Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?



SOCIOLOGY SCHOOL 2026 · PAPER I · QUESTION 3(A) · STUDENT EDITION

Religion and Science in Modern Society: Conflict or Coexistence?

THE QUESTION, AS SET IN UPSC CSE MAINS 2026

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

Directive: Discuss and judge | 20 marks | Practice target: 250 words

Religion and Society: science, secularisation and modernity

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Guranchal Ma'am, Founder, UPSC Gurus · upscgurus.in

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Start here: the basics in plain words

New to Sociology? Read this page first. It explains the key ideas in the question in everyday language, so the rest of the document makes sense.

The question in simple words

Religion and science can both influence how people understand the world, but they differ in their methods and purposes. Their relationship has involved conflict, coexistence and cooperation. The question asks you to **discuss how they relate to each other in today's society** and **judge whether conflict between them is unavoidable**.

Word	What it means, in plain words	An everyday picture
Religion	Beliefs, practices and institutions concerned with what people regard as sacred or spiritually significant, often shaping identity, meaning and community life.	Prayers, festivals and rituals that families and communities share.
Science	A way of knowing based on observation, testing and evidence, which can be checked and corrected.	A laboratory testing a new medicine before it is approved.
Modern society	Society shaped by industry, cities, education, technology and the state, where many institutions are separate from religion.	A city where people use smartphones and hospitals and also visit places of worship.
Secularisation	Processes through which religious authority, institutions or practices may lose influence or become more separate from other areas of social life. Sociologists debate these changes.	State institutions making decisions through civil law or public procedures rather than religious authority.
Necessarily in conflict	Must they always clash? Or can they also coexist, overlap or even support each other?	A religious scientist whose research follows scientific methods, or a faith-based organisation providing healthcare.

One picture to remember. Religion and science may address different questions, but their claims can also overlap. Conflict may arise over evidence or explanations, while coexistence and cooperation are also possible.

What the examiner wants, in one line. Explain the different relationships between religion and science (conflict, separation, coexistence, cooperation) and give a reasoned judgement on whether conflict is inevitable.

You now have the foundations. Section 1 examines the question carefully, while the later sections introduce the thinkers, Indian evidence and model answer needed to build a well-supported sociological argument.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

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PYQ Deep Decode

This question tests more than knowledge of religion and science. It asks you to explain their relationship in modern society, distinguish conflict from coexistence, and establish whether their opposition is inevitable or socially conditioned.

1.1 The demand

The question asks for a **discussion of the relationship between religion and science in modern society**, followed by a judgement on **whether the two necessarily remain in conflict**. **Discuss** requires examining the different forms this relationship takes, including conflict and coexistence. The word **necessarily** requires determining whether conflict is intrinsic to their relationship or depends on particular circumstances. Both questions must be answered, and the second requires a definite, reasoned judgement.

Words in the question	What they ask you to do	What goes wrong if you miss them
Discuss	Examine more than one form of the relationship, explain the sociological processes involved, and arrive at a reasoned position.	Presenting a one-sided argument or listing thinkers without explaining their relevance.
relationship between religion and science	Identify how two forms of knowledge and authority interact. The relationship itself is the subject.	Writing two separate essays, one on religion and another on science.
in modern society	Locate the discussion within modern institutions, changing authority, rationalisation and secularisation.	Describing ancient religious beliefs or historical controversies without analysing modernity.
Do they necessarily remain in conflict?	Make a judgement on whether conflict is inevitable. Distinguish an inherent contradiction from conflicts arising in particular situations.	Describing conflict extensively but never answering whether coexistence is possible.

THE DEMAND IN ONE LINE

Discuss how religion and science relate within modern society, explain conflict and coexistence sociologically, and judge whether their opposition is inevitable or depends on circumstances.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

1.2 The hidden demand

The deeper question is **where the conflict actually originates**. Does it arise because religion and science are inherently incompatible, or because religious and scientific institutions sometimes make competing claims about reality and legitimate authority?

A strong answer distinguishes **different social functions** from **overlapping truth claims**. Religion can organise sacred meanings, moral obligations and collective identities. Science can investigate empirical relationships through publicly examinable evidence. These activities need not always compete. Yet boundaries become contested when a religious interpretation makes testable claims about nature, disease or human origins, or when any institution demands authority beyond what its evidence or mandate warrants.

The hidden demand therefore concerns **the conditions of conflict and accommodation**: whether scientific findings remain open to examination, whether religious interpretations permit revision, how institutions distribute authority, and whether different communities can negotiate boundaries without surrendering empirical standards or freedom of belief.

The most useful distinction is not between religious people and scientific people. It is between the kinds of claims being made, the means used to justify them, and the institutions seeking authority over them.

Situation	Why the relationship changes	What a sociological answer identifies
Competing explanations	Two authorities make incompatible claims about an empirically examinable phenomenon.	A dispute over evidence, interpretation and intellectual authority.
Different social functions	Scientific explanation and religious meaning need not answer the same question.	Institutional differentiation and the possibility of coexistence.
Mutual influence	Religious values can shape scientific institutions, while scientific knowledge can influence religious interpretations.	Historically situated interaction rather than permanent opposition.
Contested boundaries	Institutions disagree about which claims should be governed by evidence, doctrine, professional expertise or public rules.	Authority, power, legitimacy and boundary negotiation.

WEAK

Religion is based on faith and science is based on facts. They have always fought, but sometimes they can coexist because both are important.

STRONG

Weber's rationalisation explains the expansion of calculable, empirical explanation, while Merton's study of seventeenth-century England shows how particular Puritan values could support scientific activity. Conflict is therefore not intrinsic: it becomes sharper where competing institutions claim final authority over testable propositions.

1.3 The structure

The question has **two explicit demands**, the relationship and whether conflict necessarily continues. The hidden demand about the conditions governing conflict belongs in a **short third part**. The shares below refer to the body between the introduction and conclusion; they are a guide to emphasis, not a UPSC rule.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

Introduction	1. The relationship about three-tenths	2. Why conflict is not necessary about one-half	3. Conditions of conflict or coexistence about one-fifth	Conclusion

Part 1 Relationship between religion and science in modern society — about three-tenths

Different bases of authority	Religious faith, sacred authority and questions of meaning; scientific reasoning, empirical verification and revisability.
Max Weber	Rationalisation and disenchantment: an expanding belief that the world is, in principle, intelligible through calculation rather than magical explanation.
Secularisation	Differentiation of scientific, educational and other institutions from religious control; not automatically the disappearance of belief.
Peter L. Berger	*The Sacred Canopy* (1967): religion legitimates a shared world of meaning, while modern pluralism and secularisation challenge its taken-for-granted authority.
Historical disputes	Cosmology and evolution illustrate tensions when established religious interpretations and scientific explanations overlap.

Part 2 Why religion and science do not necessarily remain in conflict — about one-half

Distinct questions	Empirical explanations of processes can coexist with religious or philosophical questions of meaning and moral obligation.
Coexisting practices	Religious participation and scientific or biomedical activity can occur within the same modern society, and sometimes within individual lives.
Adaptation	Religious interpretations may accommodate established scientific knowledge without relinquishing all religious meaning.
Robert K. Merton	*Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England* (1938): Puritan cultural values were among the historical conditions favourable to scientific development.
Contemporary evidence	Religious observance persists in technologically developed societies; Indian evidence illustrates the coexistence of modern health institutions and continuing religious life.

Part 3 Conditions under which conflict persists or gives way to coexistence — about one-fifth

Conflict persists when	Empirical claims are insulated from testing; doctrine is imposed on scientific work; or scientifically unsupported medical claims displace effective care.
Coexistence becomes possible when	Scientific claims remain evidence-based and revisable, religious interpretations permit accommodation, and institutions respect appropriate limits of authority.
Underlying sociological mechanism	Institutional differentiation, negotiation of boundaries, and the social distribution of legitimate authority.

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1.4 How to present it

This is a **conceptual and evaluative Sociology question**. Its best form is a short sociological opening, followed by three clearly numbered parts. The second part should carry the strongest argument, because the word **necessarily** is the decisive qualification. A small comparative diagram or two-column contrast is useful only if it saves words.

Element	Where it belongs	How to use it	Why it earns its place
Weber and Berger	Part 1	Use rationalisation and the sacred canopy to explain changes in knowledge and religious authority under modernity.	Establishes a sociological relationship rather than a philosophical opposition.
Merton	Part 2	Explain how Puritan values historically encouraged certain forms of scientific work.	Directly challenges the assumption that religion and science must oppose each other.
Functionalist perspective	Part 2	Use Durkheim to distinguish religion's collective and integrative functions from empirical explanation.	Explains why religion may persist even where scientific knowledge expands.
Indian evidence	Part 2	Use the 2021 Pew survey alongside NFHS-5, or a documented example of religious leaders supporting vaccination.	Anchors coexistence in contemporary social evidence without assuming individual-level causation.
Conceptual diagram	Parts 2 and 3	Different functions, overlapping claims, and conditions of conflict or coexistence.	Shows that the outcome depends on the claims and the institutions involved.
Gieryn or Casanova	Part 3	Use boundary-work or differentiation to identify how claims to authority are negotiated.	Answers the hidden demand about the conditions of conflict.
Balanced judgement	Conclusion	Reject inevitable conflict without denying genuine disputes over evidence.	Answers the final question explicitly.

The strongest presentation choice. Use Weber to establish modernity's transformation of authority, Merton to establish that the relationship need not be hostile, and a short institutional-boundary argument to explain when conflict returns. Additional thinkers should reinforce these propositions, not crowd them out.

The strongest empirical choice. Use one carefully qualified Indian illustration: religious engagement can support health communication and vaccination, while claims about vaccine effectiveness remain matters for scientific assessment. This distinguishes cooperation in social practice from authority over empirical truth.

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1.5 The introduction and the conclusion

The introduction addresses the whole question. Present religion and science as two influential institutions in modern society with potentially different sources of authority and partly overlapping claims. Indicate that modernisation changes their relationship without predetermining permanent conflict. Do not spend the introduction defining religion or listing its functions.

The conclusion settles the question. State directly that conflict is not necessary. It arises particularly when institutions make incompatible empirical claims or demand exclusive authority. Coexistence is possible where scientific inquiry remains independent and revisable, while religious practices and meanings can adapt without overriding evidence.

2 PYQ Intelligence 2013 to 2026

The contemporary relevance of the theme, the conceptual progression visible across UPSC Sociology questions, and the connected areas to prepare across Papers I and II.

2.1 Why the theme mattered in 2026

Religion and science remain important in modern India through **public health, scientific education, constitutional values, religious participation and debates over legitimate knowledge**. Evidence before the August 2026 Mains examination makes their interaction especially useful for sociological analysis. Some developments illustrate cooperation, some reveal contests over expertise, and others demonstrate continuing religious and scientific institutions. These are **contexts for understanding the question, not evidence of why UPSC selected it**.

When	What happened	Why it matters sociologically
29 June 2021	**Pew Research Center** published *Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation*, based on **29,999 adult interviews** conducted from November 2019 to March 2020 across 26 States and three Union Territories. An estimated **84%** said religion was very important in their lives.	Religious salience remains substantial in a modern society. The figure measures reported importance of religion, not attitudes towards scientific knowledge.
22 November 2021	The Union Health Ministry urged States and Union Territories to involve **faith-based organisations, religious leaders, NGOs and community influencers** in expanding COVID-19 vaccination coverage (PIB).	Public-health institutions recognised religious and community authority as potentially useful for communicating scientific health interventions. This was a governmental appeal, not a measured outcome.
22 July 2022	The Health Ministry reported NFHS-5 (2019 to 2021) national estimates: **76.4%** of children aged 12 to 23 months were fully immunised, and approximately **89%** of births took place in health institutions.	Biomedical services have an important place in Indian social life. Read with Pew's findings, this illustrates the presence of both modern healthcare and religion at the societal level, not necessarily among the same respondents.
2023	UNICEF's *Building Trust to Reach Zero-Dose Children in India* described immunisation outreach among underserved communities, including work with community influencers and religious leaders in the Aurangabad region of Maharashtra.	A documented example of possible cooperation between religious authority, community trust and vaccination. It does not establish that religious participation alone caused improved coverage.

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When	What happened	Why it matters sociologically
23 August 2023	**Chandrayaan-3** successfully soft-landed on the Moon. ISRO subsequently released mission science data to researchers on 23 August 2024.	Illustrates India's institutional commitment to scientific investigation and publicly examinable data. Alongside evidence of continuing religious life, it challenges a simplistic account of modernisation as one institution replacing the other.
May to June 2024	In **Indian Medical Association v. Union of India**, the Supreme Court addressed misleading medicinal advertising. On 11 June 2024, the Health Ministry circulated its 7 May order to relevant bodies for compliance.	The state can enforce accountability for empirical health claims. The case concerns advertising and medicinal efficacy, not a judicial finding that religious belief is incompatible with medicine.
28 February 2026	National Science Day was celebrated with the theme **Women in Science: Catalysing Viksit Bharat**. ISRO's U R Rao Satellite Centre conducted school-oriented science activities, subsequently reported in March 2026.	Scientific inquiry and participation are actively institutionalised through education, including attention to gender representation.
17 March 2026	Galen Watts and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme published **The Secular Sacred Canopy: A Paradigm Revision in the Study of Secularization** online in *Sociological Theory*. They proposed that highly secular settings may develop an overarching cultural order grounded partly in the authority of scientific empiricism.	A contemporary extension of Berger and Durkheim: sociologists examine how scientific authority can become part of a society's shared symbolic order, rather than treating the secular as simply the absence of religion.
28 July 2026	UNDP India's *Beyond Awareness: Rethinking Routine Immunization* discussed field insights from Bhiwandi, Bhind, Nuh and other locations. Vaccination decisions were shaped by family authority, gender relations, institutional trust, fears and access costs.	Acceptance of scientific healthcare is a **social process**, not simply an individual's choice between science and religion. Evidence from particular communities cannot be generalised to all Indian families.

What the Indian figures establish. Pew's 84% describes the importance of religion among the adults surveyed. NFHS-5's 76.4% describes full immunisation among the eligible child-age population covered by that survey. Both phenomena exist in modern India. The surveys do not show whether a particular religious respondent accepted vaccination, or whether religion caused or prevented that decision.

The constitutional connection. Article **51A(h)** makes developing scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform a Fundamental Duty. It was introduced through the Forty-second Constitutional Amendment, 1976. It supports an ethic of inquiry; it does not make religious belief unlawful or establish that religion and science are permanently opposed.

2.2 The skill UPSC keeps testing

Across Sociology papers, UPSC has repeatedly returned to **the nature of science, classical theories of religion, secularisation, religious revival and the place of religion in modern public life**. The questions below are reproduced verbatim from UPSC Sociology papers. The change in 2026 is especially important: the candidate must not merely describe the relationship but decide whether **conflict follows necessarily** from it.

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Year and paper	The question as UPSC set it	What it asked of you	What changed in 2026
2013 Paper I Q8(c) 10 marks	Is religion antithetical to science? Comment.	Evaluate whether their basic orientations are opposed.	Moves beyond a yes-or-no evaluation to their relationship within modern society and the conditions of conflict.
2015 Paper I Q7(a) 20 marks	Define Secularisation. What are its major dimensions in the modern world?	Explain secularisation and distinguish its dimensions.	Institutional differentiation becomes one explanation for how religion and science can coexist.
2020 Paper I Q3(b) 20 marks	Critically analyse Durkheim's views on elementary forms of religious life and role of religion. Also discuss the consequences of religious revivalism in contemporary society.	Apply classical religion theory to contemporary revivalism.	Uses religion's continuing social functions to qualify the assumption of inevitable displacement by science.
2023 Paper II Q6(a) 20 marks	How do you account for the increasing significance of religion in public and personal spheres in the context of secularization thesis in India? Explain.	Confront secularisation theory with Indian religious life.	The Paper II evidence strengthens the Paper I explanation of coexistence under modernity.
2025 Paper I Q6(a) 20 marks	What is science? Do you think that the methods used in natural sciences can be applied to sociology? Give reasons for your answer.	Examine the nature and limits of scientific methodology.	The same concern with evidence and method now enters a comparison with religious authority.
2025 Paper I Q7(b) 20 marks	How do theories of Marx, Weber and Durkheim differ in understanding religion? Explain.	Compare three sociological explanations of religion.	Classical theory must now explain the relationship with science, not merely compare conceptions of religion.
2025 Paper I Q7(c) 10 marks	What is the nature of relationship between science and religion in modern society? Analyze with suitable examples.	Analyse the relationship with examples.	The 2026 question expressly adds whether conflict **necessarily** continues, requiring a stronger conditional judgement.
2026 Paper II Q1(e) 10 marks	How does the concept 'secular' go beyond any religion in plural society like India? Analyse.	Analyse secularism in India's plural social setting.	Reinforces the need to distinguish institutional principles, individual belief and religious community life.

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Also connected: 2013 Paper I, Q5(c), on the proposition that science uses empirical means and religion non-empirical means towards logical ends; 2012 Paper II, Q3(a), on secularisation across Indian religious communities; 2016 Paper I, Q8(b), on Durkheim and Weber's theories of religion; and 2018 Paper I, Q5(c), on Durkheim's scientific method. These extend the same conceptual preparation into religion, knowledge, modernity and sociological methodology.

CARRY THIS METHOD TO ANY RELIGION, SCIENCE OR SECULARISATION QUESTION

1. **Identify the relationship.** Is the question about ideas, social institutions, methods of knowledge, authority, or all four?
2. **Apply a mechanism.** Rationalisation, differentiation, sacred solidarity, cultural support or boundary-work must explain something concrete.
3. **Separate the possible outcomes.** Conflict, independence, interaction and accommodation are distinct relationships.
4. **Test the claim with evidence.** Use historical cases and Indian observations, keeping interpretation separate from what the data measure.
5. **Make the qualified judgement.** Say when conflict occurs, when coexistence is possible, and why neither should be presumed universally.

2.3 What to prepare next

PAPER I: LINKED THEORETICAL PREPARATION

Religion and society	Sacred and profane; theories of religion; religious practices; secularisation and revivalism.
Modernity and social change	Rationalisation, disenchantment, differentiation, changing forms of social authority.
Science and sociology	Scientific method, objectivity, value neutrality, empirical verification and methodological limits.
Classical sociological theory	Marx on religion and social conditions; Durkheim on sacred solidarity; Weber on rationalisation and religious meaning.
Sociology of knowledge	Social construction of meaning, plausibility structures, authority and legitimation.
Sociology of science	Merton's cultural conditions and scientific ethos; the demarcation of scientific authority.

PAPER II: LINKED INDIAN SOCIETY PREPARATION

Religion and society in India	Religious communities, practices, diversity and the continuing public importance of religion.
Impact of colonial rule	Modern education, legal rationalisation, scientific institutions and changing intellectual authority.
Modernisation and social change	Srinivas's Westernisation, changing practices and the coexistence of different institutional influences.
Secularisation in India	T. N. Madan, institutional secularism and the limits of applying a single Western trajectory.
Gender and modernity	Biomedical care, household authority, women's experience and unequal access to scientific institutions.
Science in everyday life	Vaccination, health-seeking, public trust, local meanings and the authority of expertise.

THE LINK ACROSS BOTH PAPERS

Paper I explains why scientific rationalisation need not eliminate religious meaning. Paper II tests that explanation through India's religious institutions, public health, family relations, secularism and changing everyday practices.

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3 Additional information

The sociological foundation for a strong answer: thinkers and their mechanisms, competing perspectives, key concepts, Indian evidence, one reproducible diagram and a clear bridge between the two Sociology papers. Extended understanding then examines the wider debates and limitations.

TIER 1 · ESSENTIAL: THE SOCIOLOGICAL LENS, PERSPECTIVES, CONCEPTS, EVIDENCE AND JUDGEMENT

The sociological lens: thinkers who explain the relationship

The central task is to show that religion and science are **socially organised forms of meaning, knowledge and authority**. Their relationship cannot be inferred from the abstract contrast between faith and evidence alone. Sociological thinkers explain how institutions change, why belief persists, when cultural values support scientific work and how boundaries become contested.

Thinker	Work and year	The core idea, precisely	Use in this answer
CLASSICAL FOUNDATION: RELIGION, RATIONALISATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS			
Max Weber	*Science as a Vocation* (1919)	**Rationalisation** expands calculability and the belief that events are, in principle, explainable without appeal to mysterious forces. **Disenchantment** describes this transformation in how the world is understood. Science establishes conditional knowledge but cannot itself settle ultimate questions of value or meaning.	**Part 1:** explain science's growing authority in modern society. **Part 2:** explain why an expansion of scientific knowledge does not automatically make every religious or existential question disappear.
Émile Durkheim	*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912)	Religion distinguishes **sacred** from **profane** things and organises beliefs and practices in relation to a moral community. Religious representations express collective life; rituals generate and renew solidarity. Religion also historically contributed to systems of classification and knowledge.	**Part 2:** a functionalist explanation of continued religion. Scientific explanations can develop while religion retains ritual, symbolic and integrative functions. This does not imply that all religious factual claims are compatible with science.
Karl Marx	*A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction* (1844)	Religion is produced within historically specific social conditions. Marx sees it as both an **expression of suffering** and a form of consolation or protest. Criticism of religious consciousness directs attention towards the material and political conditions that generate it.	**Parts 1 and 3:** examine the social interests and unequal relations of power behind claims to authority. Religion's social persistence cannot be explained simply as ignorance of science.

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Thinker	Work and year	The core idea, precisely	Use in this answer
THE CORE RELATIONSHIP: CULTURAL SUPPORT, CHANGING AUTHORITY AND DIFFERENTIATION			
Robert K. Merton	*Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England* (1938)	Merton examined the relationship between **Puritan cultural values** and the development of scientific activity in seventeenth-century England. Certain religiously valued forms of disciplined, useful inquiry helped make scientific activity culturally legitimate. This is a historically situated sociological explanation, not proof that religion universally produces science.	**Part 2, the most important counterargument:** religion and science need not be inherently antagonistic because particular religious values have historically supported scientific work.
Peter L. Berger	*The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967)	Religion provides a socially constructed **symbolic universe** that legitimates social arrangements and gives life meaning. Modern pluralism and secularisation weaken the unchallenged status of a single religious worldview, changing its **plausibility structures**.	**Part 1:** explain why science and institutional pluralism transform religious authority. Do not turn Berger's 1967 account into the claim that science inevitably eliminates religion.
José Casanova	*Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994)	Distinguishes three claims commonly grouped under secularisation: **institutional differentiation**, decline of religious belief and practice, and privatisation of religion. Differentiation does not logically require the other two. Religion can remain publicly active within differentiated modern societies.	**Parts 2 and 3:** show how scientific and religious institutions may acquire different jurisdictions without religion necessarily disappearing from public or personal life.
Thomas F. Gieryn	*Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science* (1983)	**Boundary-work** refers to the practical and rhetorical activities through which scientists distinguish their work from non-science and establish professional authority, credibility and autonomy. These boundaries are socially negotiated and can vary historically.	**Part 3:** explain disputes over legitimate expertise. Sociological analysis of boundary-making does not mean that scientifically tested and untested propositions carry equal evidential weight.
INDIAN AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES: MODERN INSTITUTIONS AND LIVED EXPERIENCE			
M. N. Srinivas	*Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* (1952); *Social Change in Modern India* (1966)	His Coorg study examines the integration of religious practices with kinship, caste and social organisation. His later analysis of **Westernisation** describes institutional and cultural changes arising through prolonged contact with the West. Neither work makes the scientific method the sole determinant of religious change.	**Paper I to Paper II bridge:** religion is embedded within multiple social relationships and can change alongside education and modern institutions. The Coorg ethnography itself is not a study of science-religion conflict.

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Thinker	Work and year	The core idea, precisely	Use in this answer
T. N. Madan	*Secularism in Its Place* (1987)	Madan questions the easy transplantation of particular Western assumptions about secularism into societies where religious traditions are deeply embedded in public life. His argument directs attention to the **social and historical conditions** under which secular arrangements can gain legitimacy.	**Parts 2 and 3:** India's continued religious life cannot be dismissed as a failure to become modern. Distinguish secular political arrangements from scientific inquiry and from individual irreligion.
Veena Das	*Affliction: Health, Disease, Poverty* (2015)	Her research in low-income Delhi neighbourhoods examines how people understand illness through encounters with practitioners and everyday life. In her account of Bhagwanpur Kheda, illness narratives can draw on **biomedical, Ayurvedic and occult vocabularies** rather than following one exclusive explanatory system.	**Part 2:** a grounded example of overlapping explanatory worlds. Her findings describe situated illness experiences; they do not establish the efficacy of every treatment or the universality of such combinations.
Cecilia Coale Van Hollen	*Birth on the Threshold: Childbirth and Modernity in South India* (2003)	Van Hollen's feminist ethnography of women in **Tamil Nadu** examines the spread of hospital-based and technological childbirth alongside local practices, women's aspirations and unequal social conditions. Biomedical modernity is locally negotiated rather than adopted in one uniform form.	**Part 2:** illustrate interaction between modern medical institutions and local cultural practices. Use the example with attention to women, class, agency and clinical authority, rather than calling every local custom religious.
Meera Nanda	*The God Market: How Globalization is Making India More Hindu* (2011)	Nanda argues that economic globalisation in India has been accompanied by the growth of particular religious institutions, markets and public expressions. She criticises certain uses of religious authority and cultural nationalism. This is her interpretation of Indian political economy, not a claim about all religious communities.	**Part 2:** modern economic and technological change need not eliminate religion. **Part 3:** claims invoking scientific legitimacy still require independent empirical scrutiny.

The three thinkers to prioritise in 250 words. Weber explains how scientific rationality gains authority; **Merton** supplies the decisive historical counterexample to inevitable opposition; **Durkheim or Casanova** explains why religious functions or institutions may continue. Berger deepens the opening; Gieryn sharpens the conditional judgement.

Do not confuse sociology of science with rejection of scientific standards. Sociologists study how scientific institutions acquire authority, how evidence is produced and how expertise is socially organised. This does not make a replicated empirical finding equivalent to a claim that has not undergone appropriate testing.

Perspectives: how sociological schools read the relationship

Perspective	How it interprets religion and science	What it contributes to the judgement
Functionalist Durkheim	Religion organises sacred meanings and moral solidarity. Science develops specialised procedures for generating empirical knowledge. Their functions can partly diverge even where they intersect.	Religion may retain social purposes despite scientific advance. **Functional continuity does not establish factual compatibility.**

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Perspective	How it interprets religion and science	What it contributes to the judgement
Marxian and conflict Marx	Both religious and scientific institutions exist within material relationships. Conflicts may involve ideology, control of knowledge, unequal resources and institutional power.	Ask whose authority is protected, whose claims are challenged, and whose interests shape acceptance or resistance.
Weberian Weber	Modern rationalisation expands calculability and technical knowledge. Religious traditions continue to supply ethical orientations and ultimate meanings, though these can also become rationalised.	Disenchantment changes the conditions of belief; it does not mechanically determine religious extinction.
Sociology of science Merton	Scientific institutions develop within wider cultural conditions. Historically, particular religious values could encourage disciplined investigation.	Scientific development cannot be explained as uninterrupted liberation from religious opposition.
Social constructionist and institutional Berger, Casanova, Gieryn	Systems of meaning require social legitimacy; modern institutions differentiate; professional boundaries and claims to expertise are negotiated.	Conflict is often about **jurisdiction and legitimacy**, not simply the existence of faith beside scientific knowledge.
Feminist and everyday-life Van Hollen, Das	Formal scientific institutions interact with gendered power, care work, local interpretation and unequal access. People's choices emerge within concrete social relationships.	Avoid abstract accounts that overlook who can access evidence-based care or make household decisions.
Critical anthropology of the secular Talal Asad	Modern distinctions between religious and secular categories have histories and are shaped by institutional and political power.	Do not treat the modern boundary between religion and the secular as timeless or identical across societies.

Key concepts: use the terms precisely

Concept and association	Precise sociological meaning	Application here
Rationalisation Max Weber	The growing organisation of action and institutions through calculation, systematic rules and technically oriented reasoning.	Explains the institutional expansion of science, without equating rationalisation with personal atheism.
Disenchantment Max Weber	A transformation in which the world is understood as, in principle, susceptible to rational explanation and control, rather than requiring magical explanation.	Identifies a challenge to some religious explanations, not the disappearance of all sacred meaning.
Sacred and profane Émile Durkheim	A distinction between things set apart and protected by religious beliefs and practices, and the ordinary sphere of social activity.	Shows why religion cannot be reduced to an unsuccessful attempt at natural science.
Secularisation Berger; clarified by Casanova	A set of processes involving changing relations between religious authority and other social spheres. Institutional differentiation, declining belief and privatisation are analytically separable.	Prevents the mistaken inference that more scientific institutions automatically mean fewer believers.
Plausibility structure Peter L. Berger	Social relationships and institutions that sustain the credibility of a particular understanding of reality.	Scientific education, pluralism and competing interpretations can change the social support available to religious worldviews.

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Concept and association	Precise sociological meaning	Application here
Organised scepticism Robert K. Merton, scientific ethos formulated in 1942	The institutional expectation that claims undergo detached scrutiny according to empirical and logical criteria.	Explains why scientific institutions may resist demands to exempt factual assertions from testing.
Boundary-work Thomas F. Gieryn, 1983	Practical efforts to distinguish scientific from non-scientific activities and establish professional autonomy and legitimate authority.	Clarifies where disputes over healing, curricula or public expertise arise.
Deprivatisation of religion José Casanova, 1994	The continued or renewed participation of religious actors and institutions in public affairs, rather than withdrawal solely into private life.	Shows why differentiated modern societies may still contain publicly influential religion.

Conceptual caution: **Scientific temper** concerns habits of inquiry, critical scrutiny and openness to evidence. It is not the same as **scientism**, a philosophical position that elevates science into the exclusive source of all meaningful knowledge or value. Nor should the social study of religious practice be mistaken for a scientific endorsement of every religious assertion.

Indian evidence: what field studies and surveys actually show

The strongest Indian evidence distinguishes three levels: **socially sustained religious life**, **participation in scientific or biomedical institutions**, and **the social negotiation of knowledge and authority**. Each source answers a different question.

Source, place and year	Finding or observation	Use and evidential limit
ETHNOGRAPHIC AND FIELD-BASED EVIDENCE		
M. N. Srinivas Coorg, present-day Kodagu, Karnataka 1952	*Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* examines ritual practices, purity, kinship, caste relations and religious organisation as elements of Coorg social life.	Shows that religion has an embedded social organisation. It does **not** directly measure religious attitudes towards scientific explanations.
Cecilia Coale Van Hollen Tamil Nadu 2003	*Birth on the Threshold* describes how women encounter technological childbirth and biomedical institutions within local practices, gender relations and economic constraints. Van Hollen argues that medical modernity takes varied local forms.	Useful for showing **adaptation and negotiation**, not an automatic choice between modern medicine and inherited cultural practices. Not every cultural practice should be labelled religious.
Veena Das Bhagwanpur Kheda, East Delhi Fieldwork including 2001 to 2003; published 2015	In *Affliction*, Das examines everyday illness and care. Her analysis describes illness narratives drawing on allopathic, Ayurvedic and occult explanatory vocabularies while people interact with practitioners.	Demonstrates **overlapping explanatory frameworks** in a specific social setting. It does not prove equal effectiveness of different treatments or that all residents share such explanations.
UNICEF Aurangabad region, Maharashtra 2023	UNICEF described vaccine outreach involving community leaders and religious influencers among underserved populations. Its account also identifies misinformation and practical barriers to immunisation.	Concrete example of religious and community authority being mobilised in support of scientific healthcare. The account is descriptive and does not isolate a causal effect of religious leadership.
UNDP / Community of Practice on Demand Bhiwandi, Bhind, Nuh and other field sites 28 July 2026	UNDP reported that household vaccination decisions could be influenced by elders, gendered responsibilities, distrust, fear of side effects and the costs of reaching services.	A stronger social explanation than simply attributing vaccine hesitancy to religion. The field examples are context-specific and do not establish national patterns of household decision-making.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

Source, place and year	Finding or observation	Use and evidential limit
SURVEY ESTIMATES AND INSTITUTIONAL EVIDENCE		
Pew Research Center India Survey 2019 to 2020; report 2021	An estimated **84%** of Indian adults in the survey considered religion very important in their lives. The study interviewed **29,999 adults** across 26 States and three Union Territories.	Evidence of continued **religious salience**. Not a measure of rejection or acceptance of science.
NFHS-5 India 2019 to 2021; Health Ministry release 2022	National survey estimates indicate **76.4%** full immunisation among children aged 12 to 23 months and approximately **89%** institutional births.	Evidence of biomedical service utilisation. It cannot establish the religion or religious attitudes of the individual users without appropriate cross-tabulated data.
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare India 22 November 2021	The Ministry called for involving faith-based organisations and religious leaders in COVID-19 vaccination outreach.	Shows **institutional recognition of potential cooperation**. A policy appeal should not be reported as proof of a successful intervention.
Constitution of India Article 51A(h) Introduced in 1976	Scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform are expressed as a **Fundamental Duty**.	Offers a normative framework for evidence-based public reasoning, distinct from a sociological finding about the prevalence of religious belief.

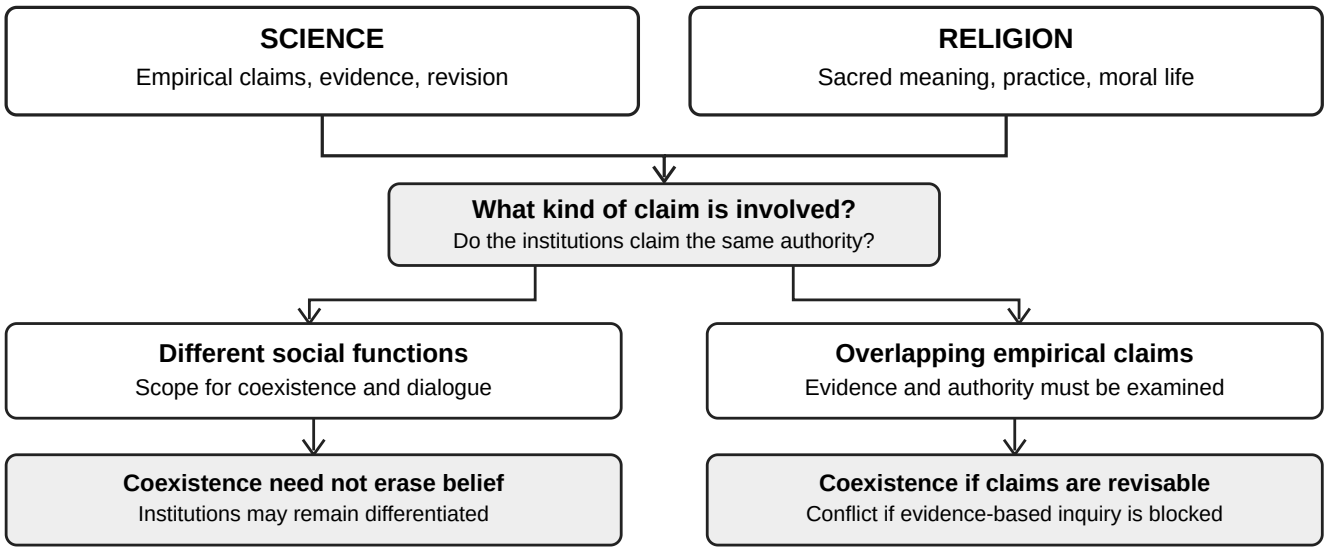
What the evidence permits you to conclude

Strong conclusion from the evidence. Modern India's religious life and biomedical institutions both have significant social presence. In documented settings, religious or community authority may facilitate engagement with scientific health services. Individual experiences can combine several explanatory vocabularies.

Conclusion the evidence does not permit. The separate Pew and NFHS surveys do not prove that the same individuals are simultaneously devout and scientifically oriented. Nor does the presence of scientific institutions show that every religious interpretation is scientifically valid or that religious practice causes acceptance of vaccination.

One diagram: where conflict becomes possible

A simple black-and-white diagram can show why the relationship is **conditional rather than necessarily hostile**. It distinguishes different social purposes from occasions when testable truth claims overlap.



Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

A teaching diagram, not a universal separation of two self-contained spheres. Some religious beliefs make claims about observable reality, and science can inform ethical decisions without determining moral goals by itself. The decisive distinction is whether empirically testable claims remain open to evidence and revision.

Paper I and Paper II bridge

Paper I: the theoretical mechanism	Paper II: the Indian application
Weber: rationalisation and disenchantment. Modern institutions increasingly rely on calculable and systematic knowledge.	Scientific education, space research and modern healthcare operate within a society where religious identities and practices remain salient.
Durkheim: sacred solidarity. Religion performs symbolic and integrative functions beyond explaining natural events.	Religious rituals and collective practices can remain important even when other institutions use scientific procedures.
Merton: cultural support for science. Religious values can, under particular historical conditions, support scientific work.	Documented immunisation outreach shows how faith-based and community networks can be engaged by health institutions.
Berger and Casanova: changing religious authority. Institutional differentiation need not mean the extinction of belief or public religion.	Pew's survey findings and Madan's analysis help examine why religion remains significant in modern Indian public and personal life.
Gieryn: boundary-work. Professional and institutional authority is negotiated where competing knowledge claims emerge.	Debates over medicinal claims, public-health information and expertise reveal where evidence and institutional legitimacy become contested.
Feminist sociology: situated knowledges (Donna Haraway, 1988), gendered power and agency. Acceptance of expertise is shaped by unequal social relationships.	Van Hollen's childbirth ethnography and UNDP's immunisation fieldwork show why gender, class, household power and access matter.

THE PAPER I TO PAPER II INSIGHT

Modern India does not require a choice between being scientifically modern and remaining religious. Sociology instead asks how empirical knowledge, collective meaning, everyday practices and institutional authority coexist, reinforce one another or enter into conflict under particular social conditions.

TIER 2 · EXTENDED UNDERSTANDING: THE WHOLE DEBATE AROUND RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Four ways of relating religion and science

Ian G. Barbour's typology, developed in his work on religion and science and presented in *Religion in an Age of Science* (1990) and *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (1997), distinguishes four broad patterns. These are **analytical possibilities**, not four inevitable historical stages.

Pattern	What it means	Example and limitation
1. Conflict	Religious and scientific positions are treated as incompatible accounts of reality.	Disputes over biological evolution or cosmology. A historical controversy does not prove that all religious traditions always opposed science.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

Pattern	What it means	Example and limitation
2. Independence	Religion and science are assigned distinct kinds of questions or purposes.	Empirical explanation of disease compared with moral or existential reflection on suffering. The domains are not wholly separate when religious claims become empirically testable.
3. Dialogue	Participants recognise areas of interaction, ask overlapping questions, and examine conceptual or ethical implications.	Discussion of medical technology, human dignity or environmental responsibility. Dialogue does not suspend the need for evidence about factual claims.
4. Integration	Attempts are made to connect religious and scientific interpretations within a broader framework.	Some theological approaches reinterpret religious understandings in response to scientific knowledge. Integration is neither universal nor guaranteed to succeed.

Why the permanent-conflict narrative is too simple

Historical scholarship complicates a universal warfare thesis. John Hedley Brooke, in *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (1991), argues that the relationship has varied across periods, institutions and intellectual traditions. Disputes sometimes involved rival scientific explanations, competing theological interpretations, political authority and professional interests, not simply two unified opposing camps.

Historical reference	What it illustrates	What not to infer
Galileo and cosmology Seventeenth century	Disputes over cosmology could become conflicts involving religious interpretation and institutional authority. Galileo's condemnation in 1633 is a historically important instance.	That every religious institution or religious scholar opposed all astronomical investigation.
Darwin and evolution 1859 onwards	Evolutionary explanations challenged some established interpretations of human and natural origins.	That all religious responses were identical or that scientific acceptance and religious affiliation were always mutually exclusive.
Merton's Puritanism thesis 1938 analysis of seventeenth-century England	Particular religious values could assist the social legitimation of scientific enquiry.	That Puritanism was the sole cause of modern science or that religious institutions always support enquiry.
Modern health claims	Scientific and regulatory authorities require evidence where treatments claim measurable efficacy.	That scrutiny of a medicinal advertisement constitutes a general rejection of spiritual or religious practices.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

Secularisation does not have only one meaning

The distinction made by **José Casanova (1994)** is essential for answering questions about modernity. Three propositions are often combined despite having different empirical implications:

Proposition	Its meaning	What follows for religion and science
Institutional differentiation	Scientific, educational, legal and other institutions become increasingly autonomous from religious institutions.	Coexistence is possible because autonomy does not require identical beliefs or a common source of authority.
Religious decline	Belief, participation or religious organisational influence decreases within a population over time.	Requires empirical evidence about the relevant society, population and period. It does not follow automatically from technological development.
Religious privatisation	Religion retreats primarily into individual or household life rather than remaining publicly influential.	Public religious organisations and movements challenge any universal claim of inevitable withdrawal.

Berger revisited his earlier secularisation expectations. His 1967 *Sacred Canopy* analysed how modern pluralism and secularisation challenge religious plausibility. In his introduction to *The Desecularization of the World* (1999), Berger argued that much of the contemporary world remained vigorously religious. The theoretical lesson is that **modernisation and religious decline are not identical processes**, even though substantial secularisation has occurred in particular societies.

India adds a distinct challenge. T. N. Madan's *Secularism in Its Place* (1987) calls attention to the historical and social circumstances of secular arrangements. Meera Nanda's *The God Market* (2011) argues that religious institutions and public expressions can expand alongside economic globalisation. Their analyses differ, but both caution against treating modernity as a single, uniform path towards the disappearance of religion.

Recent scholarship: does the secular also require a shared symbolic order?

In an article first published online on **17 March 2026**, Galen Watts and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme proposed the concept of a **secular sacred canopy**. Their argument, published in *Sociological Theory*, is that highly secular societies may still possess a collectively sustained cultural order. Scientific empiricism, naturalism and particular moral understandings of the autonomous individual may acquire strong public legitimacy within that order.

This proposal revisits the relationship between **Weber and Durkheim**. Weber directs attention to disenchantment and the loss of taken-for-granted religious explanations. Durkheim directs attention to the capacity of societies to sustain collective meanings and symbols. The authors suggest that these insights can illuminate different conditions of secular modernity.

What this adds. Scientific authority can be examined as part of a wider modern cultural order, not only as a method for establishing factual knowledge. This extends the sociological analysis of how people understand legitimate knowledge and shared meaning.

The necessary caution. The concept is a theoretical proposal about particular highly secular settings. It does not establish that science is itself a religion, that all secular societies share one worldview, or that empirical scientific methods lose their distinctive evidential standards.

Critically evaluate the major thinkers

Thinker or approach	Explanatory strength	Main limitation to remember
Weber	Captures the transformation of authority through rationalisation and specialised knowledge.	Disenchantment cannot be read as a uniform prediction that every population will become irreligious.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

Thinker or approach	Explanatory strength	Main limitation to remember
Durkheim	Explains why religious ritual, classification and solidarity need not disappear when natural explanations develop.	An emphasis on integration may insufficiently address inequalities, dissent and religious claims that conflict with empirical findings.
Marx	Connects religion with material suffering, power and historically constituted institutions.	A predominantly material explanation may understate religious experience, creative adaptation and forms of agency not reducible to class interests.
Merton	Provides a historical and sociological alternative to the claim that religion has always obstructed science.	A relationship between Puritan values and scientific development is not an experimental demonstration of a single sufficient cause.
Berger and Casanova	Distinguish institutional change from belief decline, making divergent modern trajectories intelligible.	The strength and direction of secularisation must be established empirically for each social and historical context.
Boundary-work	Reveals how professional authority and classifications of knowledge are contested.	Explaining the social construction of boundaries must not collapse the distinction between tested and untested factual claims.
Feminist ethnography	Shows how institutions and knowledge are encountered through class, gender, kinship and everyday experience.	Findings from particular field sites require careful contextualisation rather than universal generalisation.

Two debates worth knowing

Debate 1: Should religion and science occupy separate domains?

The argument for separation: scientific methods investigate observable processes, while religion may address ultimate meaning, worship and moral commitments. Weber's distinction between scientific knowledge and ultimate values helps explain why the expansion of science need not settle all existential questions. Barbour's independence model expresses a related possibility.

The challenge: religious interpretations sometimes make testable claims about healing, origins or natural events. Scientific research can also raise moral and social questions through its applications. The separation is therefore not a universal description of actual religious and scientific life.

Balanced reading: Different functions permit coexistence, but overlapping empirical claims remain subject to evidence. The distinction is useful only when it does not exempt factual assertions from scrutiny.

Debate 2: Does scientific modernity inevitably secularise society?

The classic expectation: rationalisation, education and differentiation reduce the authority of religious explanations over specialised institutions. Weber and Berger's early secularisation analysis illuminate these changes.

The challenge: Casanova distinguishes institutional differentiation from religious decline. Madan questions universal assumptions about secularism in India. Contemporary research documents diverse trajectories, including religious continuity, public revival and substantial religious decline in different settings.

Balanced reading: Science can expand without uniformly eliminating religion. Whether belief declines, changes form or remains publicly influential is an empirical question about a particular society.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

The final sociological distinction: compatibility is not the same as agreement

It is possible for religious and scientific practices to coexist without their practitioners agreeing about every proposition. It is also possible for an individual to respect religious traditions while rejecting a particular claim about the physical world because it lacks reliable evidence.

Coexistence	Religious participation and scientific activity operate within the same social setting without requiring permanent institutional opposition.
Cooperation	Religious actors and scientific institutions work together towards a shared practical goal, such as public-health communication.
Accommodation	A religious interpretation changes in response to established findings or changing social conditions.
Conflict	Incompatible claims or competing institutional demands prevent agreement, especially where empirical scrutiny is resisted.
Epistemic validity	Whether a factual claim is adequately supported by evidence remains distinct from whether the people advancing it coexist socially.

THE CENTRAL SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHT

Religion and science are neither permanent enemies nor automatically harmonious partners. Their relationship changes with the social functions they perform, the knowledge claims they advance and the institutions authorised to judge those claims.

4 Pitfalls and variations

Six errors to correct, claims that must not appear in an answer, and how to adapt the structure when a related Sociology question changes its directive or emphasis.

4.1 Six pitfalls, each with its correction

1. Treating conflict as universal

~~Religion is based on belief, science on facts, so they have always been enemies.~~

Identify historical conflict and coexistence. Use **Merton's 1938 study** to demonstrate that particular religious values have also supported scientific development.

2. Turning coexistence into complete compatibility

~~Religion gives values and science gives facts. Therefore, they can never contradict each other.~~

Different functions create room for coexistence, but religious interpretations can also make **empirically testable claims**. Those claims require examination through appropriate evidence.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

3. Name-dropping classical thinkers

~~According to Marx, religion is an opiate; Weber discussed rationalisation; Durkheim discussed solidarity.~~

Explain the mechanism: **Marx** directs attention to social conditions and power; **Weber** to changing rational authority; **Durkheim** to religion's collective and symbolic functions.

4. Misusing Merton's thesis

~~Merton proved that religion created modern science and that there is no conflict between them.~~

Merton analysed a **historically specific relationship** between Puritan values and scientific development in seventeenth-century England. This challenges inevitable conflict but does not establish permanent harmony or a single cause.

5. Overstating Indian survey evidence

~~Pew shows 84% of Indians are religious and NFHS shows 76.4% vaccinate their children. Thus, the same Indians have proved religion and science compatible.~~

State the actual estimates, populations and survey periods. The findings show **religious salience and biomedical participation at the societal level**; they do not establish the beliefs and practices of the same individuals.

6. Missing the hidden demand

~~Religion and science must learn to respect each other and maintain a balance in society.~~

Name the conditions: **empirical claims remain testable, scientific institutions retain autonomy, religious interpretations can adapt, and competing authorities negotiate legitimate boundaries**.

4.2 Never write these

- "Weber proved that scientific development makes religion disappear."
  His analysis concerns rationalisation and disenchantment; the religious consequences are not identical across all societies.
- "Peter Berger's The Sacred Canopy established that modern religion would inevitably die."
  His 1967 argument analysed secularising processes and changing plausibility structures; he later challenged universal expectations of religious decline.
- "The 84% Pew figure proves that Indians reject science."
  The question concerned the personal importance of religion, not acceptance or rejection of scientific methods.
- "All traditional medical practices are religious, and all modern medical practices are scientific."
  Traditional, cultural, religious and medical categories overlap but are not interchangeable. Treatment claims must be evaluated on their evidence.
- "If religion and science coexist, their factual claims must be equally valid."
  Social coexistence and empirical validity are different questions.
- "Durkheim regarded religion as merely false science."
  He analysed sacred classification, collective representations and ritual solidarity, and considered religion important to the development of systems of knowledge.
- "Merton's 1938 work explained the scientific ethos of organised scepticism."
  The Puritanism study appeared in 1938; Merton's classic statement of the scientific ethos was formulated in 1942 and reprinted under later titles.
- "NFHS-5 proves that religion causes vaccination."
  Survey coverage estimates do not establish this causal relationship.
- "Article 51A(h) prohibits religious faith."
  The Constitution establishes a Fundamental Duty concerning scientific temper, humanism and inquiry; it does not abolish freedom of religious belief.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

4.3 If the question changes

If the question asks	The structure becomes	What must change
Is religion antithetical to science?	Contrasting approaches; Weberian rationalisation; historical conflict; Merton's counterexample; conditional judgement.	Move directly to evaluating intrinsic opposition. Spend less space describing the whole modern relationship.
Nature of the relationship, with examples	Different forms of interaction; conflict and differentiation; cooperation and adaptation; historical and Indian examples; conclusion.	Give empirical examples greater prominence and cover several relationship patterns.
Critically examine the secularisation thesis	Classical expectations; differentiated meanings; evidence of decline and persistence; Berger's reassessment; Casanova; judgement.	Make secularisation, rather than the entire religion-science relationship, the central object of evaluation.
Compare Marx, Weber and Durkheim on religion	Marx: social suffering and power; Weber: meaning, action and rationalisation; Durkheim: sacred solidarity; comparative assessment.	Make the differences between theoretical explanations explicit. Science becomes a relevant implication, not the main subject.
Religion in contemporary Indian society	Continuing social significance; secularisation and modernity; religious institutions; Indian field studies and survey findings; critical view.	Give Paper II evidence priority. Use Srinivas, Madan and Indian studies before introducing broader theoretical extensions.
Can scientific method establish the validity of religious claims?	Distinguish kinds of claims; empirical testability; limits of scientific inference; contested boundaries; conclusion.	Put methodology and epistemology at the centre. Separate sociological explanation of a belief from scientific verification of its factual content.
Religion, science and social change	Rationalisation and differentiation; changes in religious institutions; adaptations and resistance; effects on everyday life.	Explain processes of social transformation rather than simply classifying conflict and coexistence.

For a shorter answer. Retain Weber, Merton and one carefully chosen Indian illustration. State the conflict condition clearly. Detailed historical controversies, extended secularisation debates and additional thinkers can be omitted without losing the central argument.

For a 20-mark answer. Preserve the full analytical progression: modern relationship, why conflict is not necessary, and the conditions governing coexistence. Use theory to explain, Indian evidence to illustrate, and a final judgement that keeps scientific standards and social meanings distinct.

THE CORRECTION THAT MATTERS MOST

Do not answer whether religion and science are good or bad, or whether one must defeat the other. Explain sociologically how their relationships are formed, why permanent conflict is not inevitable, and what makes conflict or accommodation more likely.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

5

The model answer

A 253-word Sociology answer, including headings and labels. It follows the question's two explicit demands and closes with the conditions determining conflict or coexistence. Weber explains the modern transformation of authority; Merton and Casanova challenge inevitable conflict; Durkheim provides an explicit functionalist perspective; and an Indian vaccination study supplies a concrete illustration. The conclusion answers the word **necessarily** without denying genuine empirical disagreements.

Model answer

A sociological discussion with a conditional judgement

253 words

Religion and science are socially organised institutions of knowledge and meaning. Modernity transforms their authority through rationalisation, but conflict is neither universal nor inevitable.

1. Relationship in modern society

Science uses publicly testable, revisable explanations; religion organises sacred meanings, rituals and moral obligations. Weber's **rationalisation** explains expanding scientific authority; disenchantment weakens some supernatural explanations without eliminating existential concerns. Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (1967) shows how pluralism unsettles religious plausibility. Galileo's 1633 condemnation illustrates conflict when cosmological claims intersect institutional authority.

2. Why conflict is not necessary

Durkheim's functionalist account locates religion in collective representations and solidarity: scientific advances do not abolish these social functions. **Casanova's institutional differentiation** permits science and religious life to retain distinct jurisdictions without requiring religious decline. **Merton's** 1938 study of seventeenth-century England shows how some Puritan values helped legitimate scientific enquiry, contradicting a universal warfare thesis.

In contemporary India, Soni and colleagues' 2023 vaccination case study reports collaboration with **18 faith-based organisations and over 400 religious institutions**. This demonstrates organised cooperation, not that religion independently caused vaccination. Religious interpretations can also accommodate established scientific findings.

3. Conditions of conflict or coexistence

Gieryn's boundary-work shows how professional groups contest legitimate expertise. Conflict intensifies particularly when religious institutions shield testable claims from evidence or scientific actors overreach into ultimate values. Cooperation depends on independent inquiry, institutional autonomy and dialogue without granting unsupported claims equal evidential standing.

Thus, **conflict is contingent, not necessary**. Differentiated institutions can coexist, but empirical claims remain answerable to scientific scrutiny and religious freedom remains protected.

DEMAND
Discuss the changing relationship between religion and science in modern society and judge whether conflict is intrinsic or conditional

HIDDEN DEMAND
Examine whether conflict stems from overlapping empirical claims and competing authority, and how institutional boundaries and social functions can change

STRUCTURE
About three-tenths on the modern relationship, one-half on why conflict is not necessary, and one-fifth on conditions of conflict or coexistence

BALANCE
Introduction 24 words, conclusion 24 words; 253 words in all

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

Why it works: The introduction situates both institutions in modern society without assuming an inevitable outcome. Part 1 uses Weber's rationalisation and Berger's account of religious plausibility to explain their changing relationship, while using Galileo's condemnation in 1633 to illustrate conflict over competing claims to authority. Part 2, the largest, applies Durkheim's functionalism, Casanova's institutional differentiation and Merton's historical argument to explain why conflict is not inevitable. Soni and colleagues' Indian vaccination study supplies concrete, carefully qualified evidence of institutional cooperation. The example is qualified so that participation is not mistaken for a demonstrated causal effect. Part 3 answers the hidden demand through competing authority claims and Gieryn's boundary-work. The conclusion directly rejects necessary conflict while preserving the independence of scientific scrutiny. The answer is **253 words, including all three headings**.

6 Other ways to write it

The model answer above is one coherent approach. The same question also permits other sociologically sound structures, provided that the relationship is explained first, the possibility of coexistence receives substantial attention, and the answer directly judges whether conflict is necessary.

Approach	How the answer is built	When it works
Thinker-led	**Weber:** rationalisation and changing authority. **Berger:** religious plausibility under modern pluralism. **Merton:** religious values historically supporting science. **Durkheim:** continuing collective functions. End with conditions of conflict.	When classical and modern sociological theory is your strongest preparation. Give each thinker a distinct explanatory role.
Perspective-led	**Weberian:** disenchantment. **Functionalist:** sacred solidarity. **Conflict:** struggles over authority and knowledge. **Sociology of science:** Merton and Gieryn. Compare the explanations before the conclusion.	When the question is broad enough for a theoretical comparison. Avoid presenting perspectives as disconnected definitions.
Four-pattern approach	Use Barbour's **conflict, independence, dialogue and integration** to organise the range of relationships. Attach Weber or Berger to modernity, Merton to historical interaction, and a sociological explanation of institutional boundaries to the conclusion.	When you want a very clear classification. Barbour's typology alone is not sufficient for a Sociology optional answer.
Indian evidence-led	Open with the coexistence of religious life and biomedical institutions in India. Use Pew and NFHS-5 carefully, then a documented vaccination outreach study. Explain this through Durkheim, Merton and institutional differentiation.	When Indian evidence is especially strong. Establish what each source measures and avoid combining separate surveys into an individual-level finding.
Authority and boundaries	Start with science as revisable empirical knowledge and religion as sacred meaning and institutional authority. Analyse historical disputes, Merton's counterexample and Gieryn's boundary-work. Close with the circumstances permitting coexistence.	When the emphasis falls on **why conflict occurs**. It is particularly useful for the hidden demand, but must still cover coexistence.
Historical to contemporary	Briefly examine cosmology and evolution, then Weberian rationalisation, Merton's Puritanism thesis, contemporary differentiation and an Indian public-health example.	When you can connect historical cases to sociological mechanisms. A chronology without conceptual explanation is insufficient.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

What must remain constant. Whatever the form, the answer must explicitly distinguish **the existence of conflict** from **the necessity of conflict**. Evidence of one historical dispute cannot establish permanent opposition, while an example of cooperation cannot establish complete compatibility.

What gives the answer sociological depth. Name the mechanism behind every major claim: rationalisation transforms authority; collective representations sustain religious meaning; cultural values can support scientific institutions; and boundary-work identifies contested expertise.

7 Quick recall

Sixteen facts and conceptual anchors for rapid revision. Remember the explanatory use of each thinker, not merely the name and year.

1. **Durkheim, 1912:** *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*; religion as sacred beliefs, practices and moral community.
2. **Weber, 1919:** *Science as a Vocation*; rationalisation, disenchantment and the limits of science in deciding ultimate values.
3. **Merton, 1938:** *Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England*, published in *Osiris*, volume 4.
4. **Berger, 1967:** *The Sacred Canopy*; religious legitimation, socially sustained meaning and plausibility structures.
5. **Casanova, 1994:** *Public Religions in the Modern World*; differentiation, religious decline and privatisation must be distinguished.
6. **Gieryn, 1983:** *Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science*, *American Sociological Review*.
7. **Pew, 2021: 29,999** adult interviews; an estimated **84%** considered religion very important in their lives.
8. **India, 2023:** a published case study describes **18 faith-based organisations** and more than **400 religious institutions** participating in vaccination outreach.
9. **Sacred and profane:** Durkheim's foundational distinction; religion is not reducible to an unsuccessful natural science.
10. **Disenchantment:** the expansion of rational intelligibility, not a universal prediction that belief disappears.
11. **Puritan values:** Merton examined their historical contribution to conditions favourable to scientific development.
12. **Plausibility structure:** the social support sustaining the credibility of a worldview.
13. **Institutional differentiation:** autonomous scientific and other institutions do not necessarily require the disappearance of religion.
14. **Boundary-work:** scientists' practices of distinguishing scientific authority from other forms of knowledge and expertise.
15. **NFHS-5, 2019 to 2021: 76.4%** full immunisation among children aged 12 to 23 months, as reported in the Health Ministry's July 2022 summary.
16. **Watts and Wilkins-Laflamme, 2026:** *The Secular Sacred Canopy*; a proposal to rethink secularisation through collectively sustained secular meanings.

THE ONE SENTENCE TO CARRY OUT OF THIS DOCUMENT

Religion and science need not remain in conflict: their relationship depends on changing social functions and claims to authority, while empirical propositions remain answerable to evidence.

Discuss the relationship between religion and science in modern society. Do they necessarily remain in conflict?

8 Write it yourself

Write this 20-mark answer independently in approximately 250 words. Then check not only whether you have remembered the thinkers, but whether each explains the relationship and whether your final judgement answers the question.

	Check	Yes / No
1	Does the introduction identify **religion, science and their changing relationship** in modern society, without assuming permanent conflict?	
2	Does Part 1 distinguish **sacred meaning and authority** from **empirical, revisable knowledge**, and use Weber or Berger to explain modernity?	
3	Is **Part 2 the largest part**, directly explaining why conflict is not necessary rather than merely listing historical controversies?	
4	Have you used **Merton's 1938 thesis accurately** and made at least one sociological perspective, such as Durkheim's functionalism, explicit?	
5	Does the answer include **one precise Indian example**, with an interpretation that stays within what the evidence actually establishes?	
6	Does Part 3 identify **the conditions of conflict and coexistence**, and does the conclusion explicitly judge whether conflict is necessary?	
7	Is the whole answer **250 to 253 words including headings and labels**, with no claim that religious belief necessarily rejects science or that cooperation validates every factual claim?	

Sources

- **UPSC:** Civil Services (Main) Examination, Sociology Optional Papers I and II, previous question-paper archive. The questions in section 2.2 are reproduced from UPSC Sociology papers for the indicated years and question numbers. UPSC previous question papers.
- **Max Weber:** *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (*Science as a Vocation*), 1919. See *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, entry on Max Weber, especially the discussion of rationalisation, disenchantment and modern science. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Max Weber.
- **Émile Durkheim:** *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*), 1912. The foundational source for sacred and profane classification, collective representations and the social functions of religion.
- **Karl Marx:** *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*, written in 1843 and published in 1844. The discussion of religion as an expression of suffering and as part of historically constituted social conditions.
- **Robert K. Merton:** *Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England*, *Osiris*, volume 4, 1938, pages 360 to 632. The historical study of Puritan values and scientific development. History of Science Society journal record. For the scientific ethos, see Merton's separate 1942 work on the normative structure of science.
- **Peter L. Berger:** *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Doubleday, 1967; *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, edited by Berger, 1999. Bibliographic record: The Sacred Canopy.
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