

Paper – Sociology of Religion, B.A. Honours

Topic: Religion

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Religion:

Religion being a pervasive and universal institution is deeply rooted in human beings. It is not just a strict institution but also exerts a tremendous influence upon all other institutions. Many sociologists and anthropologists were fascinated by the mystic side of religion. Weber therefore was no exception. His study says that religion which is based on cultural needs of man has now added new dimension to human life and human development.

Weber suggested that the protestant institution and its ethic have played an important role in the development of their economy. This idea of Weber has been beautifully ascribed in his highly acclaimed book, protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism (1905). In the book Weber gives a prolonged ascription of his kind of religion.

Before writing the book he separated his role as a scientist from that of a publicist. His visit to America gave him an opportunity to understand and to observe first hand, some aspects of capitalism, labour relations and the protestant ethics in practice. Weber therefore termed his work as a factual refutation of the materialistic correction of history.

Essence of the theory:

The sociology of religion by Weber is a piece with all his sociology. His study promulgates that now far a particular sect of religion can influence the economic behavior of its followers. Weber's main concern was to what extent religious conceptions of the world of existence have influenced the economic behavior of various societies and specially the western society. Weber says that Calvinist sect of protestant Christian religion has strongest influences on the development of capitalism.

The theory also captures several significant socio-economic influences which distinguish western from the eastern characteristics. He also embarked upon, through the 'method of difference' a comparative survey of the relation of economic ethics of world religions to economic life and to underline 'those elements of the economic ethics of western religion which differentiate them from others'.

Motivation for writing:

Weber desired to delineate the uniqueness of western capitalism and the values and interests given to its peculiar structures and dynamics.

Weber examines these connections from two points of view:

1. The influence of these religions doctrines on economy.
2. The position of the groups in the economic system.

He was less concerned with the ethical doctrine as expounded by the theologians than with these doctrines in their popular form as they guide their behaviour. He wanted to comprehend capitalism as a

civilization. The civilization modern man what motivated Weber the most is the primary orientation to the attainment of profit in nominally peaceful. System of exchange relationship.

One of the major reasons behind Weber's theory was the result of his endeavor to undertake a distinct and independent theoretical analysis of the social and political issues and his dissatisfaction with both Marxism and German historical economics and jurisprudence to solve these problems.

Inter – relationship between religions ethics and economy:

Superficially, religion and society seem potes apart. Religion Coreuns itself with the beyond, whereas economy deals with the practical business of working producing and consuming. According to him it was the ideas, beliefs, values and would view of human societies that guided the way their members acted, even in the economics sphere. Religion prescribes certain guidelines of behaviour. It is in accordance with these guidelines that followers direct on orient their activities. These guidelines are incorporated in the body of religious ethics of each religious system.

Let us illustrates Weber's view with an example from our society:

'A health expert might suggest that if Indians would eat beef, the problem of hunger and mal nutrition might be lessened. But the very idea of cow – slaughter is revolting to most Hindus and would probably be rejected outright. So even though clow – slaughter may seen economically rational, on logical, values and ideas definitely influence. The making of certain decisions. It is our beliefs and values which helps to. It was this link between religious belief and economic behaviour that Weber tried to bring out in his work.

Weber's comparative studies on Religion:

Weber tries to establish relation between religious ethics on the. One hand and the economic behaviour on the other. Weber also tries to substantiate or validate this idea with the help of comparative studies of various would religions.

Weber studies:

1. Confucianism in Ancient China.
2. Hinduism in Ancient India.
3. Judaism in Ancient Palestine (West Asia)
1. Confucianism in Ancient: Ancient China had a well developed economy. Trade, Commerce, finance and manufacture were quite advanced. Despite the presence of these material conditions, western – style of capitalism did not develop there. Because according to Weber, the Confucian ethic would not permit this.

Confucian ideas can be summed up as follows:

1. Belief in the order of the universe the cosmos.
2. Man should aim at being in harmony with nature and the cosmos.
3. Behaviour is to be guided by tradition. All wisdom lies in the past.

4. Family and kin ties and obligation were never to be neglected.

The stress on harmony traditionalism and family obligations are quite contradictory to the ventless pursuit of profit for its own sake. Indeed the spirit of capitalism would probably have been considered to be bad manners.

Judaism in West Asia:

This is the religion of the Jews who originally inhabited the land of Palestine in West Asia. Judaism is the oldest of the monotheistic. Religions a religion that speaks of one, all powerful and almighty God on 'Jahweh'.

Their prophets united them in the belief that they were the chosen ones of God and must help to establish God's Kingdom on Earth. Judaism unlike Confucianism and Hinduism speaks of an ethic of mastery over the environment not harmony. Weber says, Judaism would have generated the spirit of capitalism. However, certain historical forces prevented this. The Exodus or mass migration of the Jews from their homeland due to persecution left them scattered all over the world. Their economic participation was restricted to money lending, which they did very successfully.

Hinduism in India:

Weber expressed a strictly negative attitude while dealing with the religion of India towards the possibility of rational capitalism existing within the ethos of Hinduism. To him, it is extremely unlikely that the organization of modern capitalism could have originated in a caste based. Society like India. Now could capitalism imported from the west hope to flourish in India.

India like China was economically fairly advanced. Ancient India made valuable contributions to science. Trade links were established in various part of the world. But according to Weber, Hinduism did not provide a suitable ethic for the development of capitalism. The idea of 'Dharma', 'Karma'. 'Puran', Janma made Indians defeatists and fatalists. Weber feels that Hindus have no motivation to improve their economic condition. Weber says, Hindus would not consider it worthwhile to put in the sort of hand work that capitalism demanded. Hinduism preaches other worldly asceticism.

Criticism:

Weber says 'only specialists are allowed to comment on my theory'. Which expounds his immensity as a sociologist. Weber himself has focused on some of the limitation of his theory.

1. He says that his protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism might not be the idealist position. He therefore says that although the world is what the people's thought make of it but the ideas do need economic motive for a certain sect to progress.
2. He also says that he is presenting just one side of the coin, the other side of the material interest and socio – economic situation of Europe is still there that he.