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RELIGION AND MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Introduction

Relationship between religion and society has widely been recognized today. Though religion is a coherent system concerning the supernatural, this system has serious implications for the behaviour and welfare of its adherents.¹ It has an ideological and a social dimension. Recognizing and emphasizing the social character of religion Emile Durkheim identified the source of the "sacred" in the group or society itself.² The worship of God was seen by Durkheim as the disguised worship of the society, the great entity upon which the individual depended.

Sociologists of religion like Betty Scharff,³ Bryan Wilson,⁴ Michael Hill,⁵ Thomas F. O'Dea⁶ and others have brought out the interrelation of religion and other social institutions. Social scientists, however, are not unanimous in their analysis of the relation between religion and society. Karl Marx, for example, argued that religion is the opium of the people. "Man makes religion, religion does not make man... Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, the spirit of a spiritless condition... It is the opium of the people."⁷ In contrast, Max Weber in his study of the major religions of the world, has upheld the positive contributions of religion to the

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1. Harry M. Johnson, *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction*, (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1972), p. 392.
 2. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Trans. by Joseph Ward Swain (Illinois), pp. 415-445.
 3. Betty R. Scharff, *The Sociological Study of Religion* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1970).
 4. Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
 5. Michael Hill, *A Sociology of Religion* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973).
 6. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Sociology of Religion* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall, Inc.), 1966.
 7. K. Marx and F. Engels *On Religion* (Moscow: Progress publishers, 1972), pp. 37-38.

society.⁸ As this analysis lies within the framework of Weberian concept of religion, we shall begin by summarizing Weber's views.

2. Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism

Max Weber in his book *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* argued how Protestant ethic, particularly its Calvinistic version positively contributed to the material development of Western Europe and North America. Weber's attempt to establish his argument can be arranged in three steps. First, at the beginning of his study, statistical analyses are used to support the argument. In the regions of mixed religious composition in Germany, when compared to the Catholics, Protestants and particularly Calvinists, possessed a disproportionate amount of wealth and held positions which were economically very important. This raised the question whether religious ideas influenced the orientation that men and groups give to their activity. Secondly, his analysis was intended to establish a spiritual or intellectual affinity between the spirit of protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Finally, in his study of Protestantism and capitalism, Weber tried to discover whether in other religious traditions—Hinduism,⁹ Taoism,¹⁰ primitive Judaism,¹¹ and Islam¹²—social conditions were favourable or unfavourable to promote the development of capitalism of the Western type. Weber's study of capitalism in the West, as well as its absence in the East, is based on the conviction that religious ideas have definite influence on national economic action.

Capitalism as a system of profit-making enterprise is not peculiar to modern Western society. Weber himself does not hesitate to speak of capitalism as existing in many times and places, such as, China, India, Babylon, Egypt, Mediterranean antiquity, the Middle Ages and

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8. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Trans. by T. Parsons) (New York: Charles Scriber's & Sons, 1958).
 9. M. Weber, *The Religion of India, The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, Trans. and Ed., Hans H. Gerth & Don Martindale (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958).
 10. *The Religion of China, Confucianism and Taoism*, Trans. and Ed. By Hans H. Gerth (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1951).
 11. *Ancient Judaism*, Trans. and Ed. by Hans H. Gerth and Martindale (Illinois: The Free Press, 1952).
 12. *Sociology of Religion*, Trans. by Fischhoff Ephraim, (London: Muthuen & Co., Ltd, 1963).

modern times.¹³ The difference of the modern West from all these is only one of degree, which, however, is a highly significant one.

Weber carefully distinguishes between capitalistic acquisitiveness and mere greed or psychological instincts of acquisition.¹⁴ The latter, he says, is by no means peculiar to modern society. According to Weber the central feature of modern capitalism is the "rational capitalistic organization of free labour." This is, in turn, an example of a more general, fundamentally important type of social organization, which Weber calls "bureaucracy." It involves the following features:¹⁵ fixed areas of official jurisdiction governed by laws and regulations; offices organized on the basis of a clear hierarchy of authority; administration based on written documentation and conducted according to procedure for which special training is required; personally free officials appointed on the basis of technical qualifications; appropriation of neither office nor the means of administration by the official; the role of the participant conceived as an office when one acts by virtue of the authority vested in the office and not on personal influence or family ties; a career for the official in which promotion is governed by merit; and a fixed salary paid according to rank. Bureaucracy, thus, is the most efficient known method of organization of large numbers of persons for the performance of complicated tasks of administration. Its spread too is, to a considerable extent, accounted for by its superior efficiency. At the same time it is dependent on the existence of rather special social conditions, the absence of which may constitute a serious barrier to its development, no matter how great the objective need.

In contrast with this rationalistic economy, Weber defines another type of economic activity, which he calls traditionalism.¹⁶ Traditionalism is present where workers prefer less work to more pay; where during working hours they seek maximum comfort and minimum of exertion and where they are unable or unwilling to adapt themselves to more rationalized methods of work. Traditionalistic economic habit is also characterized by lack of acquisitive drive beyond the need for comfortable

13. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 19.

14. T. Parsons, *Structure of Social Action*, (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1949), p. 504.

15. Karl Mannheim, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (London: Trubner & Co., 1947), pp. 196-198.

16. Parsons, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

living. Workers' relations and customs are personal and affective in this type of economy.

Leisurely work habits constitute only one aspect of economic traditionalism. Other phenomena such as avarice and a completely unscrupulous drive too "are more characteristic of precapitalist than of capitalist societies... For neither avarice nor a lax moral code... (are) compatible with the idea of hard work as a virtue and hence a moral obligation."¹⁷

Having established his descriptive account of modern capitalism Weber puts forward his thesis: The problem is "the influence of certain religious ideas on the development of an economic spirit, or the ethos of an economic system. In this case we are dealing with the connection of the spirit of modern economic life with the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism."¹⁸ Weber thus wanted to show how certain types of Protestantism favoured the rational pursuit of economic gain.

Among the ascetic branches of Protestantism, Weber rested his theory mainly on Calvinism. Calvinistic theology may be said to consist of five logically independent yet empirically interdependent assumptions.¹⁹ They are:

1. There is an absolute, transcendent God, who is known only through his revelation.
2. This God has predestined all human souls, for reasons totally beyond possible human comprehension, either to eternal salvation or to eternal damnation.
3. God has created the world and placed man in it solely for the increase of his glory.
4. To this end he has decreed that man, regardless of whether predestined to salvation or damnation, shall labour to establish the kingdom of God on earth.
5. All things of the world and flesh are, left to themselves, irreparably lost to sin and death from which there is no escape except by grace. No human intermediaries can help to change the eternal decrees of God.

17. Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber, An Intellectual Portrait*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1960), p. 74.

18. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 27.

19. Parsons, *op. cit.*, p. 522.

What are the practical implications of these? Complete transcendence of God excludes any kind of mysticism with the Divine.²⁰ A Calvinist, therefore, should be involved in worldly activities. In this worldly involvement, however, he should have perfect control over the flesh.²¹ This is because of the asceticism preached by Calvinism according to which man must not indulge in things pertaining to the flesh. In this worldly asceticism Weber found the rationally planned life of the Calvinist which was favourable to the Spirit of capitalism. To quote Weber, "Its significance for the development of capitalism is obvious . . . It acted powerfully against the enjoyment of possessions. It restricted consumption . . . (It) approves the rational and utilitarian use of the wealth which were willed by God . . . over and against the glitter and ostentations of feudal magnificence. The puritan outlook . . . Stood at the cradle of modern economic man."²²

Asceticism, it may be observed, was not new to Christianity. The monks in the Middle Ages were ascetic and lived a rationally planned life. But with Luther, asceticism got a secular, this-worldly outlook. Weber summarizes the Lutheran view as follows:²³

In the traditional Catholic monasticism work was considered mainly as a penance. It was presented as a curse pronounced on man after his sin in the garden of Eden: "Because of what you have done, the ground will be under a curse. You will have to work hard all your life to make it produce enough food for you."²⁴ Work had, therefore, no positive theology. Luther, however, gave labour a positive, ethical dimension, a field for directly realizing the highest ethical aim of life. It became a "call" in life. In the Catholic tradition, the concept of calling was applied exclusively to those who lived away from the world. Luther translated the relevant biblical passage as follows: "Do not wonder at the works of a sinner, but trust in the Lord and keep at your *beruf*."²⁵ He used the German word *beruf*, which means "calling," whereas the original Greek word meant "toil." This evidently is an interpretation of Luther. For Luther, labour of the secular, everyday

20. Weber, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-113.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 170-174.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-92.

24. *Genesis*, 3:17.

25. *Sirach* 11:21.

life as a God-appointed task is a divine calling. This, Weber says, is a complete break-away from the Catholic idea of calling. But Luther's doctrine, Weber adds, did not give sufficient emphasis to work as a Salvific act, which comes from Calvin. Weber now proceeds to the analysis of Calvinism.²⁶

One of the basic theological postulates of Calvinism demanded man to work to establish the kingdom of God on earth and give glory to God. Thus for Calvinism too work in the world is a calling. But a mere work ethic of calling did not satisfy the Calvinists. One of the great questions which troubled the Calvinists was, how can one be sure that he is saved? or according to the Calvinistic formula, "how can I be sure that I am one of the elect?" The authentic Calvinistic position was that election could not be recognized by external signs. This was the embarrassing position of a Calvinist as against a Catholic. For in the latter case, the Church mediates for the believer this assurance through the sacraments, especially the sacrament of penance. But as Calvinism developed, the question pressed more urgently for an answer. It is here that for Weber the psychological, as distinct from purely logical, consequence appears.²⁷ For it gradually came to be held that good works, while they could not influence salvation, could be interpreted as signs of grace. Good works and progress in business thus, came to be looked upon as a sign of the elect. The ethical sanction is not applied to acquisition within certain limits only, but rather to the pursuit of gain joined without any limit. Weber summarizes his argument and the substance of the *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* as follows:

"... only in the Protestant Ethic of Vocation does the world... possess unique and religious significance as the object through which one fulfils his duties by rational behaviour according to the will of an absolutely transcendental God. When success crowns rational, sober, purposive behaviour of the sort not oriented to world acquisition, such success is construed as a sign that God's blessing rests upon such behaviour. This inner worldly asceticism had a number of distinctive consequences not found in any other religion. This religion demanded of the believer, not celibacy, as in the case of the monk, but the avoidance of all erotic pleasure; not poverty, but the elimination of

26. Weber, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-128.

27. Parsons, *op. cit.*, p. 525.

all idle and exploitative enjoyment of unearned wealth and income, and the avoidance of all feudalistic, sensuous ostentation of wealth; not the ascetic death-in-life of the cloister, but an alert, rationally controlled patterning of life and the avoidance of all surrender to the beauty of the world, to art, or to one's own moods and emotions. The clear and uniform goal of this asceticism was the disciplining and methodical organisation of the whole pattern of life. Its typical representative was the "man of vocation," and its unique result was the rational organization and institutionalization of social relationships."²⁸

The cumulative effect of the Calvinistic life is the crucial point. The Calvinistic ethic shaped a life of strict discipline, a rationalized theory of life (an idea borrowed from Catholic monasticism); an intense mood of work as a vocation in the secular sphere (an idea borrowed from Luther) with the sole intention of glorifying God and with the blessed sense of assurance of election as its reward (the special contribution of Calvinism).^{*} A rigid limitation of consumption on the one hand and methodical intensification of production on the other hand could have but one result – the accumulation of capital and growth of wealth. Here the affinity between the Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism shows up very clearly.

3. Hinduism and Material Development

Weber's argument of how the world image and concept of salvation provided by a religious system has causal effect throughout the history, did not conclude with the study of Protestantism. As pointed out towards the beginning of this analysis Weber made a comparative study of the major religions of the world in order to establish his thesis. Hence he argued that the Hindu ethic reflected in such concepts as *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Varna*, *Asrama* etc., had become an obstacle to material development.²⁹ For he found that the Hindu ethic adhered to the idea of an immutable world order consisting of eternal cycles of rebirths. Further as Hinduism considers the present world as transitory and illusory, Weber feels that it

28. Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 182–183.

* Lutheranism and Calvinism were two important forms of the Protestant Reformation which took place in the Western Church during the 16th century. While both Luther and Calvin rejected traditional Catholic practices, Calvin was more radical than Luther. For, Luther was willing to retain those Catholic practices which did not violate his new teachings.

29. Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, p. 326.

depreciated the mundane. In this connection he has pointed out that Indian asceticism, while methodological in its means, aimed at a state of mind that turns away from the ordinary affairs. For, even when it emphasized duties, as in the *Bhagavad Gita*, man is expected to work without the desire for the fruits of his actions (nishkamakarma). Weber, therefore, concludes: "It could not have occurred to a Hindu to see the economic success he had attained through devotion to his calling as a sign of salvation. And what is more important, it could not have occurred to a Hindu to price the rational transformation of the world in accordance with matter-of-fact considerations and to undertake such a transformation as an act of obedience to the Divine Will."³⁰

There had been various attempts to re-examine Weberian conclusions about Hinduism and material development. Kapp and Mishra, agreeing with Weber argued that "...non-secular and pre-technological institutions and values of (Hinduism)...³¹ act as brakes on economic growth."³² Similarly, Gunnar Myrdal's ideas about Asian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism too seem to support those of Weber.³³ For he says: "The writer knows of no instance in present-day South Asia where religion has induced social change."³⁴

Timberg's analysis of the Marwaris of North India,³⁵ and Narayanaswami's study of the Nattukottai Chettiars of South India,³⁶ however, remain a standing challenge to the Weberian theory of Hindu unsuitability for entrepreneurship. For as Narayanaswamy observes: "The supposed 'other-worldiness' of the Hindus has not stood in the way of these communities (i.e., the Marwaris and the Nattukottai Chettiars), who are deeply religious, and who all pursue wealth vigorously."³⁷ Studies of Loomis

30. *Ibid.*, p. 326.

31. William K. Kapp, *Hindu Culture, Economic Development and Economic Planning in India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p. 64.

32. Vikas Mishra, *Hinduism and Economic Growth* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1962) p. 206.

33. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama* (3 Vols) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

34. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

35. Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978).

36. Indira Narayanaswami, *The Religion, Family and Economic Activity of the Nattukottai Chettiars: Re-examination of the Weberian Thesis on Religion and Economy*, unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, 1981.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

and Loomis,³⁸ Balwant Nevaskar,³⁹ Bipan Chandra⁴⁰ and others too run counter to the Weberian observation that the social values reflected in Indian religions like Hinduism and Jainism are barriers to economic development in India.

M.S.A. Rao has pointed out a serious drawback in the Weberian analysis of looking for elements of Protestant ethic in Asian religions.⁴¹ He argues: "The units of comparison here do not belong to the same level. While Protestantism is a sect, Buddhism and Hinduism are religions, each comprising a number of sects. The former is also reformative in its orientation. Hence the units of legitimate comparison ought to be Protestantism and one or other of the reformatory sects of Hinduism."⁴² Rao, in this connection, speaks of Veerasaivism or Lingayatism, a sectarian reformatory movement of Hinduism in Karnataka during the 12th century. Basing himself on the study conducted by C. Parvathamma,⁴³ he observes that "Veerasaivas had attracted the attention of the western observers as the Puritans of the East... With its motto that 'work is heaven'... Veerasaivism favoured an enterprising spirit among its followers by introducing a liberating ethic."⁴⁴

4. Catholic Church and Material Development

In his comparative study of the major religious traditions of the world Weber examined the attitude of the Catholic Church towards material development and argued that Catholic ethics unlike the Protestant ethics prevented material development.⁴⁵ Weber has adduced certain concrete cases to substantiate his argument. In his analysis of the students and graduates of higher educational institutions he found that the percentage

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38. C.P. Loomis and Z.K. Loomis, *Socio-Economic Change and The Religious Factor in India* (Affiliated East-West Press Pvt., Ltd., 1964).
 39. Balwant Nevaskar, *Capitalists Without Capitalism*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971).
 40. Bipan Chandra, "Reinterpretation of Nineteenth century Indian Economic History," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. V., 1968, pp. 35-75.
 41. M.S.A. Rao, "Religion and Economic Development," in *Sociological Bulletin*, Delhi, School of Economics, Delhi, vol. XVIII, No. 1, March 1969, pp. 1-15.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
 43. C. Parvathamma, "The Socio-Economic Drive in Veerasaivism," Paper presented at the 8th All-India Sociological Conference, Agra, 1968, quoted in M.S.A. Rao, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.
 44. M.S.A. Rao, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.
 45. Parsons, *op. cit.*, pp. 517-518.

of Catholics lagged behind their proportion of the total population.⁴⁶ This, Weber says, may be explained in terms of inherited differences of wealth. But he found that among the Catholic graduates themselves the percentage of those graduating from institution preparing for technical studies and industrial and commercial occupations lagged even further behind the percentage of Protestants.

Even more striking is Weber's observation that the smaller proportion of Catholics were among the skilled labourers of industry.⁴⁷ For he found that the Catholics showed a stronger propensity to cling to their crafts, that is, they more often became master craftsmen, whereas the Protestants were attracted to a larger extent into the factories in order to fill the upper ranks of skilled labour and administrative positions.

The participation of Catholics in small proportion in the modern business life of Germany according to Weber is all the more striking.⁴⁸ This is because it runs counter to a tendency which has been observed at all times. He argues: "National or religious minorities which are in a position of subordination to a group of rulers are likely . . . to be driven with peculiar force into economic activity. Their ablest members seek to satisfy the desire for recognition of their abilities in this field, since there is no opportunity in the service of the state. This has been true of the Poles in Russia and Eastern Prussia . . . of the Huguenots in France under Louis XIV, the Nonconformists and Quakers in England . . . But the Catholics in Germany have shown no striking evidence of such a result of their position. In the past they have, unlike the Protestants, undergone no particularly prominent economic development in the times when they were persecuted or only tolerated in Holland or in England."⁴⁹

Weber observes that it was the conservative attitude of the Catholics towards the material development of society that encouraged the Jews to take to a life of business.⁵⁰ He argues: "The devout Catholic, as he went about his economic affairs, found himself continually behaving - or on the verge of behaving - in a manner that transgressed papal injunctions . . .

46. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 38.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

50. Weber, *Economy and Society*, (3 Vols.) Trans. by Ephraim Fischhoff, Hans Gerth, et al. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), Vol. II, p. 615.

(For) the life of business itself had to be regarded (by a Catholic) as reprehensible or at best as not positively favourable to God. The inevitable result of this Catholic situation was that pious Jews were encouraged to perform economic activities among Christians . . . "51

Weber concludes his *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* by describing one of the "next tasks" as that of searching out "the significance of ascetic rationalism . . . (for) the development of philosophical and scientific empiricism (and for) . . . technical development . . ."52 This "task" has been taken up by Robert Merton who argues that "the Puritan ethic so canalized the interests of the 17th century Englishmen as to contribute one important *element* in the enhanced cultivation of science. The deep-rooted religious *interests* of the day demanded in their forceful implications the systematic, rational and empirical study of Nature for the glorification of God in His works and for the control of the corrupt world."53 Merton has presented several empirical data with which he tested this hypothesis. For example, his study of the attitudes of contemporary scientists like Robert Boyle, John Ray, Francis Willughy and a few others led him to conclude that "certain elements of Protestant Ethic had pervaded the realm of scientific endeavour and had left their indelible stamp upon the attitudes of scientists towards their work."54 On the basis of the statistical data of Prussia, Baden and Wurtemberg, Merton thinking along the lines of Weber argues that Protestants, without exception, form a progressively larger proportion of the student body in those educational institutions which emphasize scientific and technological training while the interests of Catholics are centred around classical and theological training.55 Merton, therefore, concludes: "In every instance the association of Protestantism with scientific and technological interests and achievements is pronounced . . . (they) were well integrated and in essentials mutually supporting, not only in the 17th century England but in other times and places."56

51. *Ibid.*

52. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 182-183.

53. Robert. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, (Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), p. 574.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 575-576.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 589-595.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 595.

Troeltsch's ideas about Catholic non-Catholic Christian Churches too, seem to support those of Weber.⁵⁷ For he writes: "The significant point which is important even today for our subject is this: that in these Christian circles, and in them alone, was it possible to combine modern economic activity with Christian thought and, indeed, that down to the present-day it is possible to do this with a clear conscience. In this connection we only need to recall the circumlocutions with which Catholicism tries to make this modern form of economic life tolerable, and how, at bottom, it continually attempts to restrain it, or the revulsion with which early Lutheranism and contemporary German conservatism officially regard capitalism. Seen in this light, the significance of this Calvinistic form of Christianity for the whole modern development, and especially for the position of Protestantism with it, becomes plain."⁵⁸

Weber's thesis, however, has been challenged by critics. H.M. Robertson, prominent among these critics, says that "Owing to Weber's adoption of a sociological and not a historical approach to the subject, his main argument which deals with the Puritan doctrine of the 'calling' cannot be sustained."⁵⁹ He argues that the encouragement given to the capitalist spirit was not the contribution of Puritans alone. It spread simultaneously among the Protestants and the Catholics. Robertson attributes the change in the Catholic and Protestant ethics to the influence of a rising capitalistically-minded middle class. This shows, Robertson concludes, "that the chief relation between the rise of the capitalistic spirit and the Protestant ethic is the reverse of what weber has indicated."⁶⁰

Another vehement critic of Weber, Kurt Samuelson, similarly observes that substantial changes had taken place in the outlook of the Catholic Church towards material development even prior to the Reformation.⁶¹ He says that a 'spirit of capitalism' manifested itself in the Italian merchant cities long before changes about economic phenomena affected

57. Ernest Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (2 vols.), Trans. by Olive Wyon, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1931).

58. *Ibid.*, p. 647.

59. H.M. Robertson, *Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism - A Criticism of Max Weber and His School*, (New York: Kelley and Millman, Inc., 1959), p. XV.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

61. Kurt Samuelson, *Religion and Economic Action*, (Toronto: Scandinavian University Books, 1961).

even the Catholic outlook. Samuelson, therefore, argues: "Insofar as this period did witness changes in the climate of opinion of such a nature as to influence economic development, they took place not, as Weber supposes, solely *inside* the framework of religious beliefs, but outside it as well."⁶² Such important "outside elements," according to Samuelson, are Mercantilism, the Enlightenment, Darwinism and Economic Liberalism. These systems of thought which were fundamental from the economic point of view, he argues, were not borrowed from Protestantism and Puritanism but were a separate entity and totally unrelated to these religious faiths, and therefore "the hypothesis of a connection between Puritanism and Capitalism in which religion motivated economics (is untenable)."⁶³

5. Church and Society in Kerala

Merton, Troeltsch, Robertson and Samuelson, it may be observed, re-examined Weber's thesis in the Western context. Indian studies on Weber by M.S.A. Rao, Timberg, Narayanaswami and others were confined to Weber's observations about Hinduism and material development. Nobody in this country upto now has challenged his conclusion about Catholics. This task was taken up by this writer who re-examined Weberian conclusions about material development vis-a-vis Catholic non-Catholic Christian Churches in Kerala.⁶⁴ Kerala has been selected for this study as it is there that one finds among the Indian states, the highest concentration of Christians.

Weber's observations about the involvement of the Catholics in the material development of the society in such fields as educational, political, economic and welfare activities were re-examined in this enquiry. One important clarification needs to be made here. The main purpose of our study was to re-examine Weber's ideas about the involvement of the Catholic Church in the material development of the society and not to compare between Catholic and Protestant Churches. The Protestant Church which Weber studied, i.e., Calvinism, has not taken a deep root in Kerala soil or in any other part of India. It has, however, been observed that non-Catholic Christian Churches too, are involved in various

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

64. Antony Joseph Kizhakekariyil, *Church and Society in Kerala - A Sociological Study*, Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, 1986.

developmental activities of Kerala. In our enquiry, therefore, we included the non-Catholic Christians too, in order to examine the extent of Catholic involvement in comparison with that of non-Catholic Christians.

Weber had argued, as observed above, that the Catholics, when compared to the non-Catholic Christians, are educationally backward and that even among the educated Catholics there is a tendency to confine themselves to traditional subjects. Our enquiry, however, revealed that Catholics in Kerala, because of the prejudice that the western missionaries had against English education, were initially lagging behind the non-Catholic Christians in taking to modern education. But since the 1880s, when indigenous Catholic leaders were admitted into the higher realms of Church hierarchy, the situation began to change. And today Catholics in Kerala have, in fact, overtaken the non-Catholic Christians in the sphere of higher education, including those areas that emphasize science and technology. It was also observed that the involvement of the Catholic Church in Kerala at all levels of education – school, college, technical and professional – far exceeds that of the non-Catholic Christian Churches.

Another observation which Weber makes about the Catholics, it may be recalled, is that in Europe, unlike what generally happens to religious minorities, Catholics, when persecuted, came up neither in the political nor in the economic field. These observations too, do not seem to hold good in the case of Kerala. For there is overwhelming evidence in the political history of Kerala to show that Catholics were very conspicuous by their activities in the political arena of the State right from the first organized political movement of Kerala which took a concrete shape in the "Malayali Memorial" of 1891. And our enquiry has also revealed that while the political participation of non-Catholic Christians almost matches the size of the non-Catholic Christian community in Kerala, the political participation of the Catholics, contrary to Weber's claim, is proportionately greater than the size of the Catholic community. The enquiry also brought out the fact that the Catholics in Kerala started taking to economic and commercial activities like banking precisely at that time when the Government adopted many policies which were directed against the Christian community. And today, a good percentage of the commercial institutions which were started in Kerala are under the control of the Catholics.

The contribution of the Church in the social welfare sphere also brings out its involvement in the material development of the society. The contribution of the Catholic Church to the organized welfare area far exceeds that of the non-Catholic Christian Churches.

The study has thus revealed that, counter to Weber's observation, Catholics in Kerala have even overtaken non-Catholic Christians in involving themselves in the material development of the society. Weber's observations were confined to the Western society where Catholic Church might have acted as a conservative force. This, however, was not the case of Kerala where the Catholic Church has been involved in the material development of the society right from the beginning. Weber in his study of the major religions of the world does not seem to have studied the nature of the Church outside Western Europe. As he establishes his theory mainly on the basis of Christianity, Weber should have, after having made an enquiry into the European Christianity, studied the nature of the Church outside Europe even before making an investigation of non-Christian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism etc. The Indian Church which claims to itself a tradition of 2000 years would have provided with a suitable field of investigation for Weber. In fact, in his study of the religions of India, like Hinduism and Buddhism, Weber speaks about the Indian Church too, but has not taken the pain to study it. Had he included the Indian Church too in his study, Weber would have been cautious in presenting Catholic Church as a conservative force. In our enquiry, therefore, almost all the evidences seem to go against Weber's conclusion about Catholic involvement in the material development of the society.

6. Conclusion

This analysis aimed at bringing out the relation between religion and material development. No doubt Marxian view on religion has influenced many social scientists ever since he wrote his famous thesis that "Religion is the Opium of the People." But, as Hook says, "Neither Marx nor any of his orthodox followers have worked out detailed analyses of the great religions of the world from the standpoint of historical materialism. Marx's sentence, 'Religion is the opium of People' has itself acted like opium upon the minds of his followers who have repeated as if it constituted all that could be said on the subject."⁶⁵

In a developing country like India, religion is a major social institution which serves as a provider of belief systems, values and norms of action and a supplier of worldview and meaning systems. Changes in values and institutions are often supported or opposed by religious beliefs and

65. S. Hook, *From Hegel to Marx* (Michigan: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1971), p. 293.

attitudes. Hence, the positive contribution of religion to society is a theme that has stimulated many social scientists who are seriously interested in the analysis of society. Perhaps the most influential among them is Max Weber whose *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* stands as a critique of Marx. Weber has convincingly argued that a certain interpretation of Protestantism has created motivations favourable to the material development of the society. His comparative study of the major religions of the world has, in fact, evoked criticism from several corners. Hence Timberg's analysis of the Marwaris of North India and Narayanaswamy's study of the Nattukottai Chettiars of South India remain a standing challenge to Weber's theory of Hindu unsuitability for entrepreneurship. Similarly, Weber's argument that the doors of the Catholic Church are closed to scientific and technological innovations too, has been challenged by critics like Robertson and Samuelson. The study conducted by this writer too, revealed that the Catholic Church in Kerala has positively contributed towards the material development of the society.

The underlying thought of all such studies of Weber and his critics is quite evident. Religion whether we speak of Calvinism, Hinduism or Catholicism, cannot be considered as the "opium of the people," making obstacles to change. On the contrary religion does contribute towards the material development of the society. Hence Parrinder rightly observed: "Rather than look upon religion as 'shackles of the past' which Hindus or Muslims (or Christians) will leave behind as soon as they are industrialized, it is vitally important that the great role of religion in human affairs should be recognized. 'Man does not live by bread alone,' and man's faith is potent and incalculable factor in all he does."⁶⁶

66. G. Parrinder, *Comparative Religion*, (London: Sheldon Press, 1977), pp. 118-119.