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Q5(c)

**What functions does religion perform in a pluralistic society?**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

**Core demand of the question**

- What functions does religion perform in a pluralistic society?
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

**Revision summary**

Religion in pluralism still binds groups, supplies meaning, and stores values.

**Durkheim**, **Weber**, and **Parsons** remain usable at community scale, not always at national scale.

Welfare, identity, and bargaining with the state are added functions.

The same sacred honour can organise peace forums or riots.

Indian secular constitutionalism tries to keep practice without a state church.

**Introduction**

A pluralistic society contains several religious communities and a secular legal frame that claims to treat them as citizens. Religion still functions as meaning, belonging, and mobilisation. The same functions can integrate a group and divide the polity.

**Body****Classical functions, still at work**

- **Emile Durkheim** treated religion as the rite that makes the sacred and binds the group. In a plural society this binding is often at the community scale, not at the scale of the whole nation.
- **Max Weber** treated religion as a source of theodicy and of economic ethic, which still shapes work, charity, and status honour among communities.
- Talcott **Parsons** placed religion as a cultural subsystem that supplies values. Pluralism means several value stores, not one church.

**Functions specific to pluralism**

- **Identity:** festivals, law-like custom, and places of worship mark groups in public space.
- **Welfare:** trusts, langar, and community schools provide services the state does not fully supply.
- **Voice:** religious associations bargain with the state on personal law, holidays, and security.

- **Peace:** shared civic rituals and interfaith forums can lower everyday conflict.
- **Conflict:** sacred honour can be used to organise riots and electoral blocs.

### Indian illustration

- Constitutional secularism, **Articles 25 to 28**, tries to keep the state from a single church while protecting practice.
- Lived pluralism includes procession routes, waqf and temple boards, and caste inside each religion.
- Peter Berger's sacred canopy is thinner in a city of many canopies. Meaning does not vanish. It multiplies.

### Judgement

- Functions are integration within, and both bridge and barrier between, communities.
- A plural democracy needs the welfare and meaning functions without allowing the conflict function to capture the state.

### Flow diagram

Religion -> Belonging rites  
Religion -> Meaning honour  
Religion -> Welfare voice  
Plural society -> Belonging rites  
Plural society -> Bridge or barrier  
Welfare voice -> Bridge or barrier

### Conclusion

In a pluralistic society religion still performs **Durkheim's** binding, **Weber's** meaning and honour, and **Parsons's** value supply, mainly at community scale. It also performs welfare, bargaining, and, at times, conflict. The democratic task is to keep those functions inside citizenship rather than as a substitute for it.

### Facts & figures

#### **Durkheim on the sacred**

Rites that set the sacred apart and bind the group that performs them.

#### **Weber on theodicy**

Religious answers to suffering and fortune that also shape economic ethic and status.

#### **Parsons**

Religion as a cultural subsystem that maintains values for the social system.

#### **Articles 25 to 28**

Constitutional cluster on freedom of religion and the secular handling of religious instruction.

**Berger's canopy**

The idea of a single sacred cover of meaning, which pluralism thins and multiplies.

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