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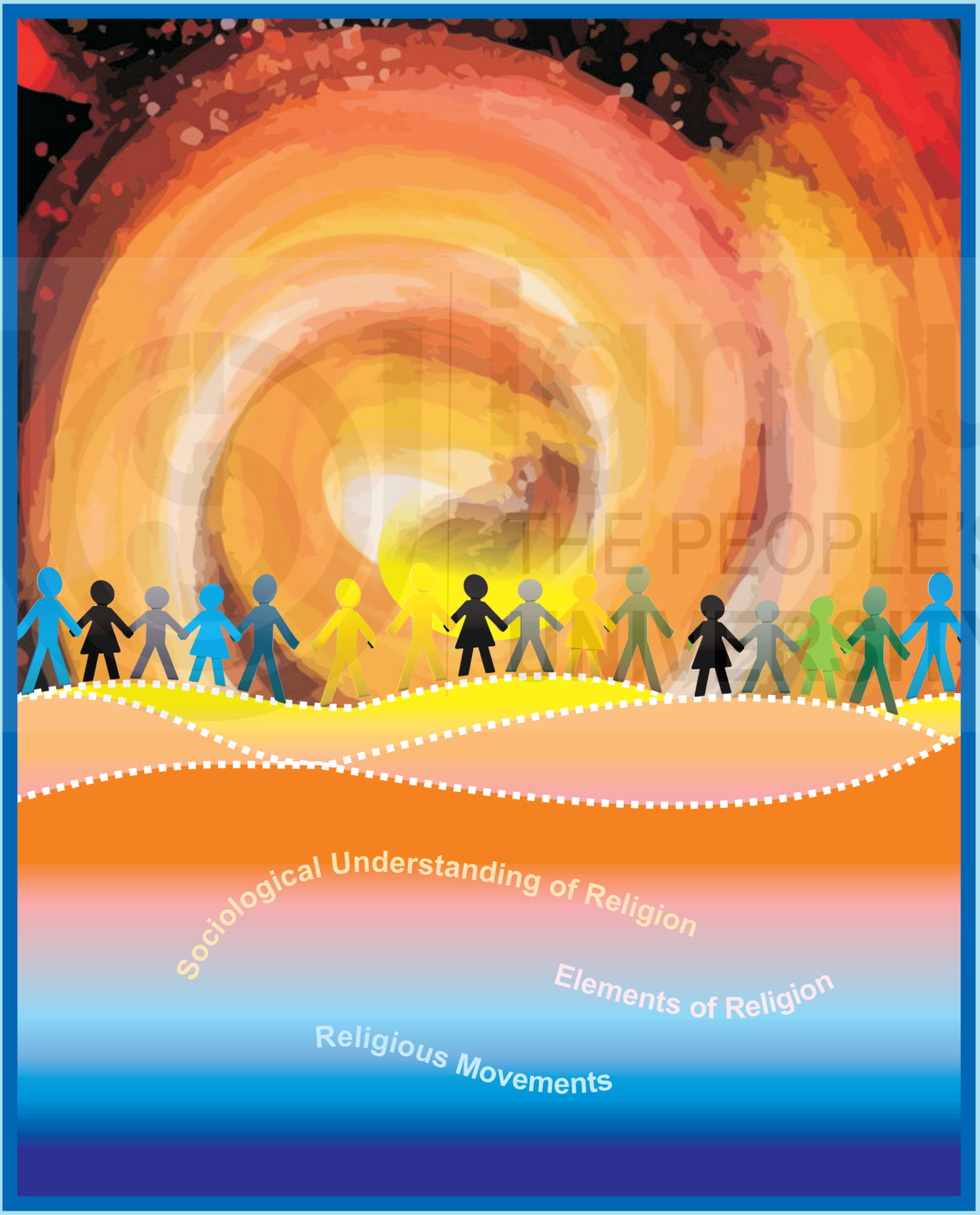
Indira Gandhi National Open University
School of Social Sciences

BSOC-106
SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION



BSOC-106

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

School of Social Sciences
Indira Gandhi National Open University

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

You might wonder what makes religion a pertinent subject of sociological enquiry. In other words, what is sociological about beliefs, rituals, prayer, places of worship and religious specialists? A simple answer to this question is: religion contributes to first, laying out of goals of life for many people; and second, providing a blue-print for behavior towards realization of these goals. In a broad sense, sociology of religion focuses attention on social contexts of religion; and the role of religion in shaping and re-shaping social order. Agreeably, in contemporary times it is difficult to see the presence of religion in all that people do and we see people defy their religion on several occasions.Those who defy the tenets of religion in their behavior are aware of the fact that they are doing so. There is no denying, however, that perceptibly or imperceptibly, religion is woven into nearly all aspects of life. It paves the way for social cohesion but is the source of many conflicts too.

This course on the sociology of religion will discuss different aspects of religion. The objective here is threefold: to familiarize you with the various forms of religion; perspectives and theoretical approaches of classical sociological thinkers; and discuss how and in what way religion can bring about change in society. The course is divided into three Blocks each of which deals with a specific theme. Each Block is divided into Units that discuss different aspects of the theme in detail.

First Block: Sociological Understanding of Religion comprises four Units. First Unit outlines elementary forms of religion. It discusses religion as a group phenomenon and how it operates in pre-modern societies. Additionally, it explains the distinction between religion and magic on the one hand and religion and science on the other. Second Unit discusses the interface of religion with economy and power particularly with reference to the perspective of Max Weber. Third Unit explains how religion influences and is influenced by politics. We discuss the nature and scope of secularization and examine how secular state emerged from struggle for power. Fourth Unit explains the views of Tylor, Frazer and Durkheim on magic, science and religion and examines how they interrelate with each other.

Second Block: Elements of Religion comprises five Units. Fifth Unit builds on sociological understanding of sacred, myth and ritual and in doing so explains the social significance of religion. Sixth Unit focuses on life-cycle rituals. We see how body serves as vehicle of transition from one phase of life to another through life-cycle rituals. Seventh Unit starts with the concept of pilgrimage and what makes a journey a pilgrimage and from there go on to explaining the social significance if pilgrimages. Eighth Unit explains the concepts of sect and cult thereafter discusses the formation and the role of sects and cults in society. Ninth Unit sheds light on ritual specialists. More specifically, it explains the role ritual specialists play in mediating between the human and divine world.

Third Block: Religious Movements comprises three Units. Tenth Unit presents two religious movements in India that prevailed in the medieval period. These movements emphasized solitude and pursuit of self-reflection making way for peaceful change in society. Eleventh Unit begins with the socio-economic conditions in society that warranted change. This is followed by the example of the Arya Samaj Movement as an example of the scope of religious movements in ushering-in social transformation. Twelfth Unit is based on New Age Movements with illustration of the Ramakrishna Mission to explain how such movements address the concerns of individuals who have lost trust in traditions and are surrounded by issues of identity.

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Block 1
Sociological Understanding of Religion

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UNIT 1 FORMULATING RELIGIOUS: ELEMENTARY FORMS OF RELIGION*

Structure

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1.2 Sociological Understanding of Religion
    1.2.1 Religion is a Group Phenomenon
    1.2.2 'Supernatural' and the 'Sacred'
    1.2.3 Beliefs and Practices
    1.2.4 Moral Prescriptions
1.3 Intellectualist Theories of Religion
    1.3.1 Nature-Myth School
    1.3.2 Ghost Theory
    1.3.3 Soul Theory or Animism
    1.3.4 Dependence on Magic
1.4 Religion in Pre-modern Societies
    1.4.1 Émile Durkheim's Contribution
1.5 Religion and Magic
1.6 Religion and Science
1.7 Let Us Sum Up
1.8 References
1.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit you will be able to:

- appreciate the need to understand religion sociologically
- discuss intellectualist theories of religion
- understand the difference between magic, science and religion

*Adopted from IGNOU Course Material: Unit 1 and 3 written by M Kennedy and Unit 4 written by Debnath Bishwanath of *Society and Religion (*ESO15) and Unit 20 *in The Study of Society* (ESO 11) with modifications by Nita Mathur

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Religion is concerned with the shared beliefs and practices of human beings. It is the human response to those elements in the life and environment of mankind which are beyond their ordinary comprehension. Most religions deal with the attempt of human beings to understand something or some power which is supernatural and suprasensory. It is pre-eminently social and is found in nearly all societies. Majumdar and Madan (1956: 151) explain that the word religion has its origin in the Latin word **rel(i)igio**. This is derived from two root words. The first root is leg, meaning 'to gather, count, or observe'. The second root is lig, meaning 'to bind'. The first root refers to belief in and practice of 'signs of Divine Communication'. The second root refers to the carrying out of those activities which link human beings with the supernatural powers. Thus, we find that the word religion basically represents beliefs and practices which are generally the main characteristics of all religions.

1.2 SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION

Religion has been characterised as that aspect of human social and personal life which embodies the most sublime of human aspirations. It is the foundation on which the normative structure of society stands. It is the upholder of values, morality and ethics of society. In this sense, it is the source of public order in society and provides the source of inner individual peace to men and women. It has both ennobling, as well as, civilising effect on mankind. Yet, it has also led to the creation of obstacles in the path of progress. Its negative effects amongst mankind have been of promoting fanaticism and intolerance, ignorance, superstition and obscurantism (O'Dea 1966:20). Human cultures in time and space have envisioned various articles of faith. So there are different forms of religion. Broadly we can classify them into three classes: (i) simple form of religion; (ii) complex form of religion; and (iii) mixed form of religion. Sociologically speaking category (ii) has evolved from the category (i); however, this development need not be unidirectional. It can be in the opposite direction too, just as it can be a mixture of both as in the case of (iii).

The simple forms of religion can be distinguished from the complex forms of religion. There are some important characteristic features which are found in the simple forms.

These characteristic features of the simple form of religion are as follows:

i) The archaic form of religion is ahistorical, that is timeless. It is believed as a divinely given form of life, which has been in existence since the appearance, or creation, of human being, the beginning of the World.

ii) As it is ahistorical, it is not founded or formalised by human being.

iii) In this form of religion, the knowledge of belief and ritual is transmitted orally from one generation to the next.

iv) In it, the religious experience is also an aesthetic experience, shared collectively in such performances as ritual dance and festivity.

v) It is essentially descriptive, not explanatory. It is practised in 'good faith' a faith that needs no interpretation, no philosophical debate, no dialectical discussion.

In this description of simple forms of religion we can see that the tendency to philosophise does not exist here. The practical aspect of religion and magic are present. Therefore, there are no scriptures or Holy books present in such religions.

According to Émile Durkheim (1912) the simple form of religion forms the inner ring, as of a tree, of which the complex forms of religions form the outer, more evolved, ring. He says that in simple societies there generally exist two component elements in the supernatural field. One is the sacred element and the other is the profane. Durkheim calls the sacred element as religion and the profane element as magic or primitive science. As a contrast to Durkheim, Malinowski (1948) has classified religion and magic as the sacred part and science as the profane part.

Every society possesses its own set of religious myths. Myths actually are the carriers of beliefs from one generation to another in a simple sense. These beliefs are shared by the group in general whether this be a simple society or a modern society. However, the conception of the exact nature of the supernatural varies from one society to another. In the belief system of some societies "the supernatural may consist of ghosts and spirits, for others it may be a belief in the impersonal power which pervades everything in this world, while for some other people the supernatural may be manifested through a pantheon of anthropomorphic Gods and Goddesses, or through a simple God" (Majumdar and Madan 1956 : 152).

One of the first attempts to explain religious beliefs and its origin in simple society was made by Tylor (1871). He formulated the theory of animism which is the belief in the soul (anima). Therefore, he called this theory animism. He says that there can be multiple sources through which religion has originated but belief in the soul is crucial.

Tylor visualised the following phases in the evolution of simple form of religions:

a) Lower Animism: It tends to be amoral, that is, the soul is continued after death in a condition which does not depend on its death during life.

b) Higher Animism: It is based on the "retribution doctrine", that is, there are rewards and punishments for the soul, depending on the lifetime performance.

According to the critics of Tylor, animism is a later development in the history of religion. Scholars like Preuss and Max Mueller propogated a pre- animistic theory or religion called Animatism. Animatism is the belief that everything in Nature has life and is animate. Manaism is a special form of animatism. According to Majumdar and Madan (1956: 156) this theory is based on the notion that the primitive religion is based on belief in an all- pervad1ng supernatural power. Though 'beyond the reach of the senses', it exists in all objects, including human beings and expresses as physical force or such other power. According to Marett, such -belief can be called Manaism after the Polynesian term 'mana' to represent this power.

To take an Indian example, amongst the Hos of Singhbhumi, Bihar, there exists a similar kind of religious belief which Majumdar (1956) has called Bongaism'. These people believe in the concept of 'bonga' which resides in trees, natural objects and sometimes in manmade articles like bi-cycles, etc. It is the manifestation of a vague supernatural power which is, according to believers, the cause of all energy.

According to Frazer, religion and magic are the two ways of dealing with the major crises of life. In primitive societies men adopted two ways of facing the realities of life. One was through magic which is the belief in the superior supernatural power, which coerces it into service. For example, through chanting magical words supernatural spirits are made to obey the demands of the magician. The other way is to become subservient to the supernatural powers and worship it. This subservience to the supernatural forces is called religion. However, in Frazer's opinion, magic and religion existed together in primitive societies in simpler forms of religions. There is the last stage in the progress of knowledge called science which, like magic is based on the principles of cause and effect, but unlike magic is based on true correlations which can be proved. Thus, magic, religion and science- are the three phases of the same reality in society.

Complex form of religion has following main features, which are radically different from the simple form of religion.

i) It is historical, that is, its origin can be traced.

ii) is also a founded religion. The founder is attributed with divine powers, recognised as the Incarnation of God, the Son of God, or the Messenger of God. The adherents look upon the founder as saviour.

iii) The knowledge of belief and ritual is codified and textualised. The scriptures are considered holy and believed to contain the sacred words of God, or of his representative, and worshipped as a deity.

iv) In this form of religion there is a large measure of personalism. The emphasis is on personal experience of religious phenomena. Faith is organised around the personality of the founder.

v) This is a highly intellectualised form of religion. It possesses a body of doctrine which the adherents are required to believe and follow. The new doctrines are added in course of scholastic development. New interpreters belong to the same spiritual lineage. This leads to the formation of cults and sects. To continue the doctrinal system and to propagate a' particular ideology there comes up a class of specialists, preachers, monks and ascetics who devote their lives exclusively for this purpose.

Mixed form of religion is characterized by the elements of both the simple and the complex forms. In particular, it is a religion with scholastic explanation but without history.

1.2.1 Religion is a Group Phenomenon

Religion involves a group of people. Religion is a shared system of beliefs and practices. Every religion emphasises the need for collective worship. Festivals and rituals are occasions which bring people together. M.N. Srinivas (1978:202)

in his study of a Coorg village observes that the festivals of village deities include a village-dance, collective hunt and a dinner for the entire village. The collective dinner, in which the entire village participates, is called 'urome' (village-harmony). Durkheim (1912), equates god with society, so much so that, when you worship God you are worshipping your own society. According to Durkheim God is a human creation and a social creation at that. .God is, in fact, born in the collective experience ("effervescence") of coming together, leading to rituals.

Some people may hold that one's religious affiliation should not be disclosed in public either through rituals or any religious marker. According to them religion belongs to the realm of the private life. Some parents are not bothered about the religious affiliation of their sons or daughters, because it is their personal affair. Some people may even declare that. 'Mera haath Jagannath' while some may say that 'my work is my religion'. Now, you might ask, whether these individual beliefs make a religions or not. The answer is that even these individual beliefs operate in the context of shared social values and norms and to that extent they can be treated like any other religion.

Many people may be critical about religion and some of us may reject it altogether. Yet the fact remains that since religion is an aspect of culture, we learn religious values, beliefs and practices as grow up in a society.

1.2.2 The 'Supernatural' and the 'Sacred'

At the centre of almost every religion lies the idea of the supernatural. The Supernatural is something beyond physical understanding. It is 'omnipotent', 'infinite', or 'extraordinary'. ‘Belief in supernatural beings’ was the definition for religion, offered by Tylor (1871), a famous anthropologist. Belief in the supernatural beings might also include belief in other kind of beings like magic forces, angels or souls of dead ancestors. Believers might arrange the supernatural beings in a hierarchy according to their power or they may differentiate the supernatural beings in terms of their functions. It should be interesting to note that Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, three Hindu Gods, are said to perform the functions of creation of the cosmic order, its maintenance and destruction, respectively.

Though the supernatural is all powerful, 'infinite' and 'beyond senses', some people try to personify it is a human being. This can be considered as one's attempt to - comprehend the supernatural. People also believe that favours can be extracted from the supernatural forces or being by pacifying them. Certain natural misfortunes may be explained with references to the anger or outrage of the supernatural. Moreover, it is not necessary that supernatural must be personified as human beings. Supernatural beings can be natural forces as well, such as wind, fire, mountain etc.

Yet the fact remains that the notion and experience of the supernatural is present in all religions across the globe. Indeed-it is among the basic areas in which both religious specialists and laypersons happen to worship, respect nerve, and propitiate the sacred.

Box 1 .1 Supernatural and Sacred

All supernatural beings are not 'sacred'. There are categories of superanatural beings, like devils, evil spirit, etc. which are considered as 'evil', are also powerful. For example, it can be pointed out from the Bible that Satan (devil) was powerful enough to tempt even Jesus, when he was doing penance in the desert. Certain other categories of supernatural beings are considered to be neutral-neither good nor evil. All categories of supernatural being create, in the minds of human being, a sense of 'fear' and 'respect'.

Some scholars have argued that there is a definite distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane'. The 'sacred versus profane' is an opposition which correspond to other oppositions like 'other worldly versus worldly', 'extraordinary versus ordinary'. The sacred, says Durkheim (1912), is set apart and forbidden from the profane. The world 'profane' refers to unholy, secular, mundane. Rituals are occasions during which communication becomes possible between the profane and the sacred. If one wants to approach the sacred, one must purify the set by undergoing penance or by any other prescribed means. Many scholars have criticised this strict separation made by Durkheim between the profane and the sacred. Such a strict separation emerges out of a church or temple-entered understanding of religion. It has been widely pointed out by scholars that sacred impinges on many profane activities of everyday life. In turn, profane communicates with the sacred even during this- worldly activities.

1.2.3 Beliefs and Rituals

A belief refers to a state or habit of mind. In this state one places trust or confidence in some person or thing. You can say that a belief is a notion or idea which has the same value as statement of knowledge or truth. In this sense, religious beliefs refer to a religious tenet or body of tenets held by a group. Most religious tenets generally are concerned with the worship of God or the supernatural. For example, Tylor (1871) defined religion as the belief in supernatural beings (animism), such as ghosts, spirits, and gods. Marett (1909) defined religion as the belief in supernatural power (animatism), such as mana. Here, when we say that a particular belief is a supernatural concept we mean that it belongs to a region which is beyond that of the natural senses. Beliefs and rituals are interrelated and normally every ritual is based, directly or otherwise, on a series of beliefs. In fact we can point out that a ritual without a belief set is in fact not possible. This is because it is beliefs that set the stage for a ritual to develop or even to emerge, Ritual a is symbolic series of repeated actions and sacred words and we have to refer to the beliefs to interpret it rightly.

At its most basic level, you may say that a belief is a part of system of knowledge or a system of understanding reality shared by members of a group. It provides the individual with explanation and meaning of life thus helping one to understand the hys' of life, like death, suffering, social injustice, etc. A religious belief almost always provides an explanation for happening which are otherwise hard to explain.

In studies of religion a distinction is made between belief and ritual. As implied above, you can say that belief is a mode of forming ideas while ritual is mode of action. About the former, we will discuss in detail in the following sections, The latter, that is, ritual, may be defined as a repeated act or a set of acts, usually ceremonial in nature, by means of which a community makes external its faith, It is a kind of patterned activity oriented towards the control of human affairs. Religious beliefs are made overt in rituals. An important example of ritual is the funeral ritual with which you may be quite familiar. A ritual provides an occasion for group assembly and reaffirms social value. According to Wallace (1966), the primary component of religion is the use of ritual to mobilise supernatural power. Rituals commonly portray or act out important aspects of religious myths and cosmology and often express anxieties and preoccupations which are commonly felt by members of a group adhering to a religion. In other words, beliefs and rituals are two sides of the same coin. In a way, it is difficult to talk about one without referring to the other.

The various categories of rituals are, among others, prayers sorcery, divination, magic, etc. Let us see what these terms mean. Prayer is a petition directed at a supernatural power. Sorcery is a conscious and overt intention to injure through the use of magical power. It involves the manipulation of special words or materials to cause harm. It is least likely to be found in those societies which are politically developed. Divination is a religious ritual to obtain hidden knowledge. It is a process of discovering the cause or agent of misfortune by decoding a communication from supernatural beings and forces. Magic is a method people use to control supernatural power. It differs from other forms of religious ritual in that it is more mechanical and involuntary in nature than other religious rituals. You will learn more about rituals in the first three units of Block 2 of this course. Here, we turn to the main theme of this unit, that is, the study of religious beliefs.

The study of religious symbols. Insofar as religious beliefs can be studied in terms of symbols. Here we will confine ourselves to a consideration of ways of religious thought. We will see how religious beliefs represent a system of knowledge or a system of perception. For this purpose one can do no better than discuss the views of Levy-Bruhl on the mode of thought of primitive people. But before that complete Check Your Progress 1.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What is belief? How is it distinguished from a ritual?

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2) What do rituals commonly represent?

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1.2.4 Moral Prescriptions

In the previous section we stated that religious beliefs and rituals help human beings to communicate with each other. When human beings define their relationship with the 'sacred', they also define their relationship with fellow human being. Some behavioral patterns are prescribed as compulsory before one can related to god. This is how morals are born out of religion. As an example, it must be pointed out that the 'Ten Commandments' form an essential component of Jewish-Christian religion. Commandments are moral prescriptions for human beings to relate to god. Religion is the source of moral values, and religion without moral prescriptions is virtually not possible. Religion can distinguish between the right and the wrong, more powerfully than other social institutions.

There are many sources of moral prescriptions in a society, such a family, education and law. People who believe in a particular religion are also expected to adhere to its moral prescriptions. Thus more prescriptions come to be shared by all the members of the group. Religion and certain of its moral prescriptions are more relevant today than ever before, because some people hold that science is increasingly becoming inhuman. Billions of dollars are poured into arms and weapon manufacture, militaly science and technology, when millions of human beings die of starvation in Africa, Latin America and many other parts of the globe. In this context, military- defence expenditure becomes a moral issue. For example, in order to follow the religious principle of non-violence, prevention of the increasing militarisation of science can become a moral commitment.

Now, before going on to the next section on Development of Sociology of Religion, complete Activity 1 and Check Your Progress 2.

Activity 1

Four characteristics of religion have been identified and developed in order to give a sociological definition of religion. Now you frame a sociological definition, yourself. Meanwhile, a specimen of the definition of religion is given to guide you.

Religion is a system of moral prescriptions, beliefs and practices, which aids a community of believers to communicate with the supernatural or the extraordinary.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Explain the idea of the supernatural

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2) Why and how does, religion serve as a source of moral prescription?

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3) List out the sociological characteristics of religion.

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1.3 INTELLECTUALIST THEORIES OF RELIGION

Intectualism refers to the exercise of reasoning for explaining something. Scholars with an intectualist assumption argue that religion is a reasoned or rational response of the individual to the natural phenomena.

Ideas about the origin and development of religion were initially based on the reports of missionaries and adventures about the nature of religion among the primitives. For example, De Brosses (1760), advanced a theory that religion' had its origin in fetishism (belief in magical fetishes or objects): The Portugese sailors

had reported that the coastal Negro tribes of West Africa worshipped inanimate things and animals. Comte (1908) took up this theory and wrote that in due course Fetishism was replaced by Polytheism. This theory was superseded by the ghost theory and soul theory. The latter theories are known as intellectualist theories of religion, because both assume that the primitives are rational beings although their efforts to explain natural phenomena are somewhat crude.

Before proceeding to discuss the intellectualist theories, we should, however, take note of another very strong theory about the origin of religion. This belonged to the nature-myth school which had to be challenged before. The ghost and soul theories could be popular: In terms of the chronology of ideas on religion, the nature-myth school came before the above-mentioned theories.

1.3.1 The Nature-Myth School

It was a German School, dealing with Indo-European religions. It established that ancient gods were universally personifications of natural phenomena. Its main propounder was Max Miller who was a German linguist. Most of his life he lived at Oxford as Professor and a Fellow of All Souls. He was a great scholar of Sanskrit and was very interested' in ancient Indian gods. He held that grand natural objects gave people a feeling of the infinite. At the same time these objects acted as symbols of the infinite. The celestial bodies, such as, moon, stars, dawn and their attributes were thought of by the people in terms of metaphor and symbol.'

We must realize that at this stage of development the visions theories that were being forwarded were part and parcel of the overall development of the sociology of religion.

Max Müller (1878) argued that with the passage of time the symbolic representations came to gain an independent identity of their own and became separated from that which they represented. The attributes or the symbols became personified as deities. According to Müller human beings and nature stand in a relationship of awe, wonderment, terror, etc. Early human beings could not understand or explain the world of nature. They ended up worshipping it out of fear and awe. Müller held that we could study the religion of early man by looking into linguistic etymological meaning of the name of gods and legends associated with them. Sometimes Max Müller and his followers reduced their theories to a farce. For example, he considered the siege of Troy (an ancient city in north-west Asia Minor) to be only a solar myth. Because his interpretations could not be support by historical evidence, his contemporaries brought many charges against the nature-myth school. Herbert Spencer, Edward Tylor and Andrew Lang were the main critics of nature-myth theories. Not only did they criticise the philological arid etymological approach to religion, they took an altogether different approach. In the following sub-section we will deal with the ghost theory and the soul theory advanced by Herbert Spencer and Edward Tylor, respectively.

1.3.2 The Ghost Theory

Unlike Max Müller, who was concerned with Indo-European religions, both Herbert Spencer and Edward Tylor focused on religious behaviour of people in simple societies. They believed that such societies offered an evidence of the carliest form of religion Spencer published his views in1882, eleven years after Tylor published his book *Primitive Culture* in 1871. Spencer's views seem to have been independently worked out a long time before their publication. We therefore first deal with Spencer's ideas on religion.

In a large part of his book, *The Principles of Sociology,* Spencer (1 876-96) discusses primitive beliefs. He shows the primitives to be rational though with a limited 'quantum of knowledge. They make reasonable, though weak, inferences with regard to natural phenomena. By observing sun, moon, clouds and stars come and go the primitives get the notion of visible and invisible conditions. Similarly, they get the idea of layperson's duality from dreams, which are considered as real life-experiences by the primitives. For them, the dream self moves about at night while the shadow-self acts by the day. This notion of duality is reinforced by people' experiences of temporary loss of sensibility. This idea of duality is extended by them to animals, plants and material objects. Such representations as that of spirit child, are quite common among the aborigines.

According to Spencer, the appearance of dead persons in dreams is taken by people in simple societies to be the evidence of temporary after life. This leads to the conception of a supernatural being in the form of a ghost. According to Spencer, the idea of ghosts grows into the idea gods and the ghosts of ancestors become divine beings. Spencer's (1876-96:440) conclusion is that 'ancestor worship is the root of every religion'.

Because the idea of ghosts of ancestors or other superior beings becoming divinities is commonly found among the primitives in many parts of the world, Spencer's theory may appear to have some plausibility. It is however quite obvious that Spencer is himself a victim of the false reasoning which he attributes to the primitives. Without ever going near the primitives, he builds his ideas about their way of reasoning. He is simply trying to think on behalf of people in simple societies.

However, we must keep in mind that early studies in the sociology of religion and were instrumental in creating interest in the area of religion and of pushing the academic study of the same further.

In the next subsection, we will see how another scholar follows more or less the same way of building up his ideas about religion. Rather than focusing on the idea of ghost, this scholar emphasises the idea of soul. His name is Edward B. Tylor, whose theory of religion is well known by the term 'animism'.

1.3.3 The Soul Theory or Animism

As the word *anima* (a Latin word meaning soul) shows, Sir Edward Tylor's theory of animism emphasis the notion of soul. This theory considers both the origin and 'development of religion. We can say that the ghost theory explains the origin of religion in the idea of ghosts while the soul theory says the same thing in terms of the idea of soul. Experiences of death, disease, visions and dreams, according to Tylor, lead the primitives to think about the existence of immaterial power, i.e., the soul. This idea of soul is then projected on to creatures other than human and even to inanimate objects. The soul exists independent of its physical home the body, and therefore arises the idea of belief in spiritual beings. This is exactly what is contained in Tylor's minimum definition of religion: that religion originated from a belief in spiritual beings.

We may point out here that the soul theory of Tylor has elements of the sacred and the supernatural. However Tylor's definition is so general that all faiths and beliefs are likely to be labelled as religion. As such while discussing Tylor's theory we must bear in mind that this theory was a bold pioneering attempt at social understanding of religion.

Tylor says that these spiritual beings later develop into gods. They possess superior powers and control destiny of human beings. This is in brief Tylor's theory of animism. Just as Spencer's theory of ghosts was criticised, Tylor's own thought was projected on to the primitives' thought processes. We have no means of knowing if this or something else is what was actually thought by the primitives. Swanton(1924:358-68) has criticised Tylor for advancing unprovable causal theories. Tylor asserts that experiences of death, disease and dreams make primitives believe in the existence of an immaterial entity. This inference which Tylor wants us to accept as an 'obvious inference' cannot be proved to be either an 'obvious' or the 'only one possible' inference.

Secondly one does not understand the logical process by which the idea of soul leads primitives to the idea of spirits. As a matter of fact the concept of soul and the concept of spirit are quite different and opposed to each other and Tyler was not able to see the difference between the two concepts.

Box 1.2 Tylor's Perspective on Magic

Tylor's theory of religion would not be complete without a mention of his views on magic. He thinks primitive religion to be rational and based on observations and obvious inferences from them, Tylor emphasises the element of rationality in magical practices as well. He argues that magic among primitives is based on observation and classification of similar elements. Failure of magic is explained by Tylor in terms of the magician's wrong inferences about a mystical link between various objects. A subjective supposition of some connection in terms of ideas is mistaken for an objective link. Tylor's

discussion of magic is good example of intellectualist interpretation. If one asks Tylor how the primitives happen to make such mistaken connections, his answer would be that it is so because the primitives do not, for good reasons, see the futility of magic. Whenever magic fails, its failure is rationally explained in terms of the practitioner forgetting to perform some prescribed act, or ignoring to observe some prohibition or some hostile magic has checked it in the way.

Andrew Lang (1844-1912), a pupil of Tylor, criticised Tylor's theory of religion. Though Lang was an evolutionist, he did not accept that the idea of gods could have arisen as a late development from a belief in ghosts or spirits. In his book, *Myth, Ritual and Religion,* Lang stressed that may primitive peoples believed in what he called' high gods'. These groups were described by Tylor-like intellectualists as not being able to think about the existence of an all-knowing god. Lang (1989:2) argued that the idea of God cannot have evolved out of reflections on dreams and "ghosts" because the two 'have entirely different origins. For him, the belief in a God was first which later became degraded as animism. He had a fantastic theory that the two streams, beliefs in monotheism one God) and animism, came to to Christianity through Hebrew and Hellenistic sources. Lang's ideas on religion were not taken seriously because he was considered more as a literary person who dabbled in the study of religion. All the same Lang's criticism of Tylor's position inspired many scholars (one of them was Wilhelm Schmidt) to study the subject of monotheism or the concept of an all powerful, creative god, in the simple societies.

R R Marett (1866-1943), another of Tylor's disciples, criticised the animistic theory. He referred to RH. Codrington's Melanesian data and claimed that the primitive belief in an impersonal force preceded beliefs in spiritual beings. Marett called this impersonal force mana which may be considered as similar to the notion of Bonga (prevalent among many tribal groups in India) and argued that belief in mana had both historical and theoretical priority. Marett (1915) wrote an article on mana in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* and established that a belief in mama and tabu (or taboo) together provided a definition of the magico-religious thinking. Though Marett did not as such speak against evolutionist theories, yet his criticism of Tylor's work and other scholars question the correctness of evolutionist analysis of religion. It made them look more closely at material collected about simple societies.

1.3.4 Dependence on Magic

It is argued by some scholar that magic rather than religion is the more primitive way of dealing with crises. The basis difference between religion and magic is that in the former, one deals with a supernatural force by submitting to it through prayer, worship and rituals, while in the latter one tries to overpower or coerce the supernatural force through certain 'magical' activities. Sir James Frazer (1922) in his work, *The Golden Bough,* which developed ideas similar to

Tylor's, wrote about magic and primitive superstition, He argued that from a dependence on magic, one would turn to religion and then eventually to scientific thinking. Frazer also stressed the role of religious specialists such as magicians and priests in dealing with the world of the supernatural. But most important of all was Frazer's emphasis on. magic and its types and functions.

Frazer made a bold attempt to understand religion or magic and his work has inspired sociologists in the field of religion.

Frazer saw the operation of magic as a semi-scientific activity-there was some kind of a rationale behind it. As a result he referred to it as the 'bastard sister of science'. He distinguished between two types magic practised by primitive people. These were as follows:

a) *Homeopathic or imitative magic*

This was a situation where magic was based on the principle that' like produces like' or a law of similarity. For example, in some tribal groups of the Chotanagpur region in India, it is believed that thunder and its rumbling noise are direct cause of rain. Therefore, when the tribals want rain they go to hill top and sacrifice a small animal. Then, they throw down rocks and stones from the mountainside. As these will make a loud rumbling sound, the tribals believe since it is like the sound of thunder, rain will follow.'

b) *Contagious magic*

The second kind of magic according to Frazer was based on the notion that things that came into contact would remain in contact always or the law of contagion operated here. The basic notion operative here is the belief among tribal people that any belonging of an individual, be it an article or clothing, somehow represents a part of the person. Even hair and nail clippings are believed to represents the person they once belonged to. Often these objects are used by the magician to influence the life of a particular person, by performing a ritual act on a piece of clothing or hair or nails. Usually this is used for negative purposes.

Thus, for Frazer, magic, like religion, was basically a means of coming to terms with the supernatural and gaining control over the environment that may have spelt danger or disaster for primitive people. It is when magic and associated rituals failed that primitive people's thoughts, according to Frazer, turned to the possibility of a far greater force being operative in the world of nature; a force that they soon came to recognise as worthy of worship. Primitive people thus progressed from reliance upon nature and magic to religious worship and activity. The important thing to, however, remember here is that for Frazer there was a stage beyond religion. This was science. When one started understanding these 'forces' with greater scientific rationality, Frazer believed that the evolution of the human intellect would be complete. It is important to realize that this ultimate relation and rejection of religion would be replaced by science. Yet we do not know how this would come about.

1.4 RELIGION IN PRE-MODERN SOCIETIES

Religion, insofar as it is to be effective either for the individual or for the social group, must be considered within the framework of society. The identity of the religious and the political, as in preliterate societies, is also to be found in an identity of the religious and the economic postulates of a literate society. The latter variety has been studied by Max Weber in relation of Western and Eastern civilisations. Weber (1958, 1963) studied the major features of world religions: Hinduism, Buddhisim, Catholocism and Protestantism, Islam, Confucianism and Taoism, and Judaism. He found that religion restated the basic postulates of a culture in new, vivid terms and re emphasised them in ritual. Weber had a historical and comparative approach to explaining religious beliefs.

The concept of rationality is the underlying theme of Weber's sociology of religion as well as the key to the understanding of modem economic activities. His interest in religion arose from a double source. One was the question why capitalism had developed in the West, rather than in other cunural areas, such as Asia where there were large resources and educated classes. The other was the question of status position of different social classes. He proposed the "Protestant Ethic" as a right answer to both the question. He argued that Catholicism looked down upon economic activities and had held the profit-seeker in low social esteem. Protestantism, on the other hand, regarded all works as justified "calling".

During the first phase of the development of sociology of religion, the interest was focused mainly to tracing the origin and evolution of religion. Explanations of two types can be identified: individualistic explanations and social explanations. Individualists explanations either emphasized the cognitive (intellectual) or the emotional aspects of religion. Both varieties of explanation of religion by anthropologists and sociologists were based on material related to primitive people around the world. Edward B. Tylor (1881) and Herbert Spencer (1882) can be called the intellectualists, because they opined that pre-modem man had to evolve religion in order to explain the phenomena of dreams, echoes and deaths. In their view, religion might vanish when its explanatory function is taken over by science. Some scholars, notably Paul Radin (1938), emphasised the emotional aspects of religion. According to this school of thought, relation is nothing but pre-modem person's emotional response to overcome a frightening situation. Religion, in this case, helps one to overcome one's feelings of powerlessness. Even Durkheim's (1912) understanding of religion emphasises the emotional component of religion. He holds that rituals and beliefs about the sacred emerge from the emotional outburst of the hunting tribes, when they come together after separation.

In addition, Durkheim's explanation of religion includes its social dimension and functional necessities. Durkheim (1961 : 52-6) says, "Religion is 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 a church, all those who adhere to them". Durkheim identified totemism as the elementary form of religion. The 'totem' is a sacred object which is also the marker of a social group. This totem is exalted during the 'collective effervescence' generated when individuals come together as a group. Rituals and beliefs not only emerge from the group, they also strengthen the solidarity of the group. Durkheim argues that religion has survived from the immemorial, although in various forms; because it has performed specific functions for the society the main function being 'integration' of society. Some of these functionalist arguments have been affirmed, elaborated and reconstructed by many scholars including Radcliffe-Brown (1952), Talcott Parsons (1954) and Milton Yinger (1957).

1.4.1 Émile Durkheim's Contribution

When scholars were disillusioned about religion, Durkheim (1858-1917) arose to explain the positive functions of religion for society. Durkheim was not satisfied by the evolutionist explanations, which failed to give religion its meaning as a social institution. Durkheim's major arguments about religion came out in a book, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. It was published in French, first in 1912, and was later translated into English in 1915.

Durkheim wanted to demonstrate social functions of religion by taking totemism as the test case. Totemism among the central Australian tribes, as represented in the enthnography of Spencer and Gillen, came handy for Durkheim. He chose totemism for analysis due to two reasons: first, he considered totemism to be an elementary form of religion; secondly, he considered that the sacred-profane distinction arose from the totemic practice.

Whereas Durkheim (1961:13) says that all religious are true in their own fashion' for the believers. He questioned the assumption that religion had its genesis in a mistake, an illusion. He asked if it was so, how could religion be so widespread and enduring?

He questioned the assumption that animism was found only in primitive societies. He pointed out that it was also found in such societies as China and Egypt. On the contrary according to Durkheim, the primitive groups took for granted ever recurring natural events and showed little interest in natural phenomena. He called naturism or worship of natural phenomena as a false explanation of religious behaviour.

Thus, criticizing the arguments of evolutionism in general, and naturism and animism in particular, Durkheim began to explain how totemism gives rise to the distinction between 'sacred and profane'. Let us now examine what totem is and what the concepts of sacred and profane refer to.

Totemism: An Elementary Form of Religion

Totemism was an elementary form for Durkheim not because it came first historically. Totemism was simple in terms of its organisation and hence it came to be the elementary form. Also, totemism could be .explained without borrowed features from any previous religion. In other words, features of totemism were unique to itself. It should be recalled that Durkheim rejected animism and naturism. Animism as well as naturism assumed that religion arose out of primitive people's ignorance about nature.

In sociology the term ‘totem’ has a specific meaning. There are as we have seen several important aspects and conditions based upon which the totem is a symbol of the group or clan. That is to say that a ‘totem’ is pre-eminently Social and not an individual emblem.

The Arunta is a tribe in Australia. Spencer and Gillen had originally' studied this tribe earlier. Durkheim used their enthnographic notes to construct his argument regarding religion. The Arunta tribe is divided into several clans. The clan is a group of people united by a name, into a common bond. The clan is not a group based on blood-relations. The name of the clan indicates its totem. Not only the clan but also individuals of the clan bear the name of the clan totem.

Totem is an emblem. It helps in establishing the identify of a person or group. Totem is employed in rituals and other religious ceremonies. Most important of all, the totem has a religious character. It is a sacred thing. (See the video programme on Religious Symbols). The totem is engraved on pieces of wood or polished stone. Now, the piece wood or the polished stone which bear the design of the clan totem becomes sacred: Its name is churinga. The churinga evokes religious sentiments. Women and uninitiated men should not even see the churinga from close distance. The place where the churinga is stored is called ernatulunga. The ertnatulunga is a sacred spot. It 'is the sanctuary of the totemic group. It is a place of peace. If an enemy takes shelter in ertnatulunga, he must be given asylum. The churinga heals the wounds. It cures diseases. It ensures the reproduction of the totemic species. It depresses or weakens the enemies. The power of churinga can be bestowed upon the efficient of rituals. The churinga is sacred because totem's design is engraved on it. In other words, the churinga is nothing but the soul or body of the ancestor. A totemic 'design is essentially a visual statement about the group membership and identity of those who engrave them.

In a sense totem is symbol. It represents something else. What is that? What does the totem stand for? Let us recall that totem helps in identifying the group. Totem is the emblem or sign representing the group. According to Durkheim (1964:206), "If a totem is at once the symbol of god and society, is that not because God and Society are only one?". The meaning of the question is that the totem of the clan is nothing but the personification of clan itself.' In other words, society is symbolised as the totemic God. This is possible because according to Durkheim,

God is to worshippers, what society is to individuals. Both God and Society have overarching power over the worshippers or the individuals. Hence Society, like God, comes to be worshipped.

This analysis has had a great impact on the thinking of sociologists who were chronologically later than Durkheim. It was also the first contribution which explained religion as a social force 'and not just an illusion.

Religion finally functions for the society, i.e. transforms it into a moral community. In the guise of religion, it is the society which is being worshipped.

Sacred versus Profane

Totemism is a system of beliefs and rites centered around the totem. The totem is very often an animal or a vegetable species or mythical ancestor. The totem is sacred; it is held in respect. The totem cannot be approached without proper rites and ceremonies. To approach the totem which is sacred, one has to purify oneself both internally and externally. But the object at the centre of totemic religion is not an animal or vegetable 'as such. Rather it is the pictorial representation of the animal or vegetable which is worshipped. Totem also serves as a symbol of the clan- identity. Totem of the clan is also totem of its members.

Against the sacred world of totem lies the profane world. The profane world includes human beings and all that is not related with the sacred totem. Myths, legends, dogmas and 'beliefs represent the sacred totem, its' power, virtues and relationship with the profane world. The sacred and profane are entirely different and the lines of separation are clearly demarcated. According to Durkheim (1964:38) distinction between the profane and sacred is ‘absolute’. These two worlds are even hostile to each other. Durkheim argues that, this type of sacred-profane dichotomy is common to all religions.

It was earlier said that only under certain special circumstances, the profane can approach the sacred by performing certain rites. These rites are derived from beliefs. In other words, beliefs and rites are the two fundamental categories in which a religion is organised. This kind of dual organisation in terms of beliefs and rites has a special significance because it explains functions of religion.

Now, let us try to understand what this ‘sacred’ means. 'Sacred' is something which is noble respected venerated and worshipped. Who creates this 'sacredness'? It is society which creates the ‘sacredness’ and sets the ‘sacred’ apart from the 'profane'. In other words, gods are derived from certain rites performed by human beings. Not only that, what is considered to be ‘sacred’ today may not be so tomorrow. Also it is a fact that when ‘profane’ approaches the sacred without due precautions, ‘sacred’ itself loses its value.

From the above, we understand that, the 'sacred' is the creation of society. If that be so, when society worships the sacred, it actually means that the society is worshipping itself. Isn't it? When a community comes together and performs certain rituals collectively, the collective sentiments are aroused. These collective sentiments are symbolised by the sacred object; set apart and venerated by the society. The set of rules and regulations, characteristics of the ritual, direct and transform the society into a 'moral' community.

According to Durkheim (1964:16) the collective representation are the result of 'an immense cooperation'. They emerge, when the whole community comes together, to enact certain rites in response to' the sacred. The rituals are to two types: positive and negative. Negative rituals include a whole set of prohibitions to be observed to recreate the collective sentiment and worship the sacred. The positive rituals, on the other hand, indicate the meticulous 'preparations' to be undergone by the individual before approaching the sacred and participating in the community. For example, the initiation rites undergone by an individual, at the attainment of adulthood, denote a "total transformation" of the young person. Some of the initiation rites is are painful but it is through pain, one 'transforms' oneself and profane passes over to the sacred.

1.5 RELIGION AND MAGIC

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.

Magic attempts to direct the supernatural power to achieve specific ends. Vermon (1962:63) explains that magic is dispensed in a buyer-seller situation , whereas .religion follows the pattern of flock and the shepherd, 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 is 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 units 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. In view of its businesslike character, and reliance on magic formula magic was considered by Frazer, a renewed anthropologist, as a primitive form of science.

1.6 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 and 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 is 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.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit introduced the course explained the meaning of sociology of religion. It was established that religion is a social phenomenon because it is a system of shared beliefs and collective practices. Religious experiences are social experiences, not only because they are experienced in a group, but religious beliefs and practices themselves are a part of culture.

Sociological characteristics of religion were listed and elaborated. Religion is a social phenomenon that is it is a system of shared beliefs and collective practices. Religion provides moral' prescriptions and it at its centre lies the idea of the sacred and supernatural.

Finally, we stated the differences and similarities between religion, magic and science. Religion is more collectively oriented and other-worldly, whereas magic is more individualistic and this-worldly. It was also pointed out that both religion and science are ways of relating with reality, though they use different methods.

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1.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) A belief is an idea or notion which refers to a state or habit of mind in which one places trust in some person or thing. It is mode of conception, whereas a ritual is a mode of action which is kind of patterned activity oriented towards control of human affairs.

2) Rituals commonly portray importance aspects of religious myths and cosmology.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Supernatural is considered to be beyond human senses. It is taken to be extraordinary, all powerful or infinite.

2) When human beings attempt to relate with god, some behaviors are prescribed as a condition to relate with god. This is how do's and don'ts come to be prescribed as moral acts which govern the relations between fellow persons.

Sociological Characteristics of religion are :

3) a) it is a social phenomenon
   b) it is a system of shared beliefs and collective practices
   c) supernatural or sacred is at the centre
   d) religion provides moral prescriptions.

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UNIT 2 ASCETICISM AND ACCUMULATION: RELIGION, ECONOMY AND POWER*

Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Religion, Economy and Power: Meaning and Inter-relationship

- 2.2.1 Religion
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- 2.2.4 Inter-relationship between Religious Ethics and Economy

2.3 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

- 2.3.1 The Spirit of Capitalism
- 2.3.2 The Protestant Ethic: Features Influencing the Development of Capitalism
- 2.3.3 Main features of Calvinism
- 2.3.4 Beliefs of those following Calvinism

2.4 Let Us Sum Up

2.5 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

2.6 References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to;

- discuss the meaning of religion and economy and explain their interconnections;
- understand the influence of the Protestant ethic on the development of modern capitalism as discussed by Weber;
- evaluate Max Weber's studies on religion and economy.

*Adapted from IGNOU Course Material: Unit 15 and 16 of *Sociological Thought* (ESO13) and Unit 10 of *Society and Religion* (ESO 15) written by Michael Kennedy with modifications by Nita Mathur

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Unit starts by clarifying the meaning of the terms 'religion', 'economy', and 'power'. It then goes on to examine the inter-relationship between religious beliefs and economic activity. To bring out the inter-relationship clearly, there is discussion of the major argument in Max Weber's famous book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*

Next the Unit goes into what Weber meant by the "spirit of capitalism" and contrasts it with "traditionalism". We then discuss certain aspects of the "Protestant ethic" which according to Weber, contributed to the development of capitalism in the West.

Economic order varies from age to age. Feudalism, capitalism and socialism are three examples of the economic order. Nature and organization of production, distribution and consumption differ widely in various economic orders. Under the impact of science, philosophy and renaissance, feudalism was breaking down in Europe during 15th and 16th centuries. The Catholic Church had strong roots in many of the feudal countries. On the transformation of feudalism, there are changes in the religious sphere too. The doctrines of the Catholic Church were challenged by new streams of thought. Among these were the supremacy of the Pope and the interference of the church in the affairs of the state which came under heavy criticism. As capitalism developed, many scholars tried to understand the relationship between capitalism and religion in particular.

2.2 RELIGION AND ECONOMY - MEANING AND INTER-RELATIONSHIP

In this section there is brief discussion of what is meant by the terms religion and economy. After defining these two terms, we discuss preliminary ideas about the relationship between religion and economy as formulated by Weber.

2.2.1 Religion

The term 'religion' refers to a set of ideas and beliefs about the "supernatural" and its impact on the lives of human beings. Human beings have always been confronted with certain problems and crises, which seem to defy logical explanation.

Why is it that a loved one dies? Why does a good man suffer and an evil one prospers? Why do natural calamities happen? Religious beliefs provide supernatural answers to these difficult questions. For instance, suffering may be explained by saying that it is "God's way" of testing a man's faith or that it is a punishment for sins committed in past lives. Religious beliefs give meaning to life. They help answer questions about oneself and the world one lives in. They provide certain guidelines of behaviour, certain codes of conduct which individuals are expected to follow.

2.2.2 Economy

What do we mean by 'economy'? In order that society may survive, certain basic physical needs have to be met. Food, clothing and shelter are essential for life. The economy or economic system refers to those arrangements made by society for the production, consumption and distribution of goods and services.
What is to be produced? How much of it is to be produced? How are goods made available to those who want them? How is work to be divided? These are some of the concerns of the economic system.

Box 2.1 Religion and Economy

Economics is generally a matter of production and distribution of goods. Human beings are directly involved in. both the processes of production and distribution. What is produced and distributed depends much on the general pattern of consumption characteristic of a society. In the previous section it was pointed out that religion influences one's deeds and actions. Understandably, religious beliefs and values affect one's work ethic, business ethic and consumption patterns.

A religion, which prescribes 'hard work' for salvation, naturally inspires its adherents to be dedicated and committed workers. On the other hand, if work is considered to be a punishment for one's sins by particular religion, then it is less likely that the believer would be a dedicated and sincere worker. However, there is another way of looking at the above situation. If any religion emphasises more on honesty and sincerity in work, the believer might fail to notice or ignore the exploitation in the factory site.

Consumption patterns too may be conditioned by one's religious belief. If religious beliefs go against consumption of all forms of liquor, then there is a possibility that liquor distilleries may have to be shut down. True, religion influences the economic activities of people. It is also true that, Religions themselves may arise out of crisis situations. Among many tribal communities in India, because of land alienation and poverty new cults emerged. New messiahs or prophets began to institute new cults to meet the crisis situation. So far it has been demonstrated that religious beliefs and values affect the processes of production, distribution and consumption.

2.2.3 Power

In ordinary usage, the term 'power' means strength or the capacity to control. Sociologists describe it as the ability of an individual or group to fulfil its desires and implement its decisions and ideas. It involves the ability to influence and/ or control the behaviour of others even against their will.

For Max Weber, power is an aspect of social relationships. It refers to the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviour of another person. Power is present in social interaction and creates situations of inequality since the one

who has power imposes it on others. The impact of power varies from situation to situation. On the one hand, it depends on the capacity of the powerful individual to exercise power. On the other hand it depends upon the extent to which it is opposed or resisted by the others.

Weber says that power can be exercised in all walks of life. It is not restricted to a battlefield or to politics. It is to be observed in the market place, on a lecture platform, at a social gathering, in sports, scientific discussions and even through charity. For example, giving alms or 'daan' to a beggar is a subtle way of exercising your superior economic power. You can bring a smile of joy to the beggar's face or a feeling of despair by giving or refusing alms.
What are the sources of power? Weber discusses two contrasting sources of power. These are as follows:

a) Power which is derived from a constellation of interests that develop in a formally free market. For example, a group of producers of sugar controls supply of their production in the market to maximise their profit.

b) An established system of authority that allocates the right to command and the duty to obey. For example, in the army, a jawan is obliged to obey the command of his officer. The officer derives his power through an established system of authority.

As you have seen in the last point, any discussion of power leads us to think about its legitimacy. It is legitimacy, which according to Weber constitutes the core point of authority. Let us now examine the concept of authority.

The German word "Herrschaft", used by Weber, has been variously translated. Some sociologists term it as 'authority', others as 'domination' or 'command'. Herrschaft is a situation in which a 'Herr' or master dominates or commands others. Raymond Aron (1967: 187) defines Herrschaft as the master's ability to obtain the obedience of those who theoretically owe it to him. In this unit, Weber's concept of Herrschaft will denote the term "authority".

A question may be raised, namely, what is the difference between power and authority? Power, as you have seen, refers to the ability or capacity to control another. Authority refers to legitimised power. It means that the master has the right to command and can expect to be obeyed.

Box 2.2 Divine Origin of Power to Rule

In ancient times, it was believed that kings were chosen by gods. In this sense, their power to rule was of divine origin. Rulers could be main religious functionaries or mediators between gods and human beings. It will interest you to learn that an Egyptian Pharaoh headed the government and served as the high priest of places of worship.

2.2.4 Inter-relationship between Religious Ethics and Economy

This is a brief outline of the meaning of religion and economy. Superficially, they seem poles apart. Religion concerns itself with the beyond, whereas economy deals with the practical business of working, producing and consuming. Are these two seemingly diverse systems related?

Max Weber thought so. According to him, it was the ideas, beliefs, values and world-view of human societies that guided the way their members acted, even in the economic sphere. As has already been mentioned, religion prescribes certain guidelines of behaviour. It is in accordance with these guidelines that followers direct or orient their activities. These guidelines are incorporated in the body of religious ethics of each religious system. Let us illustrate Weber's view with an example from our society.

A health expert might suggest that if Indians would eat beef, the problem of hunger and malnutrition might be lessened. But the very idea of cow- slaughter is revolting to most Hindus and would probably be rejected outright. So even though cow-slaughter may seem economically rational or logical, values and ideas (in this case, the idea that the cow is sacred) definitely influence the making of certain decisions. It is our beliefs and values, which help to shape our behaviour. It was this link between religious beliefs and economic behaviour that Weber tried to bring out in his work. In order not to confuse religion with ethics, see Box 2.3 to learn about ethics and ethical behaviour.

Box 2.3 Ethics

The term "ethic" is not restricted to religion alone. You can speak of business ethics, political ethics and so on. Ethics is related to social structure because it affects in some way the social behaviour of individuals in society. Ethics is important because it sets certain standards of thought and behaviour, which are used to evaluate or judge actual behaviour. Ethical codes, in other words, represent what "ought" to be done. They reflect the particular values and beliefs of the social groups of which they are part.

According to Max Weber, there were certain affinities between the Protestant religious ethics and the economic system known as capitalism. These affinities, said Weber, helped capitalism to grow in the western world.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What do you understand by "religion"?

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2) Mention two functions of religion.

a) .....

b) .....

3) How do religious beliefs affect economic behaviour?

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2.3 THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

Weber located a positive relationship between the Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism. Western capitalism, according to Weber, assumed its shape because it was supported by a certain belief system, namely, the "Protestant ethic". Weber argued that the Protestant ethic is closely associated with the spirit of capitalism. In order to bring out this inter- relationship, Weber constructed ideal types of both, the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Let us now understand what Weber meant by the term 'the spirit of capitalism'

2.3.1 The Spirit of Capitalism

Why do people work? Most of us would answer, "to earn money, of course", in order to feed, clothe and shelter ourselves and our families. We also earn so that we may have certain comforts and luxuries, which make life more enjoyable.

The desire for wealth or profit is as old as human history. Wealth has long been regarded as a symbol of power, status and prestige. But never before in human history did the desire for wealth assume the organised and disciplined form that it did in modem or rational capitalism. It is this rational capitalism that Weber wanted to study. He distinguishes between traditional or adventurist capitalism of former times and rational capitalism of modern times (see Box 2.4).

Box 2.4 Traditional Capitalism and Rational Capitalism

Traditional or adventurist capitalism existed at many times and many places. It was particularly noticeable in the Italian cities. Traditional capitalism was a risky business, involving the import of luxury items from distant places. Foreign silks, spices, ivory etc. were sold to buyers at exorbitant prices. The aim was to extract as much profit as possible because no one knew when and where the next business deal would occur. It was a thus a series of one-shot deals. Rational capitalism on the other hand depends on mass production and distribution of goods. This became possible with the Industrial Revolution and factory production. What is important is to note that rational capitalism does not deal with a few luxury items but with almost all the daily material requirements from bread to cloth to cars. Rational capitalism is constantly expanding and looking for new methods, new inventions, new products and new customers. Involving methodical work and regularised transactions, it is thus qualitatively and quantitatively different from traditional capitalism.

According to Weber, the capitalists desired wealth not for enjoyment or luxurious living. They wanted it so that they could use it to make more wealth. The thirst for money-making for its own sake is the very essence of modern capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system which aims at the unlimited accumulation of profit through the rational organisation of production.

Capitalism arose in the Western nations like England and Germany, which experienced what we call the "Industrial Revolution". The growth of the factory system, new techniques of production, new tools and machines made it possible for the capitalists or the owners to earn vast amounts of money. The production process had to be rationally organised; in other words, efficiency and discipline were essential.

The worker was a means to an end, the end being profit. The attitude towards work was that it should be done well not because one had to do it, but because it carried an intrinsic reward. The popular American saying, "Anything that's worth doing is worth doing well", sums up this attitude. Hard work and efficient work was an end in itself.

Weber contrasted this work-ethic with another type which he termed traditionalism. Here, workers prefer less work to more pay, relaxation to exertion. They are either unable or unwilling to take up new work-methods and techniques.

As has been mentioned before, in capitalism, the worker is regarded by the capitalist as a means to an end. But under traditionalism, the worker- employer relationship is informal, direct and personal.

Traditionalism hampers the growth of capitalism. Capitalism stresses individualism, innovation and the relentless pursuit of profit. Traditionalism, as described above, is characterised by a much less disciplined and efficient system of production. You have just seen that the spirit of capitalism is a work-ethic which calls for accumulation of wealth for its own sake. To do so, work has to be organised in an efficient, disciplined manner. Hard work is a virtue that carries intrinsic rewards.

Unlike "traditionalism", the spirit of capitalism demands individualism, innovation, hard work and the pursuit of wealth for its own sake. It is thus an economic ethic unlike any in the past.

Let us now try to understand what Weber meant by the Protestant ethic, in other words, the major tenets or principles of the Protestant religion. But before doing so, just complete Check Your Progress 2.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Tick the correct answer.
   The essence of capitalism according to Weber is that
   a) capitalists exploit workers.
   b) capitalists aim to increase profit so that they can lead a luxurious life.
   c) making money is an end in itself.
   d) all of the above.

2) Tick the correct answer.

Capitalism arose when the western nations went through
a) the French revolution.
b) the Green revolution.
c) the Industrial revolution.
d) none of the above.

3) Tick the correct answer.

"Rational Organization" of production requires
a) efficiency, discipline and hard work.
b) Less work and more pay for workers.
c) large amounts of money.
d) all of the above.

4) Place the following items, under the correct heading.

a) informal relationship with owner
b) work as an end in itself
c) innovation and individualism
d) resistance to change
e) worker as a means to an end
f) unlimited pursuit of profit

Traditionalism	Capitalism

2.3.2 The Protestant Ethic: Features Influencing the Development of Capitalism

Let us first clarify a few historical details. What is Protestantism? As the name suggests, it is a religion of protest. It arose in the sixteenth century in Europe in the period known as the Reformation.

Its founding fathers like Martin Luther and John Calvin broke away from the Catholic Church. They felt that the Church had become too immersed in doctrines and rituals. It had lost touch with the common people. Greed corruption and vice had gripped the Church. Priests had a life-style more suitable for princes. The Protestant sects that sprang up all over Europe tried to recapture the lost spirit of the Church. They stressed simplicity, austerity and devotion. Calvinism founded by the Frenchman John Calvin was one such sect. The followers of Calvin in England were known as the Puritans. They migrated to the continent of North America and were the founders of the American nation. Weber observed that in the West, it was by and large the Protestants who had made greatest progress in education and employment. They were the top bureaucrats, the most skilled technical workers and the leading industrialists. Was there something in their religion that inspired them to make such progress? Weber thought so, and attempted to prove it. The brand of capitalism that Weber was most interested in was Calvinism. An examination of its main features would show us how there is the link between religion and economy.

2.3.3 Main Features of Calvinism

As said before, for showing the link between religion and economy or in this particular case between the spirit of Capitalism and Calvinism, let us first discuss the main features of Calvinism.

i. Calvin's Image of God

God, said Calvin, was all powerful, transcendent. His Divine Will was unknowable. It would be foolish of any human being to try to understand God's Will. It could not be understood simply because it was God's Will!

ii. Doctrine of Pre-destination

At the core of Calvinism is the belief that certain persons are chosen or 'elected' by God to enter Heaven while the rest are damned. The 'chosen' will reach Heaven no matter what they do on Earth. We cannot bribe God to give us a place in Heaven through prayers or sacrifice. As this Will is unknowable, we cannot change it. Imagine the insecurity of the followers of this stern religion! He did not know whether he was elected or damned. They could not turn to a priest for solace and help because no mortal man could understand God. What could they do to cope with the anxiety of an uncertain destiny? How could they prove to themselves that they were the chosen ones?

They could do so by prospering on Earth. Their material prosperity would be the symbol or token of their election. He would work for the glory of God.

iii. Calvinism and "this-worldly asceticism"

By 'asceticism' we mean strict self-discipline, control and conquest of desires. In Protestantism, particularly Calvinism Weber detected this-worldly asceticism. It stressed rigorous self-discipline in order to master the environment. A simple, frugal life-style was recommended along with hard work. Worldly or sensual pleasures were viewed with horror; fine clothes, dance and music, theatre and novels came from the Devil as they would divert a person from working for the glory of God. Even the very human expression of laughter was frowned upon!

This emphasis on hard work was not confined to Calvinists alone. It was a common feature of all Protestant sects. The idea that 'honesty is the best policy' was the principle of early capitalism. Weber (1948:313) gives us the example of the 'Methodists' a sect who forbade their followers:

a) to haggle when buying and selling.

b) to trade with commodities without paying the necessary taxes and tarrifs.

c) to charge rates of interest higher than the law of the country permits.

d) 'to gather treasures on earth' (meaning the transformation of investment capital into 'funded wealth').

e) to borrow without being sure of one's ability to pay back the debt.

f) "luxuries of all sorts".

The fruits of hard labour could not be spent on worldly pleasures. Thus there was only one outlet for money. It was reinvested and hence used to make more money. Not a moment was to be idled away as "work is worship" and "time is money".

iv. **The notion of "calling"**

Would a University graduate accept a sweeper's job? Probably not. Most of us would consider the job of a sweeper or garbage-collector too "low" or too "dirty" for us. The Calvinist ethic, on the other hand, holds that all work is important and sacred. It is not mere work, it is a calling or a mission and should be performed with devotion and sincerity.

Activity 1

Write two page note on any religious sect in India in terms of its guidelines for shaping one's day-to-day behaviour. Compare your note, with those of other students at your study centre.

2.3.4 Beliefs of those following Calvinism

We have so far looked at how Weber described the strong relationship between the spiritual vision of the world and a certain style of economic activity. This relationship is conspicuous among the Calvinists. Weber summarised the Calvinist ethic in five points (Aron 1967: 221-222).

a) There exists an absolute transcendent God who created the world and rules it, but who is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the finite minds of men.

b) This all powerful and mysterious God had predestined each of us to salvation or damnation, so that we cannot by our works alter a divine decree which was made before we were born.

c) God created the world for His own glory.

d) Whether he is to be saved or damned, man is obliged to work for the glory of God and to create the Kingdom of God on earth.

e) Earthly things, human nature, and flesh belong to the order of sin and death and salvation can come to man only through divine grace.

This helped to create a disciplined and dedicated workforce without which capitalism could not have emerged. Hard work, saving and re-investment and the desire to prosper have a strong affinity with the "spirit of capitalism".

Let us see the link that Weber was trying to establish. Ideas impinge upon or affect human conduct and human conduct can be understood in the context of the ideas lying behind it. Working day and night and not enjoying the fruits of that labour might seem very irrational to most of us. But if we keep in mind the doctrine of "pre-destination" and the need to prosper to prove one's "election" by God, this irrational behaviour makes sense. As we have earlier stated, religious beliefs set guidelines for action, they motivate us to behave in a certain manner.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Why did Max Weber try to establish a link between the Protestant ethic and capitalism?

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2) Why did the followers of Calvin stress so much on hard work?

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3) Why no work was regarded as "low" by the Calvinists?

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2.4 LET US SUM UP

The Unit began with explanations of the concepts of 'religion' and 'economy'. It tried to see the link between the two as described by Max Weber. Then it discussed the major argument put forward by Weber for the development of rational capitalism in the West. Finally, it looked at some criticisms of Weber's theory raised in the context of Indian society.

2.5 REFERENCES

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Indira Gandhi National Open University Course Material, *Society and Religion* (ESO 15), New Delhi: IGNOU

2.6 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) By 'religion', we mean certain ideas and beliefs about the 'supernatural' or those phenomena that defy explanation. Religion refers to certain values, ideas and guidelines of behaviour that help people to understand themselves and the world around them.

2) a) Religion helps man to come to terms with events beyond his control.

   b) It provides certain guidelines of behaviour that help followers to orient or direct their activities.

3) Religious beliefs prescribe certain values which followers are expected to adhere or stick to. Thus economic behaviour is shaped by the values or guidelines provided by the religious system of a society.

Check Your Progress 2

1) c)

2) c)

3) a)

4)

TRADITIONALISM	CAPITALISM
(a)	(d)
(b)	(e)
(c)	(f)

Check Your Progress 3

1) Max Weber observed that in Europe, it was the Protestant community that had made great progress in the economic field. They were the leaders in industry, education and bureaucracy. Weber tried to see whether it was their religion that contributed to their success. Thus he tried to see if there was a link between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.

2) The Calvinist teachings said that people were pre-destined to be saved or damned. The Calvinists tried to prove to themselves that they were chosen or elected to be saved by prospering on earth. The only way they could prosper was by working hard and saving. Hence they stressed on hard work and discipline.

3) The Calvinists regarded work as a calling or a mission. It was to be performed with utmost sincerity and devotion. Work carried intrinsic rewards, it was to be done for its own sake. Work is worship, hence no job was regarded as low or dirty.

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UNIT 3 RATIONALITY: RELIGION AND POLITICS/STATE*

Structure

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3.1 Introduction
3.2 Understanding Rationality, Religion and Politics
  3.2.1 Meaning of Rationality
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  3.2.3 Meaning of Politics
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3.4 The Nature of Politics
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  3.5.1 Homogeneity/Heterogeneity
  3.5.2 Religious Groups and Other Divisions in Society
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to:

- understanding the meaning of religion and politics;
- know how the secular state emerged;
- explain and analyse the nature of politics; and
- discuss the factors influencing the relationship between religion and politics.

*Adopted from IGNOU Course Material: Unit 11 of the course *Society and Religion* (ESO 15) written by S N Jha with modifications; section 3.2.1 is adopted from Unit 17 of course: *Sociological Thought* (ESO 13) with modifications by Nita Mathur

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In our previous Unit we discussed the interrelationship between religion and economy. In this Unit we will discuss the relationship between religion and politics/state. To bring out this interrelationship we first introduce you to an understanding of religion and politics. We then discuss the concept of state and process of secularisation which shaped the nature of the state that we now have.

Next we will discuss the nature of politics and the various factors influencing the relationship between religion and politics

3.2 UNDERSTANDING RELIGION, RATIONALITY AND POLITICS

In this Section we will discuss what we mean by religion, rationality and politics. This discussion, we hope will reveal, how religion and political phenomenon are not strictly restricted to the religious as well as political realm.

3.2.1 Meaning of Rationality

Rationality refers to those ideas and behaviours which are logically coherent and consistent and amenable to empirical knowledge. Rationalisation refers to the process whereby rationality is applied to various aspects and activities of life. The conviction that rationality is the distinctive characteristic of human beings has made it a central theme in Western philosophy for over two hundred years (Mitchel 1968:142).

According to Weber, the contemporary world is characterised by rationality. Max Weber believed that the key to understand modern society is to be found in its rational features and rationalising forces. For him, the modern Western world is characterised by rationality. As a result of this, human activity is marked by methodical calculation. Quantification, predictability and regularity become important. Individuals rely more on logic, reason and calculation than on supernatural beliefs. For Weber, rationalisation means that "principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious power existed" (Weber 1946: 139, Cf. Hearn 1985: 76). Let us take an example. If a farmer wants to reap good harvest, he can spend time, energy and money on conducting poojas and prayers. On the other hand, he can utilise the same effort and expense in digging irrigation canals or a tube-well so that his crops may thrive. In the first case, he is dependent on "mysterious incalculable forces"; in the second case he is using rational calculation.

To Weber rationalisation is the product of scientific specialisation and technological differentiation of western culture. He describes rationalisation as

striving for perfection, as an ingenious refinement of the conduct of life and the attainment of mastery over the external world (see Freund 1972:18). Demystification of beliefs and secularisation of thought are important facets of rationalisation which assist in attaining mastery over the world. Rationalisation also involves formalisation of laws and organisations.

As has been mentioned earlier, rationality is a recurrent concept in Weber's work and rationalization is a recurrent theme in the sense of making more rational. His own attempt is to render a rational account of society. Rationality and rationalisation occur several times and in several senses. It could indeed be argued that the whole body of Weber's work is an exploration of the rationality of social forms and the logic of their changes.

Weber views rationality as a process of rationalisation of social system. This takes place through the emergence of rational organisation and institutions in human society. He also finds the reflection of the process of rationalisation in human values, beliefs, thoughts and actions. Here he locates the emergence of elements of rationality in social sciences as well.

The rationalisation characteristic of modem societies is manifested in terms of the 'Zweckrational' actions, i.e. actions in relation to goals. Hence the sphere of rationalisation is extended to economic, political, religious organisations etc. Weber makes extensive use of the concept of rationality in his study of social actions, organisations and processes. He also uses it as a mode of scientific investigation. Thus, rationality appears in Weber's work in two broadly distinct, but inter-related ways.

3.2.2 Meaning of Religion

We all have questioned regarding the meaning life, our place in the world and whether there is supernatural force that controls events and we look for guidelines for our action. The beliefs and practices that emerge to deal with questions such as this take various forms. Some believe in an invisible force, some may regard trees and animals as holy. The beliefs and practices that deal with the ultimate question are a source of comfort in the face of uncertainty, a basis of social order. These systems comprised of a shared set of beliefs and practices is called religion. Religion thus can be defined as 'stable and shared set of beliefs, symbols and rituals that focus on the sacred' (Conklin 1984: 296). Our definition also emphasises that religion is shared; a personal belief system of an individual or an individual's philosophy of life cannot be considered a religion because it is not shared and finally religion focuses essentially on the sacred. Durkheim has defined the sacred as the ideal and the supernatural that are set apart from daily life. The sacred as a superhuman force can reside in natural or artificial objects in animals or in people. Different religions have different beliefs in the sacred.

As students of sociology we are not seeking answers to the validity of the belief system, we would like to understand the social significance of religion and its relation to various social institutions. Sociologists treat religion as one institution in a complex web of institutions that form a society. One of the major consequences of religion is to strengthen ties among believers.

Some critics have suggested, that religion often becomes more important as a source of social identity than as a source of belief and practices dealing with the sacred. Many people participate in religion, more to find a place in society rather than because of their convictions. As a result, one often finds that churches, temples, mosques and synagogues often become social centres. Religion is also a rallying point around which groups mobiles themselves towards a cause.

The presence of different religions in the some society can result in violent conflicts. Persecution of religious groups throughout history is something that we are familiar with. Religious wars wrecked both East and West, though often economics and politics had at least as much to do with the struggles as religion. Christians' clashed with 'Muslims, Catholics with Protestants and so on. In India we have seen how millions became refugees in the Partition conflict between Muslims and Hindus.

Conflicts between believers of different religions, we must realise, are as much of religious conflicts as they are political. As we can see, religion is very often a vehicle of expression, a form of identity, around which a group gathers either for mustering more power for itself or any such similar cause. Politics fundamentally means how and where power is distributed in the pursuit of goals. In societies where there are different goals, there are bound to be conflicts. Each group then forges an identity, one of them being the religious identity, which helps them in the pursuit of their goals. Before we go on to analyse this interconnection between religion and politics, it will be useful, to understand what politics means.

3.2.3 Meaning of Politics

Politics and political process have been defined in different ways at different times. It will be useful in the present context to refer to two aspects of the understanding of the term politics:

i) two opposing forces of conflict and integration that determine the nature of politics. Human societies have many types of layers of conflicts. Politics is concerned with such conflicts. While conflicts 'are inevitable, they are never the ends, or the ideals, to be achieved in society. Resolution of conflicts, and cooperation and integration of society remains the cherished ideal of all societies. Every analysis of conflict ends up with providing solutions to resolve them. Movement towards an integrated or united society is as inevitable as the emergence of conflicts or differences. Some conflicts are

reduced, some persist, some regulated, and some new conflicts emerge as situations change. While diverse social and cultural processes help in achieving the objectives of a harmonious society, political process has an important role to play. Integration and conflict, thus, are the two apparently opposite forces that constitute the process of politics.

Social institutions are important from the point of view of both conflict and integration, and they are linked with politics and political process. These institutions, ideas and issues associated with them, often form the basis for an identity of individuals and leads them to conflicting situations. At the same time, social institutions bring about unity and integration with the institutions, as well as between them. These opposing forces operate within this complex interaction that constitute the process the politics. Managing the conflicts which arise out of competing situations where each individual has different interest and identities, bring about the much required integration or unity which constitute politics.

ii) The other aspect of the understanding of politics is the Distributive Approach, associated with the writing of Harold D. Laswell. We all know that there is a great deal of unevenness in the distribution of power and resources in society. Not all communities, individuals have equal access to resources, goods and distribution of positions. Some are deprived of these powers and access to goods and resources.

Political power is to allocate power and authority. This close relationship between power and resources led Laswell (1936) to observe that politics is 'who gets what, when and how'.

A group or a community may feel that it is deprived of access to resources and positions in society. This puts them at a disadvantage and makes them feel powerless. This group then, may challenge legitimacy of the state or the political regime which is vested with authority. This sense of relative deprivation has been one of the important factors for group/community mobilisation, as well as political violence.

Religion as we have already mentioned, is not just restricted to the supernatural realm. It has wider social significance. It provides moral, ethical vision and guides people and communities.

Any polity which derives its powers from the people, therefore acknowledges and accommodates the religious aspect which is important to the individual and communities.

To put it simply, politics is major social institution involving the organization of power in society. Political systems attempt to give the impression that their power is legitimate rather than coercive. If you recall your reading on Weber

you will remember that authority or power that is legitimate is derived from (1) tradition (2) rationally enacted rules and regulations and (3) charisma.

Political authority in contemporary society gets its authority from the wider section of people. Therefore people's interest and demands effect the political authority.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Briefly explain the social significance of religion.

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2) Name the three' perspectives of politics and political process.

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3) Distributive Approach to the understanding for politics is associated with the writings of……

3.3 STATE AND SECULARISATION

We have so far discussed the meaning of politics in very broad and general terms. In the Section to follow, we will be discussing the term state, which is a political institution concerned with the distribution of power in society. The state as we understand today has emerged out of the need to separate the domain of authority from the secular and religious realm.

3.3.1 The Concept of State

Max Weber defined state 'as a human community which successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory'. Thus the state is one of the important agencies of social control, whose functions are carried out through the enforcement of laws which are invariably backed by the use of force.

Comte and Herbert Spencer regarded the emergence of state as a consequence of the increasing size and complexity of societies. There seems to be some 'validity to their observations. The study of simple societies by anthropologists and sociologists have revealed some correlation between the complexity, size of

society and settled political authority. R.H. Lowie writing about the early communities says that must have been tiny and egalitarian and were like a 'kindred group'. Thus kinship exercised a great influence in maintaining unity. The society was more or less undifferentiated, so there was no great distinction made between religious institutions and political institutions. The Head of the community was both a religious as well as a political head. With increasing complexity of society, a need was felt to separate the religious and the non-religious domain, so as to democratize the domain of authority. The politics in Europe, specially in England played a significant role in the real separation of domain of power of the church and the king.

Let us see how this process of separation came about in our next section on the process of secularisation. But before we understand this process, let us try and understand what is meant by secularisation.

3.3.2 Secularisation

The decline in the political and social importance of any single religion in society is considered as secularisation. Secularisation is commonly associated with modern, technologically advanced societies. The word is derived' from the Latin word 'seculum' which means the ‘present age’. The word secularizton, in its very, general usage, came to convey a dominant social process, that is, a view of or understanding of the world "which is shift from a religious undemanding of the world (based on faith in what cannot be directly proved to a scientific understanding of the world (based on knowledge about what can be directly proved)" (Maconis,1987 p. 438), Increasingly religion seems to have less and less pervading influences on us. The political dimension of 'secularism' essentially means the separation of the political from the religious authority. A secular state in this context is one which does not support or favour any single religion. It, on the contrary, attempts to treat all citizens as equal irrespective of religious considerations. To understand the separation of the religious and political realm, let us move on to the next section on the process of secularization.

3.3.3 The Process of Secularisation

The process of modernisation was accompanied by (and if often included) many other developments. ‘Differentiation’ was one such process which mean that social institutions had exclusive functions and the different functions and formed their own institutions for effective performance. A distinction is often made between 'traditional' and ‘modern’ societies, from this point of view. While a traditional society is characterized by different functions being performed by the same institution(s) in a modern society different functions tend to be performed by institutions that are meant to perform specific functions. This process resulted in a distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the 'secular' realms of social life. The

religious aspects is broadly included in the 'sacred'. Referring to the distinctive trait of religious thought Durkheim clarifies that "the beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of the 'sacred things ..."(Durkheim, 1969 : 42). Coming back to the sacred-secular distinction, activities in society other than religion were included in 'secular'. Politics and political processes were included in the secular process of the modern society in this separation, the struggle for a dominance between the ruler, the king, and the organised Church (especially in England), played a significant role.

As pointed out earlier, the process of modernization engulfing the entire society also resulted in, what is called, 'differentiation' which, in a way, resulted in more 'secularization' of the political process. It was accepted, at least at the level of an ideal that politics and religion should keep away from influencing each other.

While this has been the ideal of politics in modern societies, the very process of modern day politics has made such isolation a near impossibility.

Activity 1

Make clippings of articles on religion and politics from various newspapers and magazines after reading these articles write a two page essay. You can discuss this among your friends and students at the study centre.

3.4 THE NATURE OF POLITICS

Society and polity have always had an interactive relationship, but politics in the democratic framework had made such relationship mutually dependent to a greater extent. When we talk about democracy at the end of the 20th century, it is not just another form of government: it is a system of politics and government that is accepted and adopted by almost all the countries of the world.

Box 3.1 Democratic Politics

Democracy, as a way of life and as form of government, suggests equality and openness, where individuals and groups compete for power. The norms and rules for working of this system impose the values of healthy competition. The individual preferences which are naturally important in a democracy, are influenced by many forces and factors. The way in which these get intermixed and finally affect human behaviour is an extremely complex process where it is not at all easy to arrange the factors in terms of any, fixed importance. At another level social groups play an important role in democratic politics.

Society, does not include individuals who are isolated from one another. Individuals are invariably members of social groups and not only of single groups, but of several such groups simultaneously. Every society is divided into groups in terms of the prevailing values and the number of such groups depends on the number of values. Caste, class, religion, ethnically, common profession, and finally, power, all these may, and do, form the basis for formation of groups. Individuals may be members of more than one group simultaneously. The importance of such groups for democratic politics is that the groups often constitute the organising blocks of the process of politics.

Religious has been one of the central factors for group identity, social basis for the formation of such groups having effect on other groupings and on individual behaviour. Religion has been strong motivating factor for group mobilisation as well. Democratic politics, concerned and affected as it is with individual and group behaviour, is affected by religion in an intimate manner. The influences vary form society, both in form and in intensity. We discuss this point later in section 3.6.

It has been suggested by some social theories their the "primordial" identities of individuals like religion, will be overshadowed by more powerful societal dynamics like modernisation and industrialisation, and may ultimately be replaced by more 'modern' or 'enduring' identities, techno-professional groups, class etc. The modernisation theory, especially of the earlier phase, had a definite suggestion that the processes of 'modernisation', with time and increasing scope, will result in replacement, if not disappearance, of 'primordial' or 'traditional' basis of individual and group identity, 'Religious' identity being one them.

The theory of 'class', similarly, puts much emphasis on the economic basis of social organisation and treats the economic class as the 'real' social groups and other groupings as, 'false' and, 'illusory'. This theory is of the view that groups will eventually organize themselves on class basis. Social institutions rooted in considerations like religion and ethnicity, or what are often called "cultural enclaves", are treated as casual, ‘disturbing’ factors rather than as integral elements of the system.

Theoretical positions cited above perceive changes in social conditions as going in one direction, while 'experiences of different societies have indicated different paths of change, having historical and culture-peculiarities. In some societies changes have been slowed down or even arrested at a particular stage. The actual process of group formation and their interplay is much more dynamic than what the above theories suggest.

Democratic politics, includes many groups that are regarded as 'primordial'. ln fact such groups have gained, both in number and in strength, because of the 'interplay of forces in democratic politics. The situation has not been different in the socialist countries, where conscious and rigorous steps were taken to ignore

religious groups. They have faced recurrent resurgences of religious identities posing problems from the theoretical, ideological and even from practical points of view. Countries of the third world have faced the problems of religious identities and groups in more serious form. Religion is an important factor in politics in general, and democratic politics in particular, needs no further elaboration.

What we need to discuss at this stage is what are the factors that affect religious forces in politics. It has been noted earlier that while religion has not become insignificant in the politics of any country, its effect is greater in some countries than in others. There are many factors that result in such variations. We will discuss the variation in terms of the nature of society and the social formations and grouping in our next section.

Activity 2

Are you a member of a political party? Even if not, do you think politics and religion should be mixed? Write down your views and compare them with those of others at the study centre.

3.5 RELIGION IN POLITICS

Relationship between religion and politics depends on various factors i) homogeneity/ heterogeneity of society, ii) the extent to which religious groupings coincide with other divisions in society based on economic status, ethnicity, etc. iii) the nature of religions, and finally iv) the historical context of such relationship. We will discuss these factors in the following section.

3.5.1 Homogeneity/Heterogeneity

A society is normally 'pluralist' in the sense that there are various kinds and levels of divisions-religious, economic, ethnic, tribal, and so on. But these divisions are more pronounced in certain societies than in others. It is in terms of these divisions that societies are described as 'homogeneous' and 'heterogeneous'. Divisions are sharper in a heterogeneous society. Religion, one of the primacy basis of individuals identity and group formation and 7 divisions accordingly. In homogeneous societies, the impact of religion on politics is less pronounced, while in heterogenous societies such impact in more perceptible. As R.R. Alford suggests the connection between religion and politics arises as a problem only in nations which are not religiously homogeneous.

3.5.2 Religious Groups and Other Divisions in Society

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The second important factor in this relationship between religion and politics is the extent to which the religious groups coincide with other divisions in society,

e.g. class, ethnicity, immigrants, and so on. Empirical studies have suggested such relationships/associations among various divisions. A number of studies conducted in different parts of United States found concentration of certain religious groups (e.g. Catholics) among lower classes. Some religious minorities in India, similarly predominantly fall into lower class-economic classes. Ethnicity and migration relate to religion and class in a complex way The authors of the well-known account of the American culture, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1973) found that 'A close examination of Catholic-Jewish relations will reveal some of the tendency of ethnic relations, in that they have a form of class relations as well'. Examples from the U.S. have been mentioned to illustrate the existence of the division coinciding with one another, even in a society that represented The Melting Pot, where race, religion naionality, class and all such cleavages are expected to the melted into a new race of men. The authors of this influential book had no hesitation in declaring that the next state of evolution of immigrant groups will involve a Catholic group in which distinctions between Irish, Italian, Polish, and German Catholic are steadily reduced. Among the Jewish group, in which the line between East European, German, and Near Eastern Jews would slowly become weak. The white Protestant groups, the Anglo-Saxon, Dutch, old-German and Scandinavian Protestants, as well as the white Protestant immigrants welcome together (Glazer and Mohmihan, 1973: 314). The groups that have been mentioned above include grouping based on religious, racial, economic and immigrant consideration which coincide with one another. Under conditions of such concentration of factors, their impact on politics is stronger. Thus the authors quoted above declare that "Religion and race define the next stage in the evolution of the American peoples" (Ibid).

3.5.3 Nature of Religion(s)

The third factor that is important is the nature of religion(s) and its attitude towards politics. R.R. Alford in his book *Party and Society* found a difference between the Anglo-American countries and the continental Eur-pean countries, with regard to 'religious appeals' of political parties. Among different factors that R.R. Alford found important (for explaining) is the difference that the continental European countries are "predominantly, Protestant", while the Anglo-American English-speaking countries and "predominantly Catholic" (Alford, 1963). Because of the history of the emergence of protesta1tism, there is more emphasis upon Church and State. Max Weber's classic the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) relates the nature of religion with ‘secular’ forces of industrialisation. There are certain religions that believe in the 'subordination' of all social processes to religion-and find it difficult to separate ‘politics’ form 'religion'. Put more sharply, 'politics' according to this view, is religion. Certain other religions are moew inclusive, and comparatively, more loose organized. These religions are more 'tolerant' towards other processes in society, and separation of 'politics' from religion finds more conducive conditions.

These differences in the nature of religion are partly in the religion itself. .But the difference arise from the various historical forces which have shaped the religion.

3.5.4 Historical Process

The fourth factor, that is both important and complex; is the historical process, operating at two levels: i) the emergence of religion .through various stages has followed different paths, providing a distinct character to them. ii) The historical process of the relationship between religion and other social groups and processes, specially the political authority, has influenced the actual place of religion in society. These two historical forces are inextricably linked with one another and the interaction is complex. The examples of the Anglo-American and the continental countries that has been mentioned earlier in the context of relationship between religion and politics, makes the-contrast interesting. Explaining the historical reasons, R R. Alford says that in the continental countries like France, Italy, Belgium etc. where religious parties are strong, 'religious freedom was won at the same time and was linked with the achievement of political freedom. The consequence was that to this day, religion, class and politics have been closely Iinked, In Britain, on the other hand, the issue of religion and politics emerged separately and were resolved separately; as a result, not only wiser Church and state legally separated, the political parties were rarely organised on religious basis. Elaborating the historical process further, Alford, says, 'certain features of Reformation in England in the 1500s, unlike those of Reformations-on the continent, may have contributed to the relatively high degree of separation of the church and state and legitimacy of religious pluralism in British culture'. Because of the specifications of the historical process, social groups belonging to certain religions exhibit distinct political behaviour.

3.6 RELIGION AND POLITICS/STATE: AN OVERVIEW

In the ordinary parlance, religion has nothing to do with politics. So also it is often presumed that politics has nothing to do with religion. A very generalised understanding of religion equates religion with a set of beliefs and practices related to the supernatural, but we have seen that religion is not concerned with the, supernatural realm only. It has a wider social significance, not only as an identity forging force but it also gives a moral and ethical vision and philosophy which guides people and communities.

Politics refers to organisation and utilisation of power. The 'State' as an agency which enforces this power has the power to govern. But what exactly do we mean by power? Where does this power emanate from? Power is compound of many factors and influences. If you recall you reading of Weber, power has been described by Weber as the ability to control or coerce another person. Authority is the 'legitimized power-that is to say, people vest a particular

authority with the 'right to command' and it is therefore ‘expected’ that such a command is obeyed. It is this element of power and legitimacy which inevitably links politics with religion despite their relative independence.

Power not only 'entails the mobilisation of muscle, weaponry or police force. In order to have legitimacy, it must also have support from the people. People, as we know, will and always resist, subvert and disobey force, if they feel that their interest of vision of life is being threatened by that political system or a particular state. We only have to look into history to see that it is full of efforts to seize, dismantle, or build counter force against state regimes which are believed to be illegitimate-without the support of the people. Social scientists and scholars will agree that cultural, social and economical values and primordial loyalties like affinity for clan, tribe, caste, religion language etc. influence and delimit politics. Very often these views are held as sacred and important by people who hold them whenever these values are threatened the authority of the state is questioned; sometimes it is resisted and many times there is call or reconstitution. It is clear that politics is not composed only of political values; it is significantly influenced by non-political views and values. All these values in the final analysis are derived from the people. That is the reason why we find that even when a state proclaims to be secular, in actual day-day-day political practice, the leadership or authority continuously makes adjustments for pragmatic resolution of problems/affairs. The political authority adjusts itself in such way as to gain the support of the industrialist, the peasant, the worker, the teacher as well as the priest.

In our section on the nature of politics, we have discussed the nature of democratic politics which envisages equality for all and equal treatment of all. This ideal is something that cannot easily be achieved because there always exists competing groups with conflicting interests. The political authority on their part try to accommodate these interests. Religion is one of the important factors around which groups identify themselves and mobilise their-interests.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What is meant by secularisation?

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2) Name the factors which affect the relationship between politics and religion.

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3) Name two theories which see the possibility of replacement of religious identity by class and secular identities.

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3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we began by talking about the growing interrelationship between religion and politics. To understand this problem, we have discussed religion and politics in detail. We discussed how the secular state emerged out of a conflict for authority by the political authority and the religious authority. Our units also present the process of politics which essentially involves the struggle for power among various groups. Religion forms an important basis for group formation which among other factors influences politics.

Finally, our unit discussed some of the factors which are responsible for the shape of the relationship between religion and politics,

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3.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Religion is a set of beliefs and practices, shared by a community of people, which deal with the ultimate questions of life, death, etc. Religion invariably involves a belief in a supernatural force which is set apart from daily life.

Durkheim calls this the sacred. Religion has, a social significance for the individual as well as the community; it is a source of comfort in the face of uncertainty. It lays down and provides norms, ethics and code of behaviour. It thus provides a sense of identity to the group.

2) The three perspectives on politics and political processes are 1) the conflict integrative approach 2) the distributive approach and 3) the behavioral approach.

3) Distributive Approach to the understanding of politics is associated with the writings of Harold D. Lasswell.

Check Your Progress 2

1) The word 'seculum' is derived from the Lafir which means the 'present age'. The word secular hence is generally associated with modern, 'technologically advanced societies. A secular viewing of things or understanding of things is supposed to be based on rational basis as against religious faith. In the political context secularisation is associated with the process whereby a demarcation between political and religious authority was established, a secular state concerned itself with matters which are civic and not sacred in the religious sense.

2) Some influencing factors affecting the relationship between religion and politics are 1) heterogeneity/homogeneity, 2) Relationship between religion and other divisions in society 3) Nature of religion and its attitude towards politics and 4) historical process.

3) The two theories which see the possibility of replacement of religious identity by class and secular identities are the 'class theory' and 'modernisation theory' respectively.

UNIT 4 THEODICY AND ESCHATOLOGY: MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION*

Structure

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4.1 Introduction
4.2 The Debate on Magic, Science and Religion
  4.2.1 Tylor on Religion
  4.2.2 Frazer on Magic, Science and Religion
  4.2.3 Frazer and Durkheim on Totemism
  4.2.4 Malinowski's Approach: The Universal in the Particular
4.3 The Domain of the Profane
  4.3.1 Gardening among the Trobriand Islanders
  4.3.2 Canoe-Building among the Trobriand Islanders
  4.3.3 Is Traditional Knowledge akin to Science?
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  4.4.1 Initiation Ceremonies
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  4.4.3 Some Other Examples of Religious Behaviour
  4.4.4 A Summary of Malinowski's View of Religion
4.5 The Domain of the Sacred-Magic
  4.5.1 The Tradition of Magic
  4.5.2 Mana and Magic
  4.5.3 Magic and Experience
4.6 Similarities and Differences
  4.6.1 Magic and Science
  4.6.2 Magic and Religion
4.7 The Function of Magic, Science and Religion
4.8 Let Us Sum Up
4.9 References
4.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

* Adopted from IGNOU Course Material: Unit 3 of *Sociological Thought* (ESO 13) with modifications by Nita Mathur

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the views of Tylor, Frazer and Durkheim on magic, science and religion;
- narrate Malinowski's examples of religious and magical behaviour; and
- distinguish between science and magic and between magic and religion.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most important contributions to the study of magic, science and religion is that of Bronislaw Malinowski. The present Unit relates his theories to his way of looking at universal aspects of culture through his study of a particular people. As an apt illustration of Malinowskian approach, we have selected his essay, 'Magic, Science and Religion'. It compares and contrasts these aspects of culture in simple societies in most lucid manner (see Robert Redfield's Introduction to the book, Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays, published in 1948). A close look at the content of this essay will enable you to evaluate Malinowski's talent for seeing the universal elements of human culture through the particular case of the Trobriand Islanders, whom he had observed and studied. Secondly, we find that Malinowski does not confine himself, in this essay, to any one perspective of religion, science and magic. In a characteristic and representative manner of his approach, he has discussed the various views on religion, advanced by Tylor, Frazer, Marett and Durkheim. This provides us with a useful commentary on the then prevailing debate on these issues. We have tried to present in this Unit a gist of Malinowski's ideas, as he viewed them. In passing we have also mentioned apparent inadequacies and inconsistencies in his arguments.

The Unit begins with the prevailing views on magic, science and religion, in Malinowski's time. This is followed by a discussion on what Malinowski considered as non-sacred or profane. It refers to the area of science or the human beings' rational control of their environment. Malinowski shows that the people in simple societies have a vast range of knowledge, based on experience and reason. This helps them to carry out their daily activities for survival and in addition also maintain the continuity of their group's existence in a difficult to control environment.

Thereafter, we discuss the areas of magic and religion, which are included by Malinowski in the domain of the sacred. According to Malinowski, the people in simple societies observe a clear distinction between the world of science and the world of magic and religion. We will see how the two domains (the profane and the sacred) are separated from each other and further how religion is separated from magic. In this way, you will learn about Malinowski's simple

theory, which deals with (i) the nature of and differences among scientific, magical and religious behaviour and (ii) how the three aspects satisfy the human needs and thereby maintain the society.

4.2 THE DEBATE ON MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

In this section, we will briefly discuss the views on magic, science and religion prevailing in Malinowski's time. He has discussed them in the first part of his essay and then has taken up some points for elaboration in its later parts. Here we follow Malinowski's approach by beginning with Tylor's view on religion.

4.2.1 Tylor on Religion

According to Malinowski we can describe Edward Tylor as the founder of an anthropological study of religion. For Tylor, animism, i.e., the belief in spiritual beings, is the essence of primitive religion. Tylor maintains that primitive people's reflections on dreams, hallucinations and visions lead them to see a separation between the human soul and the body. The soul survives after death because it appears in dreams, memories and visions. So comes the belief in ghosts, the spirits of ancestors and a world after death. According to Tylor, human beings in general and people in simple societies in particular have an inclination to form the idea of the world after death in the image of the world they live in. Secondly, animals, plants and other objects, which help or obstruct people's activities, are also regarded to possess souls or spirits.

Malinowski does not agree with Tylor's view of people in simple societies as a rational beings. Malinowski who has the authority of specialists' knowledge of primitive societies, maintains that the people in simple societies are more preoccupied with fishing, gardening and tribal get-togethers and do not spend time 'brooding over dreams and visions'. Criticising Tylor in this fashion, Malinowski moves over to Sir James Frazer's writings.

4.2.2 Frazer on Magic, Science and Religion

Frazer's works are mainly concerned with the problem of magic and its relation to science and religion. They also include a consideration of totemism and fertility cults.

Frazer's famous book. *The Golden Bough*, brings out that besides animism, primitive religion has many more beliefs and animism cannot be described as a dominating belief in primitive culture. For Frazer, the efforts to control the nature for day-to-day survival lead the early man to resort to magical practices. It is only after finding out the inefficiency of magical rites and spells that the early man is driven to making appeals to higher supernatural being like demons,

ancestor-spirits and gods. Frazer draws a clear distinction between religion and magic. For controlling nature, propitiation of superior powers is religion while direct control by way of spells and rites is magic. Frazer says that magical practices imply that man has the confidence of controlling nature directly. This attitude makes magical rites akin to scientific procedures. In addition, Frazer argues that religion implies man's acceptance of his inability to control nature directly and in this fashion religion takes man above magic. Not only this, he maintains that religion exists side by side with science.

These views of Frazer were the take-off points for many European scholars like Preuss in Germany, Marett in England, Hubert and Mauss in France. These scholars criticised Frazer and pointed out that science and magic may appear to be similar but they are quite apart from each other. For example, science is, based on reason and develops on the basis of observations and experiments while magic is born of tradition and is surrounded by mysticism. It cannot be verified by observations and experiments. Secondly, scientific knowledge is open to anyone who would like to learn it while magical formulas are kept secret and taught only to a selected few. Thirdly, science has its basis in the idea of natural forces, while magic arises from the idea of a mystical power, which is differently named in different tribal societies. Melanesians call it mana, some Australian tribes call it arungquiltha, many American Indian groups name it as wakan, orenda, manitu. So, the belief in such a supernatural force is established as the essence of pre-animistic religion and it is shown to be completely different from science.

Malinowski posed many questions about this mana type of belief in a supernatural force. He asked, is it a fundamental idea, an innate category of the primitive mind or can it be explained by still simpler and more fundamental elements of human psychology or of the reality in which primitive people live? Before proceeding to answer these questions, Malinowski discusses the problem of the religious belief of totemism and Frazer's and Durkheim's views on this matter. Before turning to these views let us complete Check Your Progress 1.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Define animism.

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2) Give Frazer's arguments for the emergence of magic and religion among people in simple societies.

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4.2.3 Frazer and Durkheim on Totemism

Frazer defined totemism as the relation between a group of people and a species of natural or artificial objects. The objects are known as the totems of the groups of people. You can say that totemism is both - a religious system and a way of forming social groups. As a religious system it reflects primitive peoples' preoccupation with their desire to forge a link with such important objects as animals, vegetable species etc. Killing or destruction of these objects is tabooed to the group of people, which holds them as totems. Rather, the groups hold rites and ceremonies for multiplication of their totem objects. As a way of forming social groups, totem objects are made a basis of the subdivision of the group into smaller units. This has thrown open an altogether new aspect of sociological significance of a religious belief. It has led Robertson Smith (1889), a pioneer of anthropology of religion, to say that primitive religion is 'essentially an affair of the community rather than of individuals'.

Durkheim's study of religion shows that he considers totemism to be the earliest form of religion. Like Robertson Smith, he too finds a very close link between religion and society. He believes the totemic principles to be similar to mana or the supernatural force. Durkheim (1976: 206) maintains that society is to its members 'what a God is to its worshippers'. He looks at religion as permeating all aspects of society and lays special emphasis on the public or collective aspects of religious practices.

Malinowski has many problems with Durkheim's formulations. He cannot imagine religion to be 'so entirely devoid of the inspiration of solitude'. According to Malinowski (1948: 56), the belief in immortality arises from the individual and it has little to do with the social or collective. Secondly, morals in a society are enforced by personal responsibility and conscience rather than by fear of social punishment. Lastly, Malinowski concedes the importance of social forces and agrees to consider both the individual and the social while studying religious behaviour of primitive people. In addition he argues that white religious ceremonies are held in open view of public, religious revelations appear in solitude.

He also points out that not all collective enterprises in a society can be described as religious activities and therefore we cannot equate society with religion. He gives the examples of a battle or a sailing regatta or a village brawl — all these are collective actions but they have nothing to do with religion. So, according to Malinowski, the collective and religious may overlap but are not synonyms. Further, he argues that society includes both the religious and non-religious or profane aspects of life and therefore cannot be equated with religious or sacred aspects alone. With all these arguments, Malinowski rejects Durkheim's sociological theory of religion.

Now, in the background of these criticisms, made by Malinowski, you would naturally like to learn about what Malinowski has to say on these issues. Before we go on to the summary of his views of magic, science and religion, let us also look at the levels on which his thought moves. The following section makes a very brief point about Malinowski's concern with the particular and the universal for understanding the problems of magic, science and religion.

4.2.4 Malinowski's Approach: The Universal in the Particular

Malinowski belongs to a borderline area, where one half lies in older preoccupations with universally valid principles of human behaviour and the other half lies in the newly found concern with empirical research in a particular society. You can easily bracket him with those nineteenth century scholars whose ideas deal with the nature and origin of religion and magic. He can be described as the last scholar of that era to provide ultimate explanations and universally applicable principles of religion and magic. But we must also recognise the fact that Malinowski is the initiator of a new phase, which held in high esteem the collection of carefully observed data from a particular society. So he is a scholar asking older questions and answering them in a new fashion.

This resulted in two clearly marked levels on which his ideas about magic, science and religion were formed and presented in the essay, which we are going to summarise in this unit. One is the level of the particular society, the Trobriand Islanders. He considers the islanders as a supreme example of Humanity and used the material collected during the field research among them as a supporting evidence for his generalised views on the nature and function of magic and religion. For him the link between one's observations of social life and one's understanding of universally valid ideas is quite simple and smooth. In this essay he combines the two levels in a simplistic manner and provides answers to questions pertaining to sociological significance of magic, science religion. Further he generalises at the level of Humanity on the basis of his knowledge of one particular case the Trobriand islanders. He tries also to prove the legitimacy of these elements. While reading his views of these three important aspects of human behaviour, it is useful to keep in mind the two levels on which his ideas are crystallised in this essay.

He visualises new ways of looking at these three aspects of social life. He has introduced a new system of reasoning in studying these phenomena. To him, all the three have to make sense. Let us see how he tries to find sense in their existence. According to Nadel (1957: 208), if his way of making sense is too simplistic and naive, it is still a novel method of studying science, religion and magic. Without this guidance, one cannot see how his successors would have made the progress that they made in the times to come. This perspective helps students of the history and development of sociological thought to learn how Malinowski introduced the logic of rationality in studies of science, magic and religion.

The American anthropologist, Robert Redfield (1948: 9), says that Malinowski's essay, Magic, Science and Religion, reflects the special quality of its author. The quality is of being able 'to see and declare the universal in the particular'. Malinowski's ways of demonstrating the meaning and function of religion and magic shows his deep sense of human interest in social situations. The next section gives you a summary of what he described as the primitive knowledge and its application for practical concerns of life. He calls this the domain of the profane, i.e., non-religious.

4. 3 THE DOMAIN OF THE PROFANE

Malinowski begins with the question: Do people in simple societies have 'any rational outlook, any rational mastery' of their surroundings? Rejecting Levy-Bruhl's (1926) idea that people in simple societies have a definite aversion to reasoning (see Box 4.1), Malinowski answers the question by showing that 'every primitive community is in possession of a considerable store of knowledge, based on experience and fashioned by reason'. He gives examples of behaviour related to the arts, crafts and economic activities of the Trobriand Islanders. The behaviour related to these activities is clearly separate from magic and religion and it is 'based on empirical knowledge and on the confidence in logic'. Malinowski calls this the profane side of life, i.e., the side, which is not religious or magical. He shows that the natives themselves keep the area of the profane apart from religion and magic. Here, for our discussion of the domain of the profane we select two from the many examples, given by Malinowski, as an evidence of his views on the existence of scientific knowledge among the primitives.

Box 4.1 L. Levy Bruhl

Lucien Levy-Bruhl was born in 1857 and died in 1939. He was a French sociologist and ethnologist and a colleague of Durkheim. Among his best known books are *How Natives Think* (1926) and *Primitive Mentality* (1923). Both the books were translated from French by Lilian A. Clare. Their French editions were published in 1912 and 1922, respectively. In both these books, Levy-Bruhl studied the common set of values, beliefs and practices, which individuals conform to and later pass on to the next generation. He took it for granted that the myths, beliefs and other ideas of people in simple societies reflect their social structure. He argued that these ideas differ from one group to the other. Then he showed how they could be seen as systems or the logical principles. He held that, the spiritual background of the primitive society was not the same as that of modern society. He considered the thought structures of people in simple societies as pre-logical as they did not understand the process of natural causation. It is important to distinguish that Levy-Bruhl focused on an analysis of the ideas, which were associated with social activities while Durkheim was confined to the study of social activities themselves.

4.3.1 Gardening among the Trobriand Islanders

The Trobriand islanders subsist mainly on products of gardening. They are also fishermen and traders of goods manufactured by them. For gardening they use such implements as a pointed digging stick and a small axe. These help them to grow crops enough to feed the population. They are also able to get a surplus yield. Their wide-ranging knowledge of the types of the soil, the plants and the interaction between the two is the main cause of their success in agriculture. This is coupled with their hard work at accurate points of time and place. In selecting the soil and seedlings they make use of their knowledge which is acquired through observation and experience. For clearing the plot, burning the bushes and planting, weeding and arranging the yam vines upwards, they need to possess both the ability to work hard and apply their labour at appropriate time and place. Their knowledge of weather and seasons of different types of plants and pests has not only to be fairly dependable but they need to have confidence on the reliability of their knowledge. Then only they can successfully carry out the operations of agriculture at regular intervals. Based on these arguments, Malinowski shows that the natives possess a rational outlook to their surroundings and command a fair degree of control over it. This is what enables them to grow crops for subsistence and for obtaining a surplus.

Having concluded in this fashion, Malinowski speaks of a close relationship between practical operations of gardening and an annual series of rites relating to gardening. Here, he warns us that they may be closely related but are certainly not mixed up. They are not one and the same thing because their results are clearly distinguished by the natives. The performance of annual magical rites is an absolute necessity for successful gardening and despite several decades of European influence, the Trobrianders have not changed their traditional practices. Indeed the Granada Television of England (GD 1990: 8) confirms that many of the ritual activities relating to yam cultivation in 1989 were found to be the same as described by Malinowski in 1915. The Trobrianders believe that ignoring the magical rites would endanger their agriculture with such problems as blight, drought, floods, pests, and wild animals. Malinowski argues that holding of magical rites for the well being of their gardens does not however imply that the Trobrianders attribute all success in gardening to magic. He writes,

If you were to suggest to a native that he should make his garden mainly by magic and scamp his work, he would simply smile on your simplicity. He knows as well as you do that there are natural conditions and causes, and by his observations he knows that he is able to control these natural forces by mental and physical effort. His knowledge is limited, no doubt, but as far as it goes it is sound and proof against mysticism. If the fences are broken down, if the seed is destroyed or has been dried or washed away, he will have recourse not to magic, but to work, guided by knowledge or reason.

Malinowski concludes that the native knows that despite all hardwork on his part, at one time or the other his crops do also fail. Rain or sun may not appear at the right time, locusts may eat away the crop. So 'to control these influences and these only' the Trobrianders take recourse to magic. In other words, one can say that the known set of conditions about weather, soil, plants, pests, sowing, weeding and fencing etc. are handled by the natives on the basis of the rational knowledge of their surroundings. The unknown and unaccountable set of conditions are coped by them with the help of magic.

In addition, Malinowski shows that the sphere of work and the sphere of ritual are also set apart from each other. Every magical rite associated with gardening has a specific name. The time and place of its performance are clearly specified and separated from the scheme of day-to-day operations of gardening. Work is prohibited at the time of a magical performance. All magical rites are performed in full knowledge of the people and are mostly attended by all members of the public.

Secondly, although the magician who conducts magical ceremonies is also the person who leads all agricultural operations, his two roles are clearly separated. They are not allowed to overlap or interfere with each other. In his role as a leader of agricultural activities, he fixes the date for starting the gardening work. He scolds a lazy or careless gardener. But he does not, at any time, mix this role with that of the magician. We will now turn to the second example about canoe-building.

4.3.2 Canoe-building among the Trobriand Islanders

Canoe is a kind of long light narrow boat with both ends sharp. Its sides are curved and it is usually propelled by hand-driven paddles. In building their canoes the Trobrianders separate the activities relating to work from those relating to magic. For building a canoe one must have the extensive knowledge of the material and the principles of stability and hydrodynamics (science dealing with the motion of water and the forces acting on solid bodies in water). Besides, they know that for greater stability one has to widen the span of the outrigger {a beam with a log at the end attached to a canoe to maintain the balance). But they also know that doing this would mean less resistance against strain. They can also give the reasons for keeping a certain width in terms of fractions of the length of their canoes. They are fully aware of the mechanics of boat making and about what one should do in the event of a storm or why one should keep the outrigger always on the weather side. Malinowski (1948: 30) tells us that the terminology about sailing, used by the Trobrianders, is as rich and complex as the one used by modem sailors. It has to be so because otherwise they cannot sail under dangerous conditions in their fragile canoes.

Just as with the activities related to yam-cultivation, those related to canoe-building amply demonstrate that the Trobrianders have an extensive knowledge of what is required for successful sailing. But here again, Malinowski

points out, the Trobrianders are still faced with unaccountable conditions of sudden gales and powerful tides. This is the point at which magic enters the scene. Magical rites are performed at the time of constructing canoes, again at the beginning and during the course of sea- expeditions. Comparing the Trobrianders with modern sailors, Malinowski (1948: 30) writes,

> If the modern seaman, entrenched in science and reason, provided with all sorts of safety appliances, sailing on steel-built steamers, if even he has a singular tendency to superstition — which does not rob him of knowledge or reason, nor make him altogether prelogical — can we wonder that his savage colleague, under much more precarious conditions, holds fast to the safety and comfort of magic?

You can make out that Malinowski has given recognition to both the rational outlook to one's surroundings and performance of magical rites for controlling the unaccountable and unforeseen forces of nature. In the essay on magic, science and religion, he goes on to provide further examples of activities related to fishing, warfare, health and death. In each case he shows that the primitive people make systematic observations and possess systems of logically coherent knowledge. He also mentions the native's ability 'to draw diagrammatic maps in sand or dust'. This indicates that they have the ability to codify knowledge in formulaic form. For example, they are aware of various seasons, movements of stars, lunar calendar and on that basis they can plan sea-expedition or warfare. They can even draw diagrams to explain their plans.

It is now time for us to complete Check Your Progress 2.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What is signified by setting apart the sphere of work from the sphere of ritual among 'Trobriand Islanders

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2) Does a rational outlook to one's surroundings imply the absence of faith in magical rites?

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4.3.3 Is Traditional Knowledge akin to Science?

Malinowski (1948: 34) raises the question: "Can we regard primitive knowledge, which as we found, is both empirical and rational, as a rudimentary stage of science, or is it not at all related to it?" To this he provides a straight answer that if we consider science to be a system of knowledge based on experience and reasoning then these people should be considered to possess rudimentary forms of science.

Secondly, if we take science to be a rational attitude, then according to Malinowski, the natives are not totally unscientific in their attitudes. They may not have an abiding thirst for knowledge. They may find quite boring the topics, which Europeans may feel very interested in. This is because their whole interest is determined by their cultural traditions. They are immensely interested in their surroundings — events related to animal life, marine life and forests. At this stage in his essay, Malinowski decides to leave aside the questions related to the nature and basis of primitive knowledge. Rather he is interested in finding out if the primitives have one amalgamated area of reality in which magic, science and religion are all one and the same or they treat the three aspects of life as separate areas of social phenomena. He has, so far, shown that the world of practical activities and rational attitudes related to them form one world for the Trobrianders. Further, this world is separate from the world of magical and religious practices. We will now discuss this other area, i.e. the domain of the sacred which includes religion and magic. Complete Activity 1 and discover our own practices pertaining to magic and religion.

Activity 1

Write a note of four pages, giving some examples from our day-to-day behaviour in which we resort to both magical and religious practices.

4.4 THE DOMAIN OF THE SACRED – RELIGION

In this section of the essay, Malinowski (1948: 36) is mainly concerned with (i) putting some order into the facts (by this time you would have realised that this was Malinowski's constant preoccupation), (ii) determining 'more precisely the character of the domain of the Sacred and mark it off from that of the Profane' and (iii) stating the relation between magic and religion. He begins with the last point and says that a prima facie distinction between magic and religion is that magical rites have a clear-cut aim and refer to their results in terms of subsequent events. In religious ceremonies there is no forethought of an outcome in terms of a specific purpose and event. Malinowski's discussion of the nature of religious beliefs and practices among the primitive people is based

on this primary distinction (later we will learn more about similarities and differences between religion and magic). He gives the example of initiation ceremonies to explain the nature of religious behaviour and its function among the primitives. To follow Malinowski's view of religion, we will go into details of this particular example.

4.4.1 Initiation Ceremonies

Malinowski (1948: 38) gives the following general features of initiation ceremonies.

i) The novices (persons to be initiated) go through a period of seclusion and prepare themselves for the ceremony.

ii) During the ceremony proper, the youth pass through many ordeals. These include acts of bodily mutilation. Sometimes these are only mimetic or imitative and not real.

iii) These ordeals signify the idea of ritual death and then rebirth of the initiated person.

iv) The above features represent the dramatic aspects of ceremonies. But the more important part is related to 'the systematic instruction of the youth in sacred myth and tradition, the gradual unveiling of tribal mysteries and the exhibition of sacred objects'.

v) Both the ordeal and instruction parts of ceremonies are considered to be brought about by ancestors or culture-heroes or a person or superhuman power. It is thought that by going through the ceremonies a novice is able to form a relationship with these superior powers.

The question that Malinowski repeatedly asks about all the three aspects is about their sociological significance. Here again, he asks, what part do the initiation ceremonies play in the maintenance and development of primitive culture? According to Malinowski, the important role of initiation ceremonies is that the youth is given lessons in sacred tradition under the conditions of bodily pain and the sanction of superior powers. This indicates the overarching relevance of preserving at any cost the customs and beliefs, the knowledge received from previous generation. Stressing this aspect of the ceremonies Malinowski (1948: 39) gives the following functions of initiation ceremonies.

i) They give 'a ritual and dramatic expression of the supreme power and value of tradition in primitive societies'.

ii) They serve 'to impress this power and value upon the minds of each generation'.

iii) They transmit tribal lore and therefore preserve tradition and maintain tribal solidarity.

In addition to pointing out the above functions of these ceremonies, Malinowski emphasises another aspect, which relates to the changing status of a novice. The religious ceremonies of initiation mark a natural or biological event, i.e., the fact of bodily maturity. This is not all. They signify also a 'social transition' from mere physical growth to the idea of entry into manhood with associated duties, rights, knowledge of sacred traditions. They provide an occasion for 'communion with sacred things and beings'. Malinowski (1948: 40) describes this as 'a creative element in religious rites'. Creativity is expressed in the process of one's transition from physical to social and to a spiritual sphere.

According to Malinowski, this discussion of the main features and functions of initiation ceremonies shows that initiation is 'a typically religious act' and the very ceremony includes its purpose as well. In a larger sense, its function is the creation of 'mental habits and social usages of inestimable value to the group and its civilisation'. Let us now take another example to explain Malinowski's view of religion.

4.4.2 Rites related to Death

According to Malinowski, the final event of life, death, is also a source of religion. Rites related to death seem to Malinowski as being very similar across the world. For example, we find that at the time death approaches, the dying person is surrounded by close relatives and at times by the whole community. In this way, a private act of an individual becomes a public event. This involves a chain reaction. Some persons remain near the dying or dead person while others make preparations for subsequent rites. In some parts of Melanesia, Malinowski cites, the relatives by marriage carry out the death ceremonies and the dead person's kin remain at a distance. Interestingly in some Australian tribes, it is exactly the reverse of the above.

Soon after death, the washed, anointed and decorated corpse is kept in full view of all and mourning begins with a dramatic outburst of grief and crying. In some cases shaven and in some other cases disorderly hair and torn clothes mark the public display of sorrow. Then comes the time to dispose off the corpse. The common forms of disposal are, as reported by Malinowski, burial in an open or closed grave, exposure in caves or on platform, in hollow of trees, or on the ground in a deserted place. It may be done by burning or floating the mortal body in boats.

Malinowski shows that there are contradictory customs among primitive communities. One is to preserve the body or to retain some of its parts. The other is to finish it off completely. Mummification and burning are two extreme ways of achieving the two ends. Malinowski does not accept the view prevalent during his times that these practices are results of the spread of and contact between cultural traits of different areas. Rejecting these diffusionist claims, he argues that in relation to a dead person these customs reflect the twofold attitude of mind.

One is the attitude of longing for the departed and the other is the fear and disgust of the changes brought by death. The desire to preserve the link with the dead and the parallel wish to break it, both ends are served by mortuary rites. This is why Malinowski includes them in the domain of religion. Remember what we learnt in the beginning of this unit, we learnt that all the rites which have their purpose inherent in their performance signify religious behaviour. This is exactly what happens in rites related to death. For example, contact with the corpse is considered to be polluting and dangerous. The persons taking part in mourning have to wash and cleanse themselves. Further, the mortuary rites force the mourners to overcome the disgust and allay their fears. This leads us to the second aspect of death ceremonies.

Overcoming disgust and allaying fears is achieved by people's belief in a future life or life after death. This implies a belief in the continuity of the spirit, or, in the idea of immortality. According to Malinowski, belief in the substance of a spirit or the idea of immortality is an outcome of 'a deep emotional revelation, standardised by religion, rather than a primitive philosophic doctrine'. This belief in immortality of spirit helps human beings to overcome or conquer the fear of death.

Here, we find that Malinowski has brought out a major feature of rites related to death. The rites held soon after death and the belief in immortality signify both the loss suffered by the whole group and the feelings of survival of the spirit. So, the natural event or a biological fact assumes the significance of a social event.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What is the main aim of initiation ceremonies among the people in simple societies?

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2) What is it that helps an individual to conquer the fear of death?

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4.4.3 Some Other Examples of Religious Behaviour

Further examples of religious ceremonies, given by Malinowski, include a brief comment on marriage rites. This comment provides him an opportunity to discuss the needs of propagation and nutrition. As in the case of initiation so also in marriage rites, Malinowski finds the ceremonies signifying much more than mere biological facts. They reflect the lifelong union of man and woman and concern a long chain of activities related with propagation and nutrition.

Malinowski points out that the act of eating involves an emotional tension for primitive people. Ceremonies, such as the first fruit offerings, harvest and seasonal festivities play a significant role in the agricultural cycle of the primitive culture. Celebrating among fishermen a big catch of fish or among hunters an animal hunt occupy similar place of importance. The food is a link between a person and his or her surroundings and in primitive religion, food is sacred besides being culturally and biologically important. Consideration of food as sacred leads Malinowski to view in a new light the ceremonies of sacrifice (an act of offering something precious usually some form of food to deity) and communion (an act of sharing food). We find that food is ritually administered in these rites and therefore they can be linked with the attitude of reverence towards the abundance of food. He gives the case of sacramental eating, related with totemic beliefs among Central Australian tribes. As mentioned before, a limited number of animals and/ or plants are selected for its totem by a tribe. Malinowski explains that for survival the primitive people have an abiding interest in continuity of the supply of particular species of animals and plants. In order that they get an abundant supply, they want to control these selected species. They study their habits and movements and develop an attitude of reverence for them. In this way an abiding interest in a limited number of animals and plants and its deification in the form of totemic rites is the natural outcome of the very survival of primitive communities.

Again Malinowski has posited both a moral value and a biological significance in a system of beliefs related to totemic objects. We can now attempt to put together Malinowski's view of religion.

4.4.4 A Summary of Malinowski's View of Religion

Malinowski has basically shown the functional value of religious ceremonies. In brief, he has surveyed the main types of religious acts and concludes that main types of religious acts have the following functions.

i) The initiation ceremonies give a sacred character to traditional knowledge.

ii) The event of death in a primitive society sets in motion a pattern of religious acts, which counteract the forces of fear and destruction.

iii) The rites associated with food, sacrifice and totemistic beliefs bring the people in direct contact with powers, which provide sustenance.

Malinowski has used the method of providing concrete evidence for his views. Taking examples from his collection of data among the Trobriand islanders, he has formulated the view that all religious ceremonies have a social side without which they do not or cannot exist. So the social side of a religious ceremony is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. He emphasises that we cannot understand religion without analysing the individual mind. This is why you would find that

he refers to the individual's state of mind at every stage of a religious ceremony. Further, he explains religious behaviour by contrasting and comparing it with magic. So it is now essential for us to turn to Malinowski's view of magic.

Activity 2

Write a one page note on Malinowski's view of religion, with particular reference to the need of individuals.

4 .5 THE DOMAIN OF THE SACRED — MAGIC

We have briefly mentioned how Malinowski distinguishes magic from science and from religion. 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 (see Malinowski 1948: 72).

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.

After describing these common types of magic, Malinowski points out that the common feature in them is the force of magic. This refers to the power contained in the spell. Mysteries of the spell are known only to the magician whose job is to preserve the tradition of knowledge in this field.

4.5.1 The Tradition of Magic

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.

i) 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.

ii) 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.

iii) 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. Such mythological allusions provide a traditional setting of magic. Malinowski considers this element in more detail and focusses on the link between tradition and magical ritual.

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. Malinowski gives examples of Central Australia where all magic is considered to be inherited from the times immemorial. In Melanesia, magic is supposed to come from a time when all human beings lived underground,

Secondly, magic is primarily associated with all-human activities, such as agriculture, fishing, hunting, trading, disease, death, and lovemaking. Malinowski points out that magic is mostly directed to human beings' relation to nature and all those activities, which affect this relationship. 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.

This interpretation of magic leads Malinowski to attack those scholars who equated magic with phenomena like mana among the Melanesians or wakan among the North American Indians or orenda among the Iroquois.

4.5.2 *Mana* and Magic

Malinowski establishes that magic is a human possession. In other words it is localised in a particular person who exercises it under special instructions and in a traditionally instituted manner. He argues that then it cannot be a force akin to mana, which has been described as prevailing all around. It is not fixed in anything and can be conveyed in almost anything. Obviously, if magic is strictly localised in human beings and acts in a specified traditional manner, it cannot be equated with mana and similar ideas.

Further, he suggests that to understand native mentality one should first study the types of behaviour and then explain the local vocabulary with the help of their customs. He concludes that magic should not be taken to arise from an abstract idea of universal power, like mana. Malinowski emphasises that each type of magic is born of its own situation. It comes out of the emotional tension created by certain situations. The spontaneous reaction of people and subsequent flow of ideas are the source of magic. All this so far sums up Malinowski's description of native ideas or native view of magic. This is that magic endows human beings with a power to control their surroundings.

Before moving to the next sub-section, do complete Check Your Progress 4. This will enhance your understanding of Malinowski's view of magic.

Check Your Progress 4

1) What is the most common feature of different types of magic?

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2) Is magic akin to the faith in an all pervading spirit or power, commonly found in primitive tribes?

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4.5.3 Magic and Experience

Malinowski now explains as a sociological observer this belief in a power over certain things. He describes once again the situation in which magic rites are performed. Whenever a person engaged in a chain of practical activities comes to a standstill, i.e. he or she cannot do anything more to stop the negative outcome, then comes over a feeling of impotency. The feeling is one of not being able to turn the course of events in one's favour. Despite best efforts, the hunter is unable to kill the game, the sailor does not find the

shoal or the gardener is unable to control the havoc caused by insects. What is one to do? The fear of losing control over one's surroundings creates tension, which leads one to some sort of activity. According to Malinowski, in this situation, one is driven to 'some substitute activity'. The person under tension or 'the sway of impotent fury' performs imaginary attacks at the enemy and utters words of anger against the enemy. Or, the separated lover would see the beloved in visions. The fisherman would see in imagination the multitude of fish in his net, he would invoke them by name.

Based on this reasoning, Malinowski concludes, "these reactions to overwhelming emotion or obsessive desire are natural response of man to such a situation, based on a universal psycho-physiological mechanism". These reactions take the form of magical rites. According to Malinowski, these are 'revealed to man in those passionate experiences, which are faced by him in the moments of his realisation of impotency of his rational actions'.

Here comes the question of the link between what is promised by performance of magical rites and what is actually achieved in real life? Malinowski gives an answer to this with 'one gain easily outweights several losses'. This means that the times when magic is successful are much more reckoned than those times when it fails. As magic is always held by some outstanding person of the group, it coincides with that person's skills, abilities and mental powers. The efficacy of magic is then dependent on the personal fame of the magician. In this way, myths associated with magic give it the character of a living force.

The failure in magic is accounted in terms of neglect in following the taboos and observances. Secondly, it is also explained in terms of stronger magic or counter-magic. Desire to achieve an ultimate control of one's surroundings and limit one's rational actions and subsequent impotency and substitute activities results in magical rites. Now counter-desire, for example, to own more property or power than your neighbour, gives rise to counter-magic. Malinowski gives examples from his Trobriand data and tells us that each magical act has a counter- magical act, which is supposed to destroy the effect of the initial rite of magic. A sorcerer who learns how to cause a disease has to, at the same time, learn the formula to cure the disease. So the dual forces, positive and negative, are an essential feature of magic and these help in explaining why a magical act may not sometimes bring the desired result.

Activity 3

Do you agree with Malinowski's claim that magic is a kind of 'substitute activity" Write a note of two pages on reasons for an individual's resorting to a substitute activity.

4.6 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Malinowski outlines, as a conclusion to the essay, relations between magic and science and between magic and religion.

4.6.1 Magic and Science

Relation between these phenomena is shown by Malinowski in terms of both the similarity and difference. First we give the similarities.

Similarities

i) 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.

ii) 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. Then he outlines the following differences between science and magic.

Differences

i) 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. In these states not the observation of nature but of one's own self or rather of impotency is crucial. It is the drama of emotions upon the human organism.

ii) 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.

iii) 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. On the basis of these differences, Malinowski concludes that science belongs to the domain of the profane while magic comprises half of the domain of the sacred.

4.6.2 Magic and Religion

Just as Malinowski compares magic with, science, he shows the relationship between magic and religion. According to him the similarities between the two are as follows.

Similarities

i) Both magic and religion belong to the area of sacred and are born and function amidst emotional tension.

ii) Both phenomena provide an escape from emotional stress, which cannot be wished away on the basis of the primitive people's range of rational knowledge.

iii) Mythological traditions closely surround both magic and religion. Taboos and practices associated with the two areas separate them from the domain of the profane.

Differences

i) Looking at the differences between religion and magic, we find the following areas of differences.

ii) Magical acts are a means to an end, which must follow them. Religious acts are self-contained acts, performed in self-fulfilment.

iii) The art of magic has a clearly marked and limited technique in which spell, rite and the magician are the main elements. Religion has no such simple technique. It has many aspects and purposes and its rationale lies in the function of its belief and practice.

iv) The magical belief concerns one's simple faith in one's power to bring about certain results on the basis of a particular spell. Religion concerns, on the other hand, with a whole range of supernatural powers.

v) Mythological tradition in religion is both complex and creative and focuses on tenets of belief. In magic, mythology centers around boastful accounts of what was in the beginning.

vi) Magical art is handed down, from generation to generation, from one magician to another, mostly in direct filiation (i.e. from father to son). Thus, it is confined to the specialists. In religion everyone takes an active part, for example every member of the community has to go through initiation. Similarly everyone has to go through the act of mourning and in due course, the mourner has also to be mourned. Again, spirits have significance for all and in after life everyone becomes a spirit. Becoming a spiritual medium is one specialised role in religion. But this is not a professional role, which can be learnt. This is only a personal gift.

vii) In magic we have both positive and negative types. Because magic has practical implications in terms of direct results, the contrast between positive and negative magic assumes a significant role. In religion in its early stages, according to Malinowski, there is little distinction between beneficial and malevolent powers.

Check Your Progress 5

1) Which two of the social phenomena of magic, science and religion are formed by a system of rules, which determine how a certain act can be effectively performed?

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2) Which two of the social phenomena of magic, science and religion belong to the domain of sacred and are born and function amidst emotional tension?

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3) Identify to which of the three social phenomena of magic, science and religion does each of the following statements relate?

a) Based on the belief that one can still hope and desire.

b) Based on the conviction in validity of experience, effort and reason.

c) Particular experience of tense and emotional states.

d) Related to the general experience of life.

e) Has many aspects and purpose and its rationale lies in the function of its belief and practice.

4.7 THE FUNCTION OF MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Finally, Malinowski returns to his favourite theme of showing cultural function of each phenomenon. The function of traditional knowledge is making the tribals familiar with their surroundings and enabling them to use natural resources. It sets them apart from all living species in the world.

The function of religion is to establish mental attitudes, e.g., respect for tradition, adjustment with nature, courage and confidence in struggle for survival and in the event of death.

The function of magic is to supply primitive people with a practical way out of difficulties faced by them in day-to-day pursuit of their survival. It provides them with the ability to carry on with life despite inevitable problems. In this way, Malinowski (1948: 9) argues,' the function of magic is to ritualise man's optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear'.

Activity 4

In order to fully comprehend the function of magic, science and religion complete Activity 4. Choose two examples of religious behaviour of a group of your choice. Show their functions in Malinowskian terms.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

We began this unit with a discussion of the debate on magic, science and religion, during the time of Malinowski. This was followed by Malinowski's approach to the study of social phenomena of magic, science and religion. Summarising his essay on this theme, we described the domain of the Profane and the domain of the Sacred. The former dealt with his view of primitive knowledge which Malinowski considered as an example of the scientific attitude and rational outlook to one's surroundings. The latter included a consideration of the magical and religious beliefs and practices. Finally we presented Malinowski's view of similarities and differences between magic and science and between magic and religion, followed by a brief discussion of the function of magic, science and religion. Here, the attempt was to give you a concrete illustration of Malinowski's approach.

4.9 REFERENCES

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Malinowski, B. (1974). *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, London: Souvenir Press.

4.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Animism, in the context of Tylor's view of religion, refers to belief in spirits which are separable from bodies.

2) Frazer argues that the primitive people try to control nature for their day-to-day survival. They employ magic for this purpose. When their magic fails to achieve the desired ends they appeal to higher supernatural beings and this leads to emergence of religion.

Check Your Progress 2

1) This signified that the Trobriand islanders do not mix up the domain of secular activity of work with the domain of magical practices. The former domain represents their rational outlook to their surroundings while the latter represents their feelings of impotency over the unaccountable and unforeseen events in nature.

2) A rational outlook to one's surroundings does not imply an absence of faith in magic. Magic has the function of accounting for the unforeseen conditions of life while the rational thinking and actions help the people to actually control their surroundings.

Check Your Progress 3

1) The main aim of initiating ceremony among the primitive people is to initiate a novice into the mysteries of sacred traditions of their group.
2) The idea of immortality of soul helps the people to overcome the feelings of fear and sorrow caused by death.

Check Your Progress 4

1) The force of magical spells is the common feature of most types of magic. Its three elements are (i) the phonetic effect of ritual utterances, (ii) selection of words, in magical spells and (iii) references to culture- heroes or ancestors or other supernatural powers.

2) The faith in an all pervading spirit or power cannot be equated with magic because magic relates to only one aspect of social life whereas an all-prevailing power has to encompass all aspects.

Check Your Progress 5

1) Magic and Science

2) Magic and Religion

3) a) Magic

   b) Science

   c) Science

   d) Magic

   e) Religion

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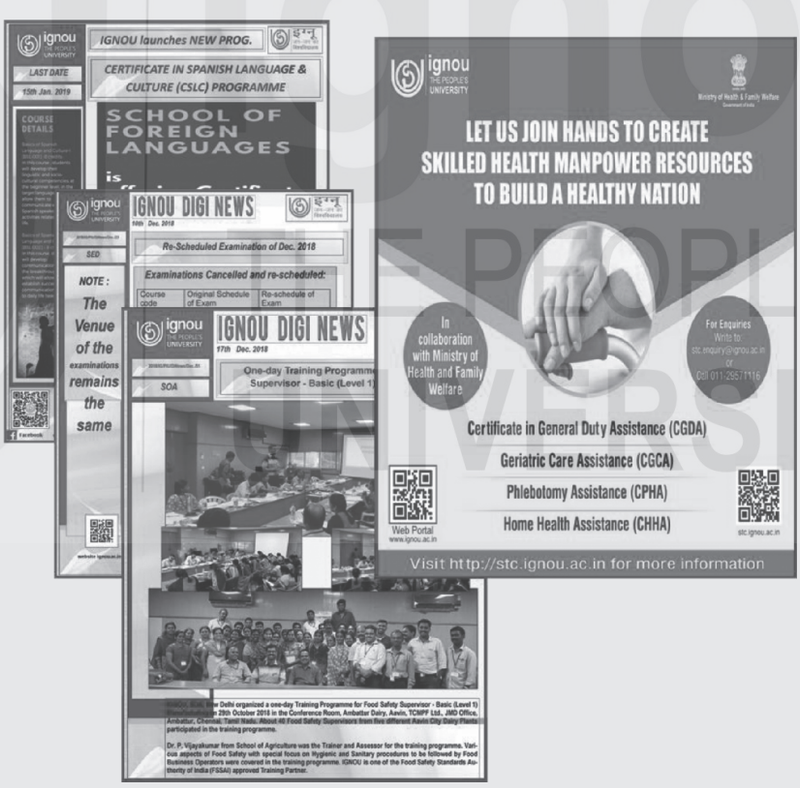

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