**Indira Gandhi National Open University**
**Elective Course in Sociology: ESO-15**
**Society and Religion**
**Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA)**

**Maximum Marks: 100** **Programme Code: BDP**
**Weightage 30%** **Course Code: ESO-15**
**Assignment Code: ESO-15/AST/TMA/2026-27**

**Answer all the questions.**

## Section-I

**Answer the following questions in about 500 words each.** **Marks**

1. Explain the evolutionary theories of religion. 20
2. Discuss religious pluralism in the contexts of India. 20

## Section-II

**Answer the following questions in about 250 words each.**

3. Discuss the role played by cults in bringing social change. 12
4. Explain the social significance of pilgrimage in Indian society. 12
5. Discuss the relationship between economy and society. 12
6. Explain the social context of sufi movement in north India. 12

## Section-III

**Answer the following questions in about 100 words each.**

7. Who is a priest? 06
8. Differentiate between sacred and profane? 06

## 1. Explain the evolutionary theories of religion.

### Answer

Religion has existed in different forms across human societies. Early anthropologists tried to explain how religious beliefs began and how they changed as human societies became more complex. Their explanations are called evolutionary theories of religion. These theories were especially influential in the nineteenth century, when scholars often believed that human culture developed through a series of stages from simpler to more elaborate forms. They used reports from travellers, missionaries and colonial officials to compare beliefs and rituals across societies. Although later sociology and anthropology questioned many of their assumptions, these theories were important in making religion a subject of systematic study.

**E.B. Tylor and animism.** Edward Burnett Tylor argued in *Primitive Culture* (1871) that the earliest foundation of religion was animism, or belief in spiritual beings. He suggested that people tried to understand dreams, death, shadows and trance experiences. A person might see a deceased relative in a dream or notice that a sleeping body remained still while the dreamer appeared to travel elsewhere. Such experiences, Tylor believed, encouraged the idea of a soul that could exist apart from the body. By extending this idea, people attributed spirits to ancestors, animals, trees, rivers and other parts of nature. From belief in many spirits, more organised beliefs in deities could develop. Tylor treated religion as an intellectual attempt to explain puzzling events, rather than merely as fear or deception.

However, animism should not be confused with ignorance. Communities with animistic traditions often have detailed environmental knowledge and sophisticated social institutions. Nor does evidence show that all societies must pass through the same sequence from spirits to many gods and finally to one God. Belief in spirits, several deities and a supreme being can coexist within one society.

**Max Müller and the worship of nature.** The scholar F. Max Müller proposed a theory sometimes called naturism. He emphasised how human beings experienced powerful natural phenomena such as the sun, thunder, wind and dawn. Natural forces were impressive, sometimes frightening, and essential for survival. In his view, poetic descriptions of these forces could gradually become personified as divine beings. For example, the sun could be spoken of as if it acted like a person, and such personification could help form a religious image. His work drew attention to language, myths and natural symbolism. Its