

**B.A 6<sup>th</sup> SEMESTER**

**DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVES (DSEs)**

**OPTION-11**

**SOC616DB: SOCIOLOGY: RELIGION AND SOCIETY**

**(CREDIT:6)**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

**UNIVERSITY OF LADAKH**

# UNIT- 1

## **1.1 RELIGION- CONCEPT AND EVOLUTION**

### ***1.1.1 MEANING***

Religion, which is a matter of belief and practice, is a universal social phenomenon which seriously concerns almost every living man. The study of religion has played a vital role in the discipline of sociology since its very beginning in the mid-19th century. Sociology of religion often asked the question about what people believe how religion is organised and how religion affects various aspects of social life. Sociological study of religion explores religion from a variety of different vintage points within the social science, and considers the influence of religion in different areas of social life including the family, race, politics etc. Generally, religion is understood by many as a belief in the Supernatural power or the Supreme Being and their relationship with the nature that surrounds them. Man, being a social animal, is also, therefore, considered a religious being. Religion is also accepted as one of the strongest sources and means of social control. It is considered as one of the earliest institutions of mankind and is found in all the societies of the past and present. Scholars from the different disciplines of Sociology, Anthropology, Ethnology, Theology and Philosophy conceptualise the elements of religion in their own context; as a result there is no single uniform theory or definition on religion.

The term religion carries a different meaning for different people. **Ronald L. Johnstone** puts it in this way, “The English word ‘Religion’ has a Latin root, i.e. ‘Religare’ meaning, ‘to bind together’ (suggesting the concept of a group or fellowship). It includes manifold elements and aspects of life like beliefs, feelings, experiences, values, symbols, worship, rituals, festivals, cult and cultures, myth and mythology.

In history there were different approaches to God and religion. From the negative perspective, we see the trend of *atheism*. It is the belief that there is no God of any kind. Another trend is *agnosticism* which literally means ‘not-knowism’. That means, we are not able to affirm or deny the existence of God. This trend argues that our intellect is incapable of knowing God and making any kind of judgement on God. Still another stand is *scepticism*. This approach simply means doubting. That means, we cannot have certainty about anything, not even on material things.

Coming to the positive approaches to God and religion, *deism* can refer to the trend of thought according to which this universe was created and set on motion by a God and left it alone to operate. The deists teach that natural theology is enough to explain the religious matters. Finally, perhaps not

the last, the common stand, that is *theism*. Theism refers to a particular doctrine concerning the nature of a God and his relationship to the universe. It conceives of a God as personal and active in the governance and organization of the world and the universe.

### ***Definitions of Religion***

1. According to the philologists **Max Muller**, “the root of the English word “religion”, the Latin “religo”, was originally used to mean only reverence for God or the Gods, carefully pondering of divine things, piety”
2. The typical dictionary definition of religion refers to a “belief in, or the worship of a God or Gods” or the “Service and worship of God or the supernatural.”
3. **Edward Burnett Tylor** defined religion as “the belief in spiritual being”.
4. The anthropologist **Clifford Geertz** defined religion as a “ system of symbol which acts to establish powerful pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing, these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”.
5. The sociologist **Emile Durkheim**, in his seminal book *The Elementary forms of the Religious life*, defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called Church, all those who adhere to them”

Religion plays a very role in the functioning of the society but with its own limitations. Some of the positive and negative functions are stated below.

#### Positive Functions of the religion

- 1) Close the gap between hope and reality (e.g., the final victory over death, evil, etc., is in heaven).
- 2) Make virtue out of social necessity (encouraging and requiring the individual to sacrifice for others, ego surrender where the functioning of society conflicts with the functioning of the individual).
- 3) Support and console individuals and groups.
- 4) Enhance social stability through projecting sacredness upon social norms, and through the creation of authoritative sources of opinion regarding moral matters.
- 5) Promote social change when religion is in conflict with the prevailing order of society, through social criticism and prophecy--the "prophetic function" of religion.
- 6) Provide a source of personal identity in pluralistic societies afflicted with anomie.
- 7) Facilitate personal growth and maturation, as they are conceptualized by the religion.
- 8) Adjust individuals to the life cycle of changing social status.

- 9) Rationalize social, political, and economic inequality, reducing conflict in stratified societies.

### ***NEGATIVE FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION***

- 1) Excessive guilt and repression causing individuals to suffer emotionally for failure to live up to religious ideals.
- 2) Authoritarianism—supporting oppressive authority in society.
- 3) Self-mortification—inducing people to endure physical suffering unnecessarily or to cause themselves to suffer deliberately for religious reasons.
- 4) Ethnocentrism—causing people to have narrow, culturally centered perceptions of other groups, arming them with absolute convictions that can justify repression and violence toward them.
- 5) Promotes intergroup conflict—by causing individuals to feel urgent about exporting their religion, and to feel offended by the religions of other peoples.
- 6) Rationalizes social, political, and economic inequality, preventing social change necessary to reduce social conflict.

### ***CONCEPT OF RELIGION***

The important concepts that appear in the study of religion include supernatural beings – of polytheistic and monotheistic beliefs, forms of religion – animism, animatism, totemism, ritual, myth, religious symbolism, ancestor worship, magic, witchcraft and sorcery. Each of these concepts is briefly explained below:

#### ***(a) SUPERNATURAL BEINGS***

There is dichotomy of world into: natural and supernatural. The natural world is explained in terms of cause and effect relations, whereas the supernatural world cannot be explained in causal relations alone. Gods, goddesses, god-lings, dead ancestors, spirits who may be benevolent or malevolent; ghosts, demons, and other forms, which are usually malevolent, and are powerful than human beings in their movements and actions that constitute the world of the supernatural beings. The supernatural beings may be visible at particular point of time, not for all but for a few, or remain invisible. They are not subject to natural laws and principles, whereas the natural beings necessarily follow the natural or physical laws and principles.

Theism refers to the beliefs and ideas that focus on supernatural beings within the religious practices. When the society holds belief in multiple supernatural beings it is called as polytheistic religion. Hinduism is the best example of having a number of gods and goddesses in its pantheon. Monotheistic religions are those having belief in one supreme supernatural being that may be called God or *Yahweh* or *Allah* as in case of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

In several religious practices, the interaction between humans and spiritual beings are through spirit possession, vision and dreams. The spiritual beings possess some humans who become media through which other humans and spirit enter into dialogue. Sometimes, the spirits speak to the human agent who conveys the message to people. In some cases, the humans get visions or the spirits appear in dreams to interact with them. Also individuals get into trance for interacting with the spirits. Thus, links are established between humans and supernatural world.

### ***(b) ANIMISM***

The term Animism is coined by E. B. Tylor (1871) to describe the belief in soul or life force and personality existing in animate and inanimate objects as well as human beings. Several of the tribal religions hold such beliefs. His theory is that human beings are rational beings, and attempt to interpret mysterious phenomena like sleeping, dreams and death with the idea of soul.

### ***(c) ANIMATISM***

R. R. Marett (1866-1943) considered that humans believed in impersonal forces in nature and certain objects. This sort of belief had created in humans religious feelings of awe, fear, wonder, respect, admiration, and other psychical effects. He believed that primitive man could not distinguish between the natural and supernatural and also between living and dead. This condition that prevailed before the development of the idea of soul is called animatism, which Marrett named after *mana* which means power in Polynesia.

### ***(d) NATURISM***

Max Muller contended that since the gods in various societies were originally from natural phenomenon, such as sun, thunder, trees, animals, mountains, forests, lakes, rivers, oceans and so on, the human perception of nature must have had very powerful agencies for origin of religion. Nature was the greatest surprise, a terror, a marvel, a miracle which has also been permanent, constant and regular occurrences, and these could not be explained with the known facts. They are believed to have great influence on the affairs of human beings. The religious thoughts must have originated from the conceptualisation of nature itself and worship of nature.

### ***(e) TOTEMISM***

It is a system of belief in which certain objects, plants or animals have kinship relationship with social groups. Such animate and inanimate objects stand as emblems giving identity to the groups and form representations of the groups. They create religious feelings among the members and form the objects of worship, reverence and sacredness. According to Durkheim, totemism is the earliest form of

religion and it is quite prominently found among the Australian tribes, and such phenomena are also noted among the American tribes as well.

### ***(f) TABOO***

Taboo a Polynesian concept (*tabu/tapu*) but widely used in anthropological literature. It refers to something, use of which is collectively and strictly forbidden in religious context. The violation of a taboo has different consequences of temporary defilement, crime to be punished and attracts the sanctions of supernatural beings and so on.

### ***(g) SACRED AND PROFANE***

According to Durkheim, these are central concepts of religion. The sacred refers to the things or spaces which are set apart for religious purposes, and against these the profane refers to those considered secular in nature. However, in several religions there are no equivalent terms and often they overlap also.

### ***(h) RITUAL***

Ritual, one may understand it as a set of formalised actions performed with symbolic value in a socially relevant context or worshipping a deity or cult. Rituals vary in form and in content within a particular religion and across religions. They involve participation of one or more individuals, physical movements or actions, verbal and non-verbal or symbolic mode of communication based on certain shared knowledge. Often ritual actions are infused with certain moods and emotional states and the participants may inwardly assent or dissent from the ritual process.

**Victor Turner** defines ritual as “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technical routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical (or non-empirical) beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects”.

**Gluckman and Turner** differentiate ritual from ceremony, though both of them are forms of religious behaviour. Ritual involves social status and transition of one’s status and, therefore, it is ‘transformative’, while the ceremony is associated with social status and ‘confirmatory’. Rituals are classified as religious, magical, calenderical, sacred, secular, private, public, sacrificial and totemic and so on.

### ***(i) WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY***

Witchcraft and sorcery are acts of harming one’s fellow men through supernatural means. Though both the arts aim at the same thing there are certain differences between the two. In witchcraft the witch possesses some supernatural power to harm men. He or she is endowed with the power which a

common man is not. The power may be inborn or acquired. It is believed that some of the witches are gifted with this power which they can use willfully, whatever they want to do or to happen automatically takes place in accordance with their wish. The others acquire this power with the help of elaborate rituals and practice. Normally old women were believed to be witches. There are many beliefs associated with witchcraft. The sorcerer on the other hand is a medicine man. He uses bad medicines, acts consciously and works for profit. He cannot harm man without the help of his magical equipment.

### ***1.1.2 EVOLUTIONARY THEORY OF RELIGION***

The study of the religious notions of primitive people arose within the context of evolutionary theory. E.B. Tylor, expounds in his book, *Primitive Culture* (1871), that animism is the earliest and most basic religious form. Out of this evolved fetishism, belief in demons, polytheism, and, finally, monotheism is derived from the adoration of a great god, such as the sky god, in a polytheistic context. He defines religion in such a way that all forms of it could be included, namely, as ‘the belief in Spiritual Beings’. He firmly states that religion is a cultural universal, for no known cultures are without such beliefs. Belief in spirits began as an uncritical but nonetheless rational effort to explain such puzzling empirical phenomenon as death, dreams and possessions. **Herbert Spencer** advocated ancestor worship, a relatively similar system to Tylor’s animism.

As we discuss on religion and its stages of development, certainly it is necessary to look at the beginnings of the thought. There was urgency for man to reconsider current and inherited beliefs and practices to gain some harmony between past and the present experiences. As a result we see the developments from the very basic worship patterns of the primitive man to that of the present age. The developmental stages of the evolution of religion could be enumerated as Totemism, Animism, Pantheism, Polytheism, Monotheism, Monism.

1. The essential feature of **totemism** is the belief in a supernatural connection between a group of people and a group of objects like certain animal species, sometimes plants, or more rarely other objects. Usually there is a taboo on killing or eating an animal totem. In totemism we find that plant species may be totems just as animal species or rocks are.
2. **Animism** may perhaps be explained as the belief that everything which has life or motion has also a soul or spirit, and all natural phenomena are caused by direct personal agency. The theistic tradition recognizes and accepts the existence of God, more specifically a personal God.

3. **Pantheism** is ‘God-is-all-ism’. According to this view all is God and God is all. God is identical with the world and nature. In other words, God and universe are one. God is not a reality separate from the world and remote from it. The particular individual objects have no absolute existence of their own, rather they are either the different modes of the universal substance or parts of the divine whole.
  
4. **Polytheism**, according to the German Sociologist Max Müller, was the form of worship of God during the ancient times. Polytheism is the stage of development in the religious thought when the belief in and worship of many individual Gods existed. Indeed, it was the result of the anthropomorphic personification of the natural powers that was beyond the control of human.
  
5. **Monotheism** is the beginning of believing in one Supreme God even in the polytheistic situation. In the monotheistic tradition we see that there is a demand to abandon many older beliefs, hopes, fears and customs relating to many gods. Even though they have the concept of many gods, they believe in one Supreme God and other gods are only subordinate. Or they believed, as Max Müller observes, that the multiple gods are only the manifestations of the one supreme.
  
6. **Monism** is the belief in one reality. The word was coined by Christian Wolf in the west though it was existed from the ancient times.

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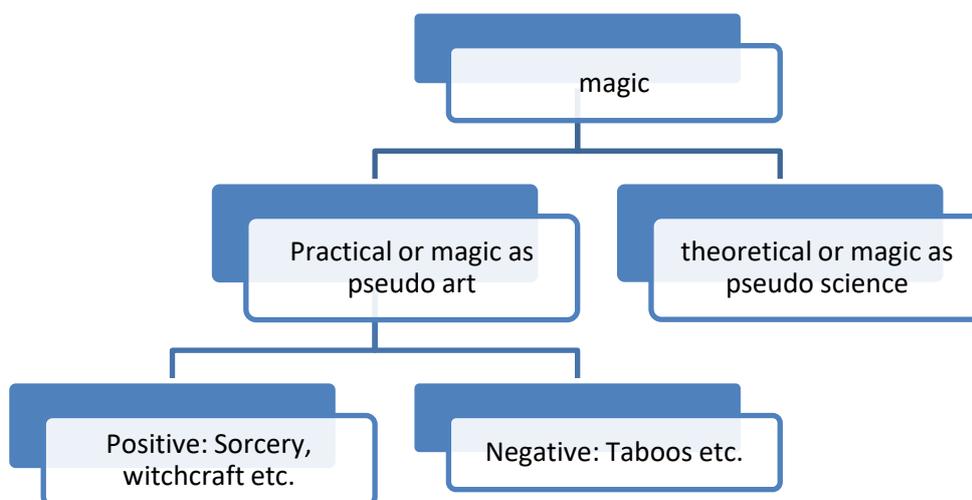
### 1.2.1. MAGIC: MEANING

The term 'magic' is derived from the Persian word 'magi'. 'Magi' or 'magian' in Persian means 'wise men'. 'Magi' is the plural form of the word 'magus'. The magi were the learned Persian priests revered as sages, magicians and diviners. Magic in one of its meanings is the art of producing mysterious results by tricks. These tricks are performed by the magician (normally in the stage) in front of an audience to amuse them. Tricks such as producing a rabbit or pigeon from ones hat, sawing a man into two halves, suspending a man in the air, etc. are popularly known as magic. Magic is the use of rituals, symbols, actions, gestures and language that are believed to exploit supernatural forces. The belief in and the practice of magic has been present since the earliest human cultures and continues to have an important spiritual, religious and medicinal role in many cultures today.

Magic is often viewed with suspicion by the wider community, and is sometimes practiced in isolation and secrecy. In non-scientific societies, perceived magical attack is sometimes employed to explain personal or societal misfortune. On the basis of evidence collected from all part of the world, James Frazer found that magical formulae are based on two principles: (i) Like products like; and (ii) Once in contact always in contact. He has reduced these principles into laws.

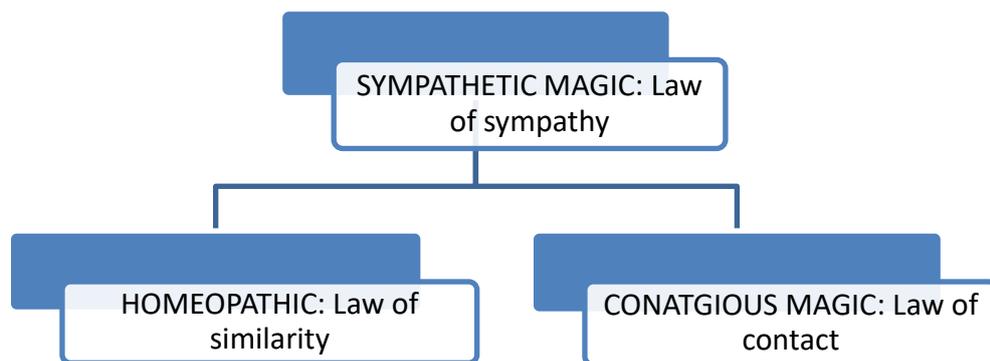
The first he calls the law of similarity, and the magic associated with it homeopathic, imitative or mimetic magic. The second is called by him the law of contact, or contagion, and the magic associated with it contagious magic. On these two principles are based all the various magical rites found in primitive society. All types of magic are labelled sympathetic by Frazer, because he considers them to be based on the principle of sympathy between cause and effect. Magic, like modern science, is based on the observation of, and experimentation on, cause-effect phenomena.

Frazer sums up these conclusions in a diagram: FIGURE-1



**FIGURE-1** Explanation of magic according to Frazer

Frazer noted that there are two types of magical action that designed to avoid certain ends. The first, he called sorcery or positive magic and the second, he called taboo or negative magic. The aim of the positive magic is to produce a desired event. The aim of the negative is to avoid an undesirable one. But consequences, desirable and undesirable, are supposed to be brought about in accordance with the laws of similarity and contact.



In Chota Nagpur some tribal groups believe the thunder, with its rumbling noise, is the direct cause of rain. Therefore, when they want rain they go to a hill top, sacrifice a hen or a pig, and then start flinging down stones, rocks and boulders down the hill, expecting rain to follow the rumbling noises created by their action, just as it follows thunder.

The Ho tribe light fires expecting rain to come out of the cloud of smoke that is raised to the skies. These are cases of homoeopathic magic. So also was the human sacrifice of the Khond. It is believed that as tears roll down the sufferer's eyes, and blood gushes forth from his wounds, so will rain come. One based on law of similarity or idea that like produces like or that an effect resembles a cause. Imitative magic is based on the principle "that like produces like or that an effect resembles its cause." Contagious magic is based on the law of contact or contagion. The law of contact or contagion is the belief" that things which have once/been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed. This division is not always maintained in the practice of magic. They are often combined and Frazer called this combination of the two, Sympathetic magic, which is the belief that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy.

Malinowski describes magic as a range of practical acts, which are carried out to achieve a desired result. Among several types of magic, Malinowski selects for special mention (i) the black magic and love magic, (ii) imitating or forecasting type of magic and (iii) simple magic.

- i) In black magic, a pointed object (like a bone or a stick, an arrow or the spine of an animal) is directed towards the person to be destroyed. This is done in a mimic fashion to an imagined body of the victim. The performance of such a ritual is marked by a dramatic expression of emotion. The magician ritually, in a mimic way, destroys a figure or object, which symbolises the victim. The rite expresses all the hatred and fury against that person. Love magic is the reverse of black magic. In this the magician strokes and fondles the object representing the beloved. Here, the behaviour of a love-stricken person is imitated. One can say that all such magical acts, be they black or love or terror, are basically expressions of emotion. Objects and actions used in these rites are linked through emotions.
- ii) In the second type of magic the ceremonies imitate the desired result. For example, if the aim is to kill a person then the performer of the ritual will slowly weaken the voice, utter a death rattle and fall down in imitation of the rigor of death.
- iii) Then, there are simple acts of magic, which are meant for immediate results. Generally, a magician conveys the magic spell to some object, which can be later applied to the person who has to be controlled. In such a case the material object, which receives the magic-spell, has to be of an appropriate and pre-determined nature.

The magic spell may be contained in the ritual utterance of a formula, which is handed down from one to the other generation of magicians. Malinowski describes three elements associated with the magical formulas.

1. The first element is the phonetic effect, which results from imitations of natural sounds, such as the whistling of the wind, the sound of thunder, the roar of sea-waves.
2. The second element is the uttering of words, which point to the desired result of the particular magic. For example, in black magic the performer speaks about the symptoms of the disease, which is meant to kill the victim. Similarly, in healing magic, the performer describes the conditions associated with good health.
3. The third element refers to, according to Malinowski, the most important aspect of every spell.

This comprises the mythological references to magic being handed down by ancestors and culture heroes. Almost each magical rite has a story justifying its existence. The story generally describes when and where a particular magic rite became the property of a magician of a certain group of a family or clan. But this sort of story, Malinowski cautions, should not be confused with the origins of magic, because all magic is considered to be existing since the beginning. Magic is supposed to coexist with all rational efforts of human beings to control their surroundings. The spell or the magical rite takes care of what eludes their normal rational attempts. Secondly, magic is primarily associated with all-human activities, such as agriculture, fishing, hunting, trading, disease, death, and

lovemaking. Magic is not as such directed to nature and is not conceived as a product of nature. It is also not derived from knowledge of natural laws. Rather it is primarily based on tradition and refers to human beings' power to achieve desired results.

### ***1.2.2 RELIGION AND MAGIC***

Both magic and religion contain rituals. Typically, there is a recognition that rituals do not always work; rather, it is thought to simply increase the likelihood of the desired result coming to pass. Religion and magic are two ways of tiding over crises. Primitive man must have had to face the realities of life. He did so with his belief in some superior power, or powers, either by trying to coerce it into service, i.e., by magic, or by praying and offering worship to it, i.e., by the religious approach. Both magic and religion are tools of adaptation, the objective being to help man out of difficult situations and relieve his tensions. The two approaches seem to have always existed together and sometimes they come so near each other as almost to blend into each other. However, it is believed that the magical approach is the more primitive. Man must have resorted to supplication only after his ego driven magical approach failed to purification, others often seek "magical" favourable results, such as healing or good luck in battle.

Religion and magic reveal many similarities. Both of them deal with unobservable powers. They operate only on the basis of faith of the adherent or believer. Both religion and magic can be explained as human attempts to cope with fears, frustrations and uncertainties of day-to-day life. Both in religion and magic attempts are made to direct the supernatural power to achieve specific ends, using certain techniques. Malinowski and Frazer are well-known scholars who have contributed richly to the understanding of magic and religion. Religion refers to ultimate problems and meaning of human existence (e.g. death, failures etc.), whereas magic is concerned more with immediate problem like control of weather, drought, victory in battle, prevention of disease.

Within religion, one prays to gods and pleads with them, whereas in magic, the magical manipulates the supernatural power. Religion makes a person believe in the power of the supernatural. On the contrary, in magical practices, the adherent believe in the own power to manipulate the power of the supernatural. It needs to be pointed out that religion and magic are not completely distinct. In religion, a person feels powerless before the sacred, and accepts the supreme power and omnipotence of the sacred. A devotee prays and begs to the supreme.

Moreover, religion demands a strong emotional involvement its adherents and is very personal. In magic, the magician in business like and undertake to manipulate the power of the supernatural, only for a 'price'. A magical act is more impersonal and follows a fixed formula. Religion has more of collective-orientation. Religion pursue common goals; it has a set of beliefs and common practice; it unites its adherents as a community. Indirect contrast, magic does not produce or even attempt to

produce 'community' among the believers. Magic is more individualistic. Magic moreover does not provide a philosophy, a way of life or moral prescriptions, as religion does. A practitioner of magic, the magician represents only himself or herself whereas religious functionaries represent the religion or the community of believers.

**R:H. Lowie (1925)**, basing his thinking on his study of the Crow Indians (an 'Amerindian people of the region between the Platte and Yellow stone rivers), considers that for the primitives, religion is a matter of feeling. It is marked by 'a sense of the Extraordinary; Mysterious or Supernatural'. Instead of religious behaviour, he writes about emotional responses of amazement and awe. Anything that gives rise to those feelings is characterised as religion. Thus, for Lowie, if magic is associated with emotion, it is to be called religion.

Another American anthropologist, **Paul Radin**, also emphasised that religious feelings arise and are centered around beliefs and customs. This sensitivity to belief and custom is expressed in thrill. The religious thrill is generally manifested in time of crises. He considered magic as religion only if it arouses the religious feelings. In the absence of religious emotion, magic is only folklore.

**Malinowski** held that both religion and magic originate and function under conditions of emotional stress. Magic is used by the primitive as we use scientific knowledge today for overcoming practical difficulties in their day to day life. This relieves the tension which is built up because of a sense of weakness or inability of human beings to achieve success in their pursuits. In magic, desired goals are acted out and magical rites are an end and the practitioner of magic yet the feeling of confidence. They can then continue to pursue their normal activities.

### ***1.2.3 RELIGION AND SCIENCE***

Science is a search for knowledge as well as method for solving problems. Both religion and science are forms of human understanding. Thus, science and religion are human ways of relating themselves to reality. Science and religion try to make exploit the world of the unknown. Religion is more collectively oriented than science, but science too emphasises team-spirit and co-operation of the scientific community. Both science and religion claim access to truth. On many occasions in the past as well as present, in many a war, science and religion have acted against humankind. Both religion and science prescribe qualifications for their personnel.

Science insists that all phenomena that are observed should not be accepted at face value. Its value and meaning can be discovered through experimentation. All factors (time, place, persons, equipment, etc.) that can affect the results of such experiments are controlled in laboratory condition. Science differs from religion because it believes in neutrality and objectivity. Scientific method is claimed to

have annulled the subjective biases. Science believes in precision and measurement, which is not possible for religion. Science brings the unknown to the level of observable reality. Religion cannot bring god to the level of observable phenomenon. Scientific knowledge has more concrete application in the form of technology, which might help in manipulating nature. Religion cannot establish such concrete and immediate results. Scientific knowledge and method are valid universally, whereas principles of religious life differ from society to society.

However, both share some similarities in their functioning. Durkheim maintains that scientific thought has its origins in religious thought. Both attempt to classify things, relate them to one another and explain them. Scientific thought is a more developed and refined form of religious thought. The terms used in modern science like force and power have a religious origin. Durkheim writes that religious thought will ultimately give way to the advance of scientific thought. He points out that social sciences are in fact undertaking a scientific study of religion itself. Both religious and scientific thought contribute to the collective representations of society. There cannot be any conflict between the two because both are directed towards seeking universal principles. Thus the goal of both systems of thought is to help human beings rise above the limitations of private, individual nature and lead a life which is both, individual and social. Individuals need society in order to be truly human, and religion and science both contribute to unifying individuals with society.

#### ***1.2.4 .MAGIC AND SCIENCE***

Like science, magic has a specific aim related with human needs and instincts. Both are governed by a system of rules, which determine how a certain act can be effectively performed. Both science and magic develop techniques of carrying out certain activities. On the basis of these similarities, Malinowski concludes that he would agree with James Frazer and call magic a pseudo-science. However, the differences between the two are more pronounced. Science, as reflected in the primitive knowledge of tribals, is related with the general experience of everyday life. It is based on observation and reason over their interaction with nature.

Magic, is on the other hand, founded in particular experience of tense emotional states. The basis of science is the conviction in validity of experience, effort and reason. But magic is based on the belief that one can still hope, one can still desire. The corpus of rational knowledge is incorporated in a social setting and certain type of activities, which are clearly separable from the social setting, and activities related with the body of magical knowledge.



### ***1.3. SACRED AND PROFANE***

The concepts of sacred and profane are central to Durkheim's theory of religion. Durkheim says that the sacred is ideal and transcends everyday existence, it is extra-ordinary, potentially dangerous, awe-inspiring, fear inducing. The sacred refers to things set part by man including religious beliefs, rites, duties or anything socially defined as requiring special religious treatment. Almost anything can be sacred – a god, a rock, across, the moon, the earth ,a tree, an animal or bird etc. These are sacred only because some community has marked them as sacred. Once established as sacred they become symbols of religious beliefs, sentiments and practices.

The profane is mundane, anything ordinary. Through his survey of religions, Durkheim seems to hold that there is no identical belief or practice. However he did find that all religions, regardless of their name or teaching, separate the sacred from the profane. By profane, he meant those aspects of life that were not concerned with religion or religious purposes but were parts of the ordinary aspects of worldly life. He also found that all religions develop a community around their practices and beliefs. Thus according to Durkheim, a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, which unite into one single moral community called a church, and all those who adhere to them. Throughout human history, the distinction between the profane and the sacred has been central to all religions. In brief, religion is a system of beliefs and practices acknowledging the Sacred.

The profane embraces those ideas, persons, practices and things that are regarded with an everyday attitude of commonness, utility and familiarity. The unholy or the profane is also believed to contaminate the holy or sacred. It is the denial or sub-ordination of the holy in some way. The attitudes and behaviour toward it are charged with negative emotions and hedged about by strong taboos.

The sacred and profane are closely related because of the highly emotional attitude towards them. According to Durkheim the circle of sacred objects cannot be determined then once and for all. Its extent varies indefinitely according to different religions. The significance of the sacred lies in the fact of its distinction from the profane. There is an opposition between these two spheres which has to be carefully regulated through rites and ceremonies. The sacred is usually in a higher position, valued more than profane things, and its identity and power are protected by social rules. The sacred and profane are kept apart, says Durkheim, because they are heterogeneous (different), antagonistic (in conflict) and isolated (separated). Rites therefore exist to mediate between the two worlds.

For example. Why are believers not allowed to wear their shoes inside a temple? Wearing shoes or chappals for walking is a routine, practical or profane act. The temple is considered a holy, pure place; it is sacred. The floor of the temple must therefore be protected from the polluting dirt of our shoes. The sacred and profane are kept apart. Beliefs and rites, says Durkheim, unite to form religion. Beliefs

are the moral ideas, the rules, the teachings and myths. They are the collective representations which exist outside of the individual, yet integrate the individual into the religious system.

Through beliefs, human beings understand the sacred and their relationship to it. They can lead their lives accordingly. Rites are the rules of conduct that follow from beliefs, which prescribe how human beings must behave with regard to sacred things. They can be positive, where the sacred is sought to be brought closer to the world of men, for example, through 'havan' or sacrifice. Rites can be negative, which means the sacred and profane are sought to be kept apart, e.g. purification rites, fasts, penance or suffering. In Durkheim's view rites serve to sustain the intensity of religious-beliefs. They bring individuals together, strengthening their social natures.

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## UNIT- 2

### FORMS OF RELIGION

#### ***2.1 ANIMISM: CONCEPT AND MEANING***

Edward B Tylor (1832-1917) in his classical works “Primitive Culture” mentioned that “animism” is the point of departure for the birth and development of religion. The term animism is sometimes used loosely alike for the belief that external things possess of a life akin to human soul. Tylor borrowed the term from a German chemist, George Ernest Stahl (1660-1734) according to whom all living things derived from “anima”, “soul” or “mind”. Tylor located “animism” “in the current atmosphere of evolution, and employed it to depict the culture of progress of humankind from lower to higher form. According to Tylor animism divides into two great dogmas, forming part of one consistent doctrine; first concerning soul of the individual creature which is capable of continued existence after the death and secondly other spirit, which can go upward to the rank of powerful deities.

Thus animism, in its full development, includes belief in soul and in a future state in controlling deities and subordinate spirit which is resulting in some kind of active worship. Religious significance of animism is that man selects the object for its religious function by endowing it with a soul like his own. The evidence which bears on animistic nature worship shows that it was essentially connected with a belief in souls operating in the things which attracted man’s curiosity and wonder or excited his fear.

The idea of soul was first conceived by men as having double life they ordinarily lead one when awake and the other while asleep. For the primitive man 'the mental representation which he has while awake and those of his dreams are said to be of the same value. So when he dreams that he has visited a distant country, he believes that he really was there. But he could not have gone there unless two beings exist within him; the one, his body which has remained lying on the ground and which he finds in the same position on awakening, the other during this time, has travelled through space. Tylor’s conjectural arguments ran as follows.

Primitive man had certain experiences; in his dreams he engaged in various types of activities even while he was sleeping; he met his dead ancestors in dreams and had hallucinatory experiences about them, and other beings, while he was awake; he heard the echoes of his own voice; he saw his own reflection in ponds, pools and rivers; and he failed to disentangle himself from his shadow. Even while he was having these understandable (to him) experiences, something of a much deeper import

must also have happened periodically and sets the primitive man's mind thinking: people must have died. This catastrophe must have been a great challenge. It was thus that the belief in such an unseen thing, or power which kept people alive when it was in them, and made them dead when it left their bodies, emerged. Such a thing, or power, is called "soul".

But how was it that sleep, so very like death, was not death, and how was it that people had all these various experiences in dreams, and while awake, heard echoes and saw shadows and reflections? Tylor says primitive man must have thought there must be two souls in a human being; a free soul which could go out of him and have experiences, and a body soul which if it left the body resulted in its death. The former may have been associated with and represented by breath and shadow, the latter by blood and head.

Primitive man must have come to the conclusion that when the body soul left the body permanently, the person concerned died; and his soul became a ghost or spirit. So, Tylor believed that an attitude of awe and reverence towards these intangible and non-material spiritual beings forms the core of the earliest form of primitive religion. These spiritual beings are not under our control, and have, therefore, to be propitiated lest should do harm, and in order that they may render help. Thus ancestor worship was the earliest temples. Animism consists of such a belief in the role of spiritual beings in human life; it is a kind of polytheism. Tylor believed that in course of time there was evolutionary development in religious beliefs and forms, and the progress was from polytheism towards monotheism.

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## ***2.2 NATURISM: CONCEPT AND MEANING***

Animism is based on the idea attributed on it, which had no physical reality. Max Muller propounded the concept naturism, which is contrary to animism. Max Muller says at first nothing seemed less natural than nature. Nature was the greatest surprise, a terror, a marvel, a standing miracle and it was only an account of their permanence, consistency and regular recurrence that certain features of that standing miracle were called natural, in the sense of foreseen, common intelligible. It was that vast domain of surprise, of terror, or marvel, or miracle, the unknown, as distinguished from the known. The flowing river manifests an infinite force since nothing can exhaust it. There is no aspect of nature, which is not pitted to awaken within us this overwhelming sensation of an infinity, which surrounds us and dominates us. It is from this sensation that religions are derived. Natural forces have been transformed into personal agents, living and thinking beings, spiritual powers or gods. Man's fear of the nature and its power to destroy made them deify nature into gods in naturism.

Max Muller said that the earliest form of religion must have been the worship of objects of nature like sun, moon, river, etc; and evidence in support of such a view has come in from archaeological excavations conducted in Egypt and elsewhere. It is maintained that an attitude of awe or love and reverence towards objects of nature is born as a result of a “diseased” mind which invests lifeless things with life and all the power that is associated with life. This error of mind is, according to this theory, born out of defective language. Such linguistic errors as the sun rises and sets, or thunder sends rain, or the tree bear flowers and fruits, give rise to belief in some power inherent in the suns, thunder, trees, etc. So far as it is maintained that objects of nature were worshipped, no difficulty arises; evidence in favour of such a practice is heavy. However, any claim to such worship being the earliest form of religion, or the explanation given, is not convincing. There is no proof to show that various conceptions follow The merit and usefulness of these various theories emerges when they are taken together, as each of them expresses some essential truth regarding primitive religion.

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## ***2.3 TOTEMISM: CONCEPT AND MEANING***

Totemism is the key element of the study in the development of 19th and early 20th century's theories of religion, especially for the thinker like Emile Durkheim. The word Totemism is derived from the root “oode” (ojibwe language) which referred to something's kinship related. Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) proposed a structural theory of the origins of religion in the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915), saying that social order is required for people to live and work together. Durkheim begins

his argument that religion is a social phenomenon by analysing the religion of the Australian Aborigines. He chooses these people because he believes that they represent the most elementary form of social organisation, the clan, and the most basic religious belief, Totemism. Durkheim treated the totem as symbolic of the god, he inferred that the god is a personification of the clan.

This conclusion, if generalized, suggest that all the objects of religious worship symbolize social relationships and, indeed, play an important role in the continuance of the social group. Among these people, as in all cultures, religion centres on a distinction between the sacred, which is viewed as powerful, full of life force and efficacious, and the profane which is ordinary and lifeless. The sacred force for the Australian Aborigines is the Totem, an animal that is intimately related to the clan by genealogical myths and who often cannot be killed or eaten. The totem is usually an animal or other natural figure that spiritually represents a group of related people such as clan. It is stipulated ancestor of a group of people whose life is conceived to be bound up with the life of the tribe, and to be closely linked with the wellbeing of the social whole.

Durkheim theorizes that totemism arises from the socio-economic conditions of the Aborigines, in which most of the year is spent in small family groups hunting and gathering. However, at times of crisis or plenty the families meet as a clan. Communing with his kin, the primitive people experience a sense of power, well-being, security, and joy that is beyond the scope of the ordinary. This totemic system, Durkheim argues, is eminently social.

The primitive people, according to Durkheim, felt power and security due to their membership in the clan which allows them to transcend their personal and family boundaries. The myths and rites that surround the totem, who is the symbol for society, help to ensure the continuity of the community and make intelligible various social phenomena. He used Totemism as a case of the simplest and most primitive religion that observation can make known to us . Durkheim used his analysis of Totemism to demonstrate the social origin of religion and the underlying unity of religious, philosophical and scientific thought. Totemism was not just a way of thinking but also of acting and telling, organised around the separation of the domain of “sacred” and “profane that for Durkheim constitute the essence of religion itself. He saw Totemism as the original form of religion.

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