separated from the worker and worker is given wages. The volume or the amount of wages is so low that workers can only survive or that number of workers can survive which are necessary to maintain production in the capitalist society. So, as a result of that you have alienation.

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Alienation means unhappiness. In place of peace and prosperity we have unhappiness, there is no meaning in life, there is no knowledge, no un, no iota of truth, no cooperation and in this situation when workers are alienated the only thing they can fall back on is a religion. You see Karl Marx, for Karl Marx it is not important whether religion is good or bad, he is neither in support of religion nor against religion, but Karl Marx will say that in the conditions of capitalism where people are alienated religion is the only hope in the hopeless situation of capitalism. Hope of work, hope in a hopeless situation.

Now, let me read one or two paragraphs from Haralambos. Haralambos is explaining Marxist theory of religion; I will read two though relatively long paragraphs. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature that means religion may not be required by the exploiters, by the dominant classes, by the powerful people. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature. The sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of the soulless condition, conditions are soulless, it is the opium of the people. It does nothing to solve the problem, it does not solve the problem, it is not that by becoming religious or by engaging in religion you get solution to your problems, but it is the opium, it is simply a misguided attempt to make life bearable, as such religion merely stupefies its adherence rather than bringing them true happiness and fulfillment.

In Lenin's world religion is a kind of spiritual gin in which the slaves of capital drown their human shape and their claims to any decent life. From a Marxian perspective most

religious movements originate in oppressed classes. Christianity was a movement against oppression. In the beginning though later on it became an orthodox religion, but initially Christianity was a revolt against the powerful Jews. Initially the movement by Prophet Muhammad was a movement against the wrong conditions and against the decadent ruling classes of that time, but gradually all religions Christianity, Islam all religions take the same shape because conditions have not changed.

Religion can dull, why religion then? Religion can dull the pain of oppression in the following ways. Firstly, it promises a paradise of eternal bliss in life after death. (()), because there is no peace and prosperity here. So, people feel happy (()) I am an honest worker and they are not giving due rewards to workers, workers are unhappy, God is watching them also, I will be, I will go to heaven, I will have peace and prosperity after my death and they will burn in the fire of hell.

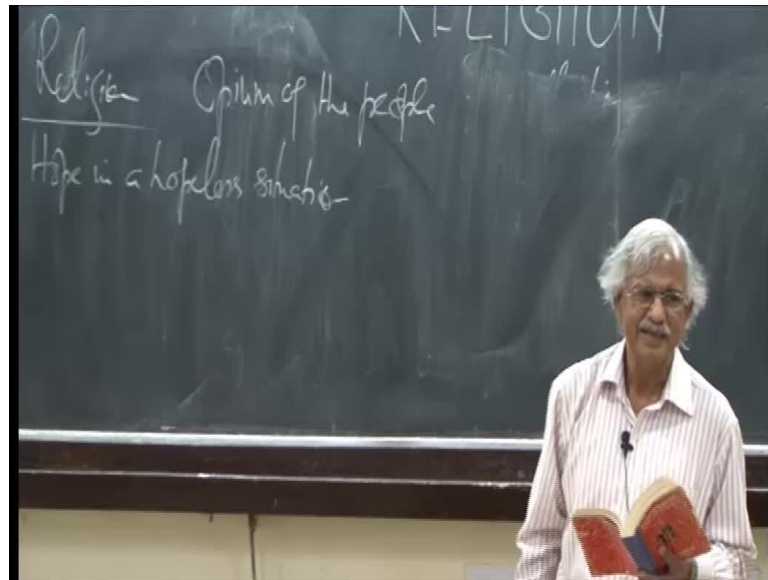
Engel's argue that the appeal of Christianity to oppress classes lies in its promise of salvation from bondage and misery in the afterlife. The Christian vision of heaven can make life on earth more bearable, make more bearable by giving people something to look forward, there is something to look forward. In this world otherwise what is they have to look forward for a rickshaw puller? What is they have to look forward for a small shopkeeper running a bicycle shop? (()) cycle repair, scooter mechanic, what is there to look forward? There is nothing to look forward in this life, in this world, in this society. So, he imagines that after his death he will live a good life if not now then.

Secondly, some religions make a virtue of the suffering produced by oppression. Oppression itself becomes a virtue. In particular those who bear the deprivations of poverty with dignity and humility will be rewarded for their virtue. This view is contained in the well known biblical quotation, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle (()) exaggeration hyperbole, but that is also possible. A camel can pass through the needle of an eye. Now, a camel can pass through the eye of a needle, but it says the, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, rich man will not go to heaven.

Religion thus makes poverty more tolerable by offering a reward for suffering and promising redress for injustice in the afterlife. So, some religions therefore, make a virtue of suffering, fasting, not wearing good clothes, not eating well, not desiring very

tasty food, not desiring to live in a decent colony, not desiring to have affluence, not desiring anything because from non desires or from the life of poverty you earn some, married some virtues, religious married and on the basis of this religious married in the afterlife you will enjoy in heaven.

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Mahatma Gandhi also talked of voluntary poverty. Voluntary poverty, poverty becomes a virtue. Actually, poverty is the product of capitalist society, but people think that poverty is a good thing or they tend to rationalize their poverty, with this rationalization of poverty they survive in the hope of something in the afterlife where today rich men, affluent people, exploiters, dominant people will burn in the fire of hell, brimstones, sulfur and we poor people will be happy, we will have all our desires fulfilled.

Thirdly, religion can offer the hope of supernatural intervention to solve the problems on earth when they do not find, when the ordinary people, the worker, the proletariat, even the middle classes when they do not find any hope in this hopeless world, all politicians are corrupt, all religious pundits are corrupt, exploitative, selfish, all intellectuals are self seeking and the whole system is decadent, then people survive with the faith that something miraculous will happen and what is that in Geetha (()) a false faith, a false faith when there is so much of corruption, exploitation, oppression all around then miracle will happen and in this kalyug God will manifest in the form of a human being or

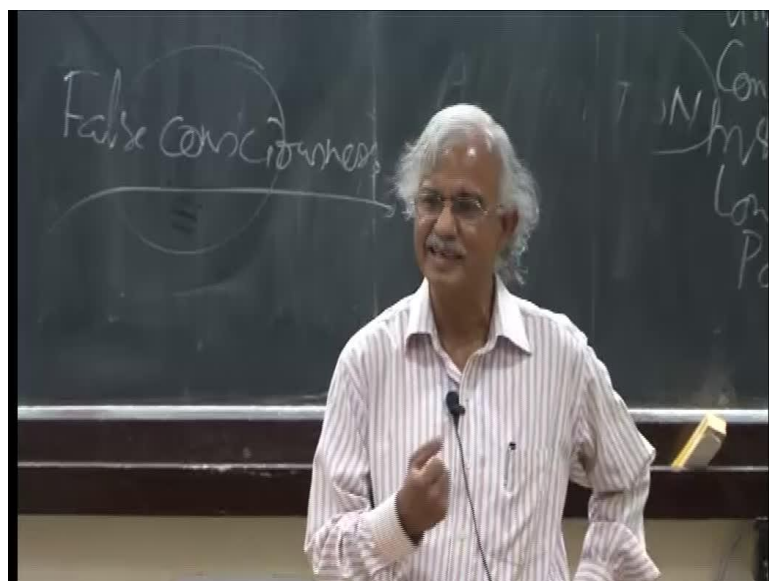
a half human, half animal and destroy the corrupt people and make the working classes or the honest people happy.

Members of religious groups such as Jehovah's witnesses live in anticipation of the day when the supernatural powers will descend from on high and create heaven on earth, same concept as the concept of avatar in Hindu religion. Fourthly, religion often justify the social order and a person's position within it. God can be seen as creating and ordaining the social structure as in the following version. So, this was the idea of Karl Marx and other Marxist writers.

Now, sociologists of religion including Karl Marx are not authentic scholars to transmit you religious experience or spiritual experience as in some sects you must have heard that in India there are many sects where nam or mantra or prana is transmitted from guru to disciples or from some close disciples of guru to initiators.

Sociologists do not have any such sociologist cannot give you anything, any nam or any mantra or prana with which you can feel yourself knowledgeable. Sociologists only study what is this religion like, why is that in some societies people are more religious, why is it that the nature of religion, we will in the next lecture we will see how the nature of religion changes and we will also talk a little bit of about some world religions. So, this is for Karl Marx religion is part of false consciousness.

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I thought that I must first introduce the idea why sociologists are interested in religion, because for sociologists, religion is connected with other facts of society for example, in Karl Marx's theory religiosity or religiousness is part of the general theory of capitalist order and according to this theory people do not find any fulfillment in work, work leads to suffering, exploitation, unhappiness, conflicts, competition, unemployment, deprivation, pathological condition, pathological social order, pathological psychological order and one result of pathological psyche psychological order false consciousness.

One result, religion is the result, religion does not solve problem. Religion does not solve psychotic problems in the way psychiatrist claim to solve, but religion is the product of psychiatric disorders in a society in which the whole order is disorderly and exploitative and generates false consciousness. So, religion tells people that you will be rewarded if not now you will be rewarded in the next life, after life, after death there will be no place of the exploiters in the heaven, only you will go to heaven and all exploiters will go to hell.

Religion help the exploiters or the dominant classes of society by maintaining social order, by making people adhere to norms of society which are based on exploitation, inequality and injustice and religion eulogizes poverty, suffering. It say that it is good to suffer, some religion, if not all religion, there are many religions which make virtue of suffering, Jain religion. Jain religion is one religion of all the religions which are coming to my mind Jain is one religion which makes the highest virtue of suffering.

So, much virtues that in the stage of perfection Jain monks are supposed to stop even eating, they will not eat, they will not drink water and maybe they will survive for a few days or a few or for a few months, there is technical name for this development and you know eventually after some days or some months they will die. This is the highest virtue of life. I am not ridiculing the Jain concept of this, of attaining nirvanas, that this is how jiva ultimately reaches the moksha, liberation, this is from Jain perspective.

From sociological perspective the work if workers are Jain then the workers they know that nothing can be done in this world. So, they develop a false sense that suffering is good and suffering is so good that not only this we are suffering in in this capitalist society, we should suffer and we should suffer more (()) ultimately, they must stop drinking and eating and they must suffer, they must do some (()) and this (()), this (())

will take them to the highest goal of life, liberation. So, religion is justified, maintained and is produced by the capitalist society and religion helps the capitalist society to function by making people, working classes stupefied and keeping them in false consciousness.