
UNIT 1 SOCIOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- appreciate the need to understand religion sociologically
- differentiate between Sociology of Religion, Philosophy of Religion and Theology
- trace the development of Sociology of Religion
- understand the difference between magic, science and religion
- sociologically analyse any religion, on your own.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of this course and we extend to you a warm welcome. Political parties use the appeal of religion to gain public support. Secularism debated on public platforms. In this context it is important for you to understand how religion influences social and political thinking and action today.

Broadly speaking, this Block introduces you to various approaches used in the study of religion. Evolutionism and functionalism are two well-known approaches which are discussed in Unit 2 and 3. Religion is also understood through the study of beliefs and symbols. This is explained in Unit 4 and 5. To appreciate any discussion of sociological thought in various theories of religion, we should first form an idea of religion as a field of sociological study. This is the main focus of Unit 1 which introduces the Course in general and the Block in particular.

Unit 1 begins with a discussion on how religion becomes a relevant field of sociological analyses. It also differentiates sociology of religion from philosophy of religion and

theory. Efforts are then made provide a sociological definition of religion by listing out and elaborating the characteristics of religion. This is followed by an outline of the development of Sociology of Religion. And before summing up, religion is differentiated from and related to magic and science.

1.2 RELIGION IS A FIELD OF SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

- How do sociologists study religion using the scientific method?
- Is it at all possible to study religion?
- How are 'gods' and 'heaven' connected with sociology?
- When there are philosophers and theologians to study religion, why should sociologists also study religion.
- Religion is something 'sacred'. How can we take it an object of study?
- Religion is a personal affair. Why should a sociologist intrude on an individual's privacy?

These are some of the queries, which come to mind. Your questions are absolutely genuine and if you try to find answers to them, you might very well end up a sociologist of religion, yourself.

Sociologists find religion a relevant field of inquiry because religion is a social phenomenon. Moreover, a sociologist concentrates on issues and questions which are not generally considered by theologians and philosophers. The sociologist of religion focuses on the links between religion and other social phenomena such as politics, economics, science and technology. The sociologist of religion is not bound in his/her professional writing to accept prescriptions of a particular religion. A recent book on religion by Lawson and MacCauley (1990:v) is dedicated to those who taught that "...religion need not be a force to be feared nor a dogma to be embraced, but simply a way of life". To the extent religion is a way of life, it is perfect field of sociological analysis. Now we will see what this means.

1.2.1 Religion is a Social Phenomenon

What do we mean when we say something is 'social'. It broadly refers to

- a) experience of **human beings as a collectivity in all parts of the world,**
- b) **relationships** between human beings, probably in all walks of their life, and
- c) to **all facets of everyday human life,** for example, education, politics, economy etc.

Every society has religious beliefs, rites and organisations. Religion very often affects our understanding of the everyday life. The way in which we relate to each other is very often influenced by our religious beliefs. Religions is also related to politics, and to economic activities like production, distribution and consumption. Religion can unite human being together, but also sow hatred among them. Religion may produce differing impacts in different places. At one end of the globe, it serves to justify oppression and unequal distribution of resources. The same religion, you may find, serves as a reason to resist and struggle against oppression, at the other end of the globe. If religious beliefs are the same, then how do we explain why people react differently in different parts of the world? All religions teach love and universal brotherhood. Even then, why do people 'fight' amongst themselves and 'die' in the name of religion? It is precisely these sets of question, and the like which sociologists study. In a book on *Religion, Society and the Individual,*

Yinger (1957:xi) wrote that religion is a social phenomenon, because it is “woven into the fabric of social life”.

Whether a believer or non-believer, a sociologist is supposed to observe without bias the way in which people experience religion. May be a sociologists curious to understand the different ways in which the rich the poor experience religion. Reality is not what meets our eyes alone. A sociologist most often tries to unearth the explicit, outwardly visible reality. But behind this lies the invisible trend—the increasing criminal trends of party politics. Further in times of acute crisis, there tends to emerge a strong fervor of religious revivalism. By research, a sociologist might possibly prove that the rich use religion during crises to exploit the masses. or, it may be that the masses recall and revive religion during crises, as a measure of hope.

By now, you would have understood that religion is a social phenomenon and hence it is legitimately a field of sociological study. Sociology of religion attempt to understand the relationship between religion and society. Religion and society have positive as well as negative effects on each other. Apart from this, sociologists also study the relationship between religion and various other social institutions like education, government and economy. They try to study the separate meaning of religion for various groups and levels in a society. This is certainly different from what is of concern to a philosopher of religion and theologians.

Let us now discuss the difference between sociology of religion, philosophy or religion and theology.

1.2.2 Sociology of Religion Differs from Philosophy of Religion and Theology

Clear-cut distinctions cannot be made between sociology of religion, philosophy of religion and theology. This is because they concentrate on the study of a singly social reality, that is religion, and no social reality can be separated like atoms. When we try do differentiate between disciplines, we do so in terms of their focus and specific issues. To be specific, though sociology of religion, philosophy of religion and theology differ in their focus and the issues of analytical interest, they have much to contribute to the development of each other. Let us see how they differ in their focus and the issues of analytical interest.

Box 1.01

A sociologist may be a believer, and need not necessarily study religion. But if one is interested in the mutual interaction between religion and society, there are a number of issues one can investigate, for example, rituals, sects, or different aspects of a religion or a whole of religion as it operates in different setting. In other words, a sociologist has a vast domain from which to choose the particular area of study. Whether good exists or not is not a question a sociologist is interested in. Sociology of religion cannot prove or disprove the existence of god, or judge whether a set of values are right or wrong. **Sociology of religion is not an agenda of socio-religious reform.**

The focus of the three disciplines is broadly as follows

- i) **Sociology of religion** does not ask, whcther god exists. Rather, sociology of religion asks, if **people believe** that god exists, ‘why do they believe’, ‘how do they come to believe?’, ‘how do they describe their god?’, and ‘is there any relationship between their description of god and their social conditions?’ Similarly, sacrificing goats or buffaloes for deities cannot be certified as right or wrong by the sociologist. To be precise, the question of ‘what ought to be?’ does not belong

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iii) Mention any two differences between sociology of religion and theology. Use five lines for your answer.

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1.3 SOCIOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF RELIGION

A definition helps us to identify clearly the subject of our study. The primary task of sociologists, before undertaking any research, is that they should define the object of their study. Very often definitions tend to describe the content or substance of the object of study. But adequate care must be taken so that a definition provides the essential ideas of the object of study. Broadly, the following four characteristics of religion(s) have been identified in order to construct a sociological definition.

1.3.1 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 we grow up in a society.

1.3.2 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 as 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, and propitiate the sacred.

Box 1.02

All supernatural beings are not 'sacred'. There are categories of supernatural 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.

1.3.3 Beliefs and Practices

Religious belief is a system of knowledge about the divine and its relationship with the human. It is simply not enough to believe in the existence of a supernatural force. The knowledge of its existence must be explained to people and to generations to come. Beliefs serves this purpose of revealing the existence of the supernatural or divine or the sacred. Belief explains the nature of the divine, the deeds, actions or words of the divine and prescribes ways in which human beings can communicate with the divine.

Belief necessarily involves a sense of the past and speaks about a tradition, in the sense of a custom followed for a long time. It narrates the history of communication

between the divine and human, and in doing so gives meaning to ritual.

Ritual is an act performed repeatedly and according to custom. It is ceremonial and formal. Most often rituals are invested with specific purposes. Rituals are series of symbolic actions which have a specific meaning in relation to religious beliefs. Rituals tend to be standardised, repeated and condensed. In pre-modern societies, rituals tend to be very elaborate and even minute details are observed carefully, in order to get full benefit. Rituals may be performed collectively, or individually. Where rituals are performed collectively, either every one performs or only the specialists perform while the believers participate. Shaman, *pujari*, priest are examples of ritual specialists. They recite extensive prayers or chants (mantra) and simultaneously perform the ritual acts (see Unit 4 in this Block and Units 5, 7, 8 in Block 2).

There is a debate in sociology or religion on the nature of the belief and ritual. Some scholars have argued that ritual emerged before an elaborate system of belief. Durkheim is one among them. Another group of scholars argue that people tried to explain the mysterious through belief first and then the ritual followed. Let us now talk about religious behaviour as a source of moral values.

1.3.4 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 relate 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 as 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, military 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, after carefully reading the sections 1.2 and 1.3. 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

i) Define, in five lines, the idea of the supernatural

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ii) What is a religious belief? Use five lines for your answer.

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iii) What is a ritual? Use five lines for your answer.

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

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v) List out, the sociological characteristics of religion. Use four lines for your answer.

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1.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Scholarly interest in religion is not a recent one. The Veda, Upanishad and the treatises of Greek, philosophers, like a Aristotle and Plato, are texts which show scholarly interest in religion. It has to be admitted that Theology (Have you heard about St. Augustine’s ‘Summa Theological’?) and Philosophy have gone far ahead in the study of religion than the relatively new and recent discipline of Sociology of Religion. Here, we are concerned with sociological interest in religion. Such classical sociologists as Durkheim and Weber studied in different ways the significance of religion. This interest is again revived in the present times. There are three observable

- i) Sociological interest in religion began to emerge after the merchant-voyagers, missionaries and the colonialists 'discovered' the pre-modern societies. Here anthropologists and sociologists seemed to share an interest in religion (refer to Units 2 and 3 of this Block).
- ii) Sociological interest in religion received an impetus following the industrial revolution in Europe. Industrial revolution followed the break-down of feudalism in the fifteenth century. Scholars of this stream were more interested in analysing the 'fate' of religion in the industrial world (see Block 2 of this course).
- iii) Sociological interest in religion is evident in those studies which trace the growth of religious revivalism in societies of late-industrial phase, and early post-industrial phase. Scholars of this stream are engaged in analysing the reasons for the survival of religion. In this third stream, we witness the presence of a large number of third world scholars, who are concerned with questions of Islamic fundamentalism, and Sinhala-Buddhist and Hindu communalism (see Block 3 and 5 of this course).

1.4.1 Pre-modern Societies

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



Religions, art, drama, and architecture influence society deeply world-wide.

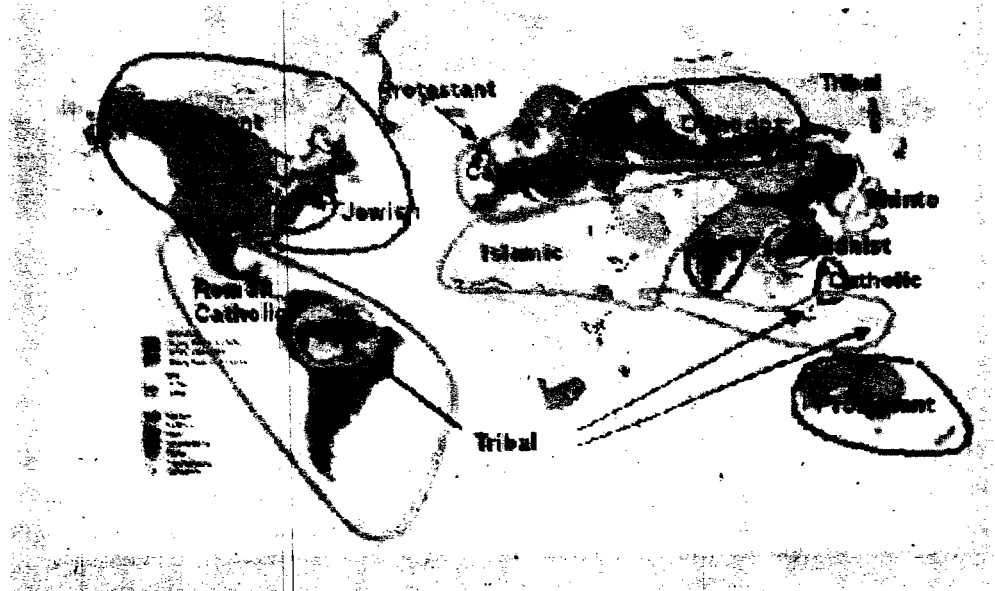
types can be identified: individualistic explanations and social explanations. Individualists explanations either emphasised the cognitive (intellectual) or the emotional aspects of religion. Both varieties of explanation of religion by anthropologists and sociologists were based on material related to primitive people around the world. Edward B. Tylor (1881) and Herbert Spencer (1882) can be called the intellectualists, because they opined that pre-modern man had to evolve religion in order to explain the phenomena of dreams, echoes and deaths (see Unit 2 of this Block). 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 (see details in Section 2.4 of Unit 2), religion is nothing but pre-modern 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 (see Unit 3 of this Block). 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). Units 2 and 3 of this Block deal in detail with the issues discussed in this sub-section.

1.4.2 Industrial Societies

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Weber (1864-1920) are two important scholars who have explained religion in industrial societies in details (in relation to issues discussed in this sub-section see Units 10 and 11 Block 2 of this course). Both Karl Marx (1976) and Max Weber (1963) argue that religion is increasingly losing its reason or justification for existence and there will come a specific historical point after



Generalized map of world religions

which religion will be no more. For Max Weber, rationalisation is the main theme and for Karl Marx, class conflict. According to Karl Marx (1979), religion in this world of exploitation is an expression of distress and at the same time it is also a protest against the real distress. In other words, religion continues to survive because of oppressive social conditions. When this oppressive and exploitative condition is destroyed, religion will become unnecessary. Marx denied a place for religion in his utopian world of communism.

According to Karl Marx, religion is a component of superstructure (broadly, the world of ideas), which is a mere reflection of the base (broadly put, the mode of production comprising relations of production and forces of production). There have been wide ranging debates among scholars both Marxist and non-Marxist, whether base or material condition can **determine** the superstructure or realm of ideas. Some neo-Marxist scholars argue that, in some cases, the realm of ideas may become relatively independent and try to subvert the material conditions or the base.

Increasingly, religion has come to be accepted as a possible instrument of social change as well. Though Max Weber agreed that religion will vanish ultimately, he demonstrated the power of religious ideas to act as forces of development. By systematically analysing the doctrines of certain Protestant sects like Lutheranism, Calvinism and Pietism, Weber came to believe that ethics generated by these sects have aided capitalist development in many European countries. The doctrine of predestination, preached by Calvin (1509-1564), said that God had chosen his people already, and one could live by faith alone. Calvin criticised all kinds of magical practices followed by Catholics. The doctrine of predestination aroused the question, "Am I one of the God's chosen?" in the minds of the believers. This question resulted in the hard work and asceticism. Work became an end in itself, for it was for the greater glory of God. Work was no more a means to obtain worldly pleasures and prosperities. Asceticism combined with hardwork resulted in accumulation of wealth (capital) which was reinvested to accelerate the pace of industrialisation. Thus religious ideas generated by the Protestant sects aided capitalist development, according to Weber. You will learn more about this in Unit 10 of Block 2.

1.4.3 Religious Revivalism

Though many of scholars predicted that religion would ultimately vanish, it has managed to survive. In fact, there has been a religious revivalism in many parts of the world.

In recent times there has been a fresh growth of fundamentalist Protestant sects in the United States. There has been religious revivalism in many Asian countries and religion tends to increasingly become a tool of political mobilisation. Meanwhile, in some of the Latin American countries, Christianity has become the tool of resistance against exploitation. Even where religion seems to lose its hold in the sense of decreasing attendance in church ceremonies, a private religion is seemingly emerging. In other words, a personal interpretation of religious doctrines is tolerated. Some scholars raise doubts whether religion will vanish from the history of mankind. They have analysed the evidence of religion found in the forms of rituals and beliefs in the so-called secular system like the State, Communism and Nationalism (see Unit 19 on **Civil Religion**, of Block 2). To be specific, if communism is analysed as a form of religion, no one should be surprised.

Before concluding the section, let me quote the words of Turner (1986:48), for they summarise the secret of the survival of religion, "Religion is not a cognitive system, a set of dogmas alone, it is a meaningful experience and experienced meaning".

Activity 2

Is religious revivalism on the increase in almost all parts of the world? Give some examples of this phenomenon in India and abroad. In addition, write, in 250 words, your views on why religion is again popularly accepted and vigorously defended.

1.5 RELIGION AND OTHER RELATED SOCIAL PHENOMENA

We shall now discuss the similarities and differences between religion, magic and science. Very often science is opposed to religion and magic is classified within religion. These arbitrary assumptions have to be clarified, for a better understanding of religion, science and magic. For a detailed review of this topic see Unit 23 of Block 6 of ESO-03. Our reason for including this section in this unit is related to the fact that many anthropological and sociological studies have conventionally discussed this topic to analyse religious phenomena.

1.5.1 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

Vernon (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. In direct 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.

1.5.2 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.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) State briefly, in five lines, the individualistic view of religion held by the intellectualists.

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- ii) Describe, in five lines, the origin and functions of religion, as explained by Durkheim.

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iii) What is the role of religious ideas, according to Weberian thought? How did Weber arrive at his thesis? Use five lines for your answer.

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iv) Mention, in five lines, any two differences magic and religion.

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v) Match the following

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| 1) Webber | a) Religion is an emotional response to overcome a frightening situation. |
| 2) Marx | b) Religious ideas can become forces of development. |
| 3) Durkheim | c) Religion explains the mysterious. |
| 4) Spencer | d) Religion is a mode of protest. |
| 5) Paul Radin | e) Religion integrates society. |

1.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit introduced the course (ESO-05) by explaining the meaning of sociology of religion. First, 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.

Secondly, it was demonstrated that sociology of religion differs from philosophy and theology. Sociology brings to the fore certain issues not considered by philosophy and theology. Sociology, philosophy and theology. Though they differ among themselves, are interlinked disciplines. Sociology of religion explains religious beliefs and practices in their social context, philosophy of religion tries to explain the truth or untruth about god, and theology tries to know about god by studying human experiences.

Thirdly, 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.

Fourthly, the unit provided a brief sketch of the development of sociology of religion. Three phases were identified and elaborated. Intellectualism and emotionalism were the early sub-phase of the first phase. The second phase examined the question of religion against the background of rapid industrialisation. Marx and Weber belonged to this phase. Marx considered religion to be a mode of protest. Religion will lose

its relevance, when the present exploitative conditions justifying it are destroyed. Weber, developing his theory from the position of ethics of protestant sects, argued that religious ideas can be effective forces in development.

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.

1.7 KEY WORDS

Beliefs: it is a tenet or body of tenets, held by a group. It refers to state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing.

Faith: allegiance to duty or a person. Belief and trust in and loyalty to God. Belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion.

Magic: standardised series of acts performed as a means of manipulating the supernatural to reach the desired end.

Morality: prescriptions of conduct for human beings.

Protestant: one who makes a protest. Here, the term refers to non-Catholic Christians who deny the universal authority of the Pope and affirm the Reformation principles of justification by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers and the primacy of the Bible as the only source or revealed truth.

Revivalism: the spirit of methods characteristics of religious revivals. A tendency to revive or restore.

Rite of Passage: a ceremony which marks the passage of time and is associated with a crisis or change of status for an individual, such as marriage, illness or death.

Ritual: the established form for a ceremony, particularly a religious ceremony.

Theology: the study of God and God's relation to the world.

1.8 FURTHER READING

O'Dea, Thomas F., 1966. *The Sociology of Religion*. Prentice Hall : New Delhi

Robertson, Roland, 1970. *The Sociological Interpretation of Religion*. Basil Blackwell : Oxford

Yinger, J. Milton, 1957. *Religion, Society and the Individual*. Macmillan : New York

1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i) a) Yes

b) Yes

c) Yes

d) No

- ii) Religion is woven into the social life in the form of beliefs, rituals and organisation. Religion influences our understanding of the world and the pattern of our interaction with fellow human beings.
- ii) Sociology of religion explains beliefs and rituals in their social context, whereas theology tries to understand the divine by probing the experiences of the believers. A sociologist need not necessarily be a believer in order to study religion, whereas a theologian is necessarily a believer.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Supernatural is considered to be beyond human senses. It is taken to be extraordinary, all powerful or infinite.
- ii) Religious beliefs refers to a system of knowledge about the divine and its relationship with the human. It gives meaning to a ritual.
- iii) A ritual refers to the performance of acts, usually ceremonial in nature. Ritual acts are the outward expression of religious beliefs.
- iv) 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.
- v)
 - 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.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) According to the intellectualists, members of pre-modern societies evolved religion in order to explain the phenomena of dreams, echoes and deaths. Consequent upon this view is the assumption that religion might vanish when the function of explanation is taken over by science.
- ii) Durkheim felt that totemism is an elementary form of religion. The totem is a sacred object which is also the marker of a social group. The totem is exalted and rituals arise during the 'collective effervescence' generated when the group assembles together.
- iii) Weber argued that religious ideas can be forces of development. He found that the 'doctrine of predestination' propounded by the Protestant sects had generated a life style of hard work and asceticism; self-denial in which people earned but did not spend money on luxury. This resulted in the generation of capital necessary for industrialisation.
- iv) Religion refers to ultimate problems (for example death, failures) and meaning of human life, whereas magic is concerned with immediate problems like good weather, good crops or cure of disease. Religion is collectively oriented, unlike magic, which is more individualistic.
- v)
 - 1) b
 - 2) d
 - 3) e
 - 4) c
 - 5) a

UNIT 2 EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES OF RELIGION

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Evolutionism and its Roots
 - 2.2.1 Positivism
 - 2.2.2 Intellectualism
- 2.3 Intellectualist Theories of Religion
 - 2.3.1 The Nature-Myth School
 - 2.3.2 The Ghost Theory
 - 2.3.3 The Soul Theory or Animism
 - 2.3.4 Dependence on Magic
- 2.4 The Origin of Religion in Psycho-biological Processes
 - 2.4.1 A Product of Fear
 - 2.4.2 Religious Feelings and Thrill
 - 2.4.3 Emotional Stress
 - 2.4.4 Feelings of Guilt
- 2.5 A Critique of Evolutionist Theories
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Key Words
- 2.8 Further Reading
- 2.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit primarily deals with one of the many attempts that have been made by scholars to study the nature of religious phenomena. After going through this unit, you should be able to

- describe the evolutionary theory and trace its roots in positivism and intellectualism
- discuss the various intellectualist and psychological theories of religion
- analyse the drawbacks of evolutionist theories and follow the gradual shift from the question of origin to functions of religion.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Unit 1 gave you a general idea of the scope of this block on *The Study of Religion*. Now, we focus on the main theme of the block i.e. the various approaches to the study of religion. Unit 2 will discuss the evolutionary theories of religion. These theories represent the first major attempt to explain the origin and development of religion.

First, we will discuss the theory of evolutionism and its roots in positivism and intellectualism. This will be followed by an account of intellectualist theories which assumed that human beings in their early stages of development created religion in order to explain natural phenomena in rational terms. Next, we will take up those evolutionists who believed religion to arise as a result of psycho-biological processes. Finally, we will explain how evolutionary ideas were doubted, questioned and a gradual shift was made towards functionalist explanation of religion.

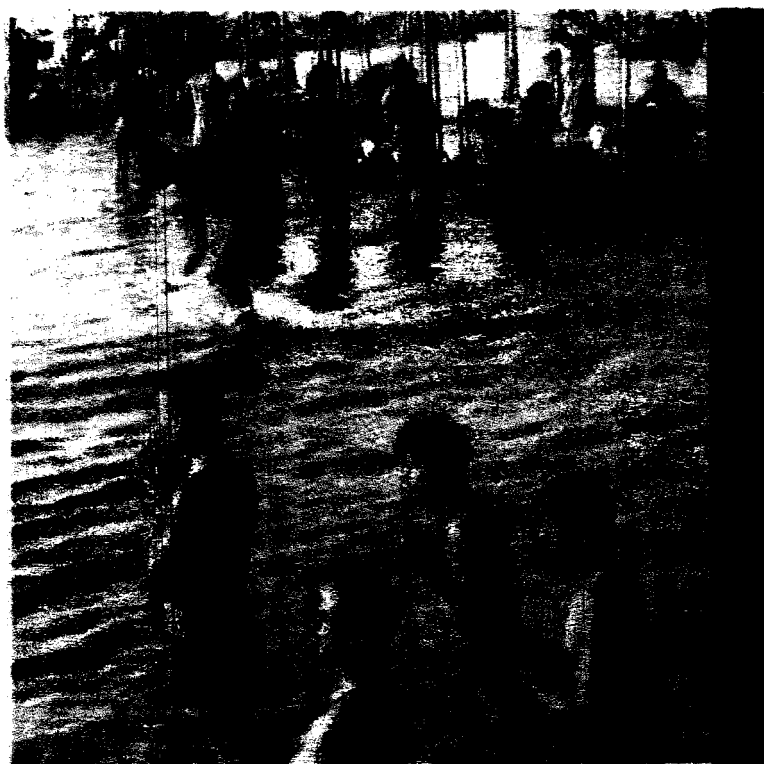
You should also bear in mind that it is not only in the study of religion that we find

evolutionary ideas coming before the functionalist explanation, in fact this has been the chronological order of the development of sociological thought. In the sociology of knowledge all social phenomena were first explained by early sociologists in terms of evolutionary theories. These theories were gradually replaced by functionalist theories. The debates about origins and development of religion were considered to be necessary for sociologists to understand and explain social phenomena. In other words, you can say that our study of the various approaches for understanding and explaining religion is located in the larger framework of sociology of knowledge. This link should always be borne in mind while critically evaluating any sociological theory of religion. This will save you from entering into unnecessary religious discourses. Those of you who do not have a background of sociology will benefit from reading our elective course on *Sociological Thought (ESO-03)* which has outlined the growth of sociological knowledge from evolutionism to functionalism.

2.2 EVOLUTIONISM AND ITS ROOTS

Generally speaking, evolutionism refers to a belief that societies everywhere have a common development pattern. Here it is also understood that mind as well as society progress in a straight line towards ever-increasing complexity and rationality. In this rectilinear progress there are definite stages, beginning from the 'origin' to the present state of human civilisation. Most evolutionists studied the world's primitive peoples for finding out the beginning and progress of social institutions and society. They did not, however, agree on any one theory of social development but presented widely varying schemes of development through which human societies were supposed to have passed.

Evolutionist way of thinking about human societies took final shape in the early nineteenth century. It left a great impact on many disciplines, particularly science, philosophy and anthropology/sociology. Under the influence of evolutionism, anthropologists began the search for the 'origin' of society, religion, family and other social institutions. The term evolutionism came to be identified with the anthropological theories dealing with the origin and development of religion. These evolutionists were trying to identify, using whatever material was available about the pre-modern



Ritual ceremony performed by the devotees in Sangam, Allahabad

tribal societies; the stages through which society and its institutions developed over the years. The stages described by them can be listed as those of animism, animatism, etc.

Evolutionist understanding of religion seems to rest on two assumptions, namely positivism and intellectualism. We will briefly discuss the two assumptions before studying in detail the evolutionary theories of religion.

2.2.1 Positivism

Positivism means a commitment to principles of natural science. It refers to a conviction that like other natural science, sociology can also offer scientific explanations of social phenomena. Scholars with a positivist assumption, very often, tried to contrast religion with science. For them, religion, when subjected to scientific analysis, ends up merely as something irrational. Positivists tended to assume that when belief in science, based on experiment and sensory perception, is widely held religion will lose its value. They argued that under the impact of rapid industrialisation, religion was losing its ground. We give you two examples of scholars with positivist assumptions.

The French Spencer (1798-1857), believed that the theological stage was the beginning, metaphysical stage was the next and the scientific stage was the last in the evolution of human societies (for further details see Block 1, ESO-03), Comte emphasised that religion will end after the further growth of science.

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), an English scholar, argued that religion arose from the practice of worshipping the ghosts of ancestors. This practice was universal, according to him, among primitive people. After this stage came polytheism (worshipping many gods) and finally monotheism (worshipping a single God). Charles Darwin's famous book *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859 and it brought a revolution in biological sciences. Even before this, Spencer (1857) claimed in his essay, *Progress: Its Law & Cause*, that as science advances and a contract-based society develops, religion centered on god head will fade away. Consequently agnosticism (belief that nothing can be known about god) will be the religion of the scientific age. We may say that Spencer (1876-1896) in his three volumes of *Principles of Sociology*, constructed first systematic theory of religion.

2.2.2 Intellectualism

Intellectualism refers to the exercise of reasoning for explaining something. Scholars with an intellectualist assumption argue that religion is a reasoned or rational response of the individual to the natural phenomena. In other words, religion is a system of explanation offered by the primitive, with reference to supernatural beings. Evolutionism based on the intellectualist assumption claims that religion is a matter of knowledge. The emotional side of religion was ignored by the nineteenth century intellectualists as a non-essential addition. Later, in the twentieth century, these intellectualists were criticised for their one-sided approach to religion. Notwithstanding this valid criticism, we can say one thing in their favour that they were the first to establish that the primitives were not mindless and godless as the report of missionaries and adventures made them out to be. The intellectualists tried to prove that the primitives were rational though their efforts to explain the natural phenomena were somewhat crude and false.

Secondly, these nineteenth century intellectualists were the first Europeans to conceptualise the entire human society as one unit. This resulted in challenging the assumed high position of the so-called European scientific mind. Further it resulted also in changing the nature and importance of classical studies and thereby in

altering the view of European intellectual achievement. We shall not here discuss the specific examples of intellectual evolutionaries because in the following section we shall deal with their contributions in details.

It is good to remember that intellectualists were an odd mixture of positivism and evolutionism. The twentieth century anthropologists and sociologists subjected them to some very harsh criticism. For example, F.B. Jevon's (1896) influential and famous book, *Introduction to the History of Religion*, is described by Evans-Pritchard (1965:5) as 'a collection of absurd reconstructions, unsupportable hypotheses and conjectures....'.

Having discussed the two assumptions on which the evolutionism rests, we will now discuss the various evolutionary theories of religion. First we will take up the intellectualists theories, dealing with the origin and development of religion and then we will also look at those evolutionary theories which trace religion's origin in psycho-biological processes.

At this point it is apt to indicate that there were initially many theories of religion. Further these theories were gradually superceded and criticised and alternatives presented to this type of theorising above the sources and procedures of religion in society.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Define evolutionism, in about five lines.

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ii) What is positivism? Use five lines for your answer.

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iii) How do the intellectualists define religion? Use five lines for your answer.

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2.3 INTELLECTUALIST THEORIES OF RELIGION

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 courses **Fetishism** was replaced by **Polytheism**. This theory was superseded by the ghost theory and the soul theory. These latter theories are known as intellectualist theories of religion, because both assume that the primitives are rational being, 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.

2.3.1 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 Müller 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 supported 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 and 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. We will also mention Andrew Lang's criticism of the views of Tylor.

2.3.2 The Ghost Theory

Unlike Max Müller, who was concerned with Indo-European religions, both Herbert Spencer and Edward Tylor focused on religious behaviour of the primitives. They believed that primitive societies offered an evidence of the earliest forms of religion. Their view on primitive beliefs are quite similar. Spencer published his views in 1882, 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 (1876-96) 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 a person'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 peoples' experiences of temporary loss of sensibilities. The event of death is also considered by the primitives as a longer period of insensibility. This idea of duality is extended by them to animals, plants and material object. 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 the primitives 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 the primitives.

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'.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) What is the relationship between human beings and nature according to the theory of naturism? Use six lines for your answer.

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- ii) Differentiate between the ghost theory and naturism. Use six lines for your answer.

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2.3.3 The Soul Theory or Animism

As the word *anima* (a Latin meaning soul) shows, Sir Edward Tylor's theory of animism emphasises 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 Tylor was not able to see the difference between the two concepts.

Box 2.01

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 many primitive peoples believed in what he

called high gods. These groups were described by Tylor-like intellectualists as not being able to abstractly 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 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 primitive monotheism or the concept of an all powerful, creative god, among the primitives.

R.R. Marett (1866-1943), another of Tylor’s disciples, criticised the animistic theory. He referred to R.H. 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 *Encyclopaedia 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 primitive societies. Later this trend merged in the functionalist approach to the study of religion.

But before we learn in detail in Unit 3 about the functionalist theories of religion, we need to look at those evolutionist theories which claimed that religion originated in magic and superstition. An important study in this area was made by Sir James Frazer in his *magnum opus*, *The Golden Bough*.

The idea behind discussing spirits, soul, magic and sorcery as related to evolutionist theories is that you should be familiar with these currents of thought. Secondly, you should be able to examine critically these ideas and your own ideas about religion.

Activity 1

In India, it is common to come across the idea of soul. Given that Tylor’s theory of animism was several criticised by his own disciplines, as a sociologist, how would you like to account for the idea of soul? Write a short not of 250 words on your idea concerning the idea of soul.

2.3.4 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 semiscientific 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 a 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.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Briefly describe what is James Frazer’s evolutionary scheme of understanding the intellectual development of the primitive mind.

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ii) Match the following:

- | A | B |
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| a) Homeopathic | i) 'law of similarity' |
| b) Magic | ii) 'coercion of the supernatural' |
| c) Imitative | iii) 'once in contact' |

2.4 THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION IN PSYCHO-BIOLOGICAL PROCESSES

You would recall that in section 1.4.1 of Unit 1 we discussed religion in premodern societies. There we mentioned that some scholars stressed the emotional aspects of religion. In most text books on sociological study of religion, the cognitive (intellectualist) and emotional aspects of religion are discussed together. Evans-Pritchard (1965) has provided a most readable discussion of the two streams of thought. Taken as a response and reaction to extreme intellectualist viewpoints, emotionalist theories provide a kind of balance and show that emotions are an important part of religion. As we disagree with intellectualist explanations, so we may question analysis of religion in terms of emotion. All the same, we need to discuss it as the background which served as a base for later scholars, who came to be known as functionalists and structuralists. Here we will discuss some of the important and well-known theories which seek religion's origin in psycho-biological processes. First, we will talk about the view that religion is mainly a product of fear. Then, we take up Malinowski's thesis that religion arises and becomes active in conditions of emotional stress. And finally we discuss Freud's view that religion arises as a result of feeling of guilt.

2.4.1 A Product of Fear

Taylor held that the idea of spirit grew out of the idea of soul and the idea of spirit later became the conception of God. Most of Taylor's contemporaries accepted this view of religion. We have already mentioned that Taylor's pupils were among the best critics of his theory.

A classical scholar, a school headmaster, A.E. Crawley, questioned the logic of Taylor's view about the source of the idea of soul. According to Crawley (1909:78), the idea of soul cannot possibly arise from dreams. He argued that the idea of soul originated from sensation whereas the existence of spirits is only in the minds of people. He said that 'the world of spirits is the mental world'. This is again an intellectualist standpoint. But as Evans-Pritchard (1965:36) points out this is not all that Crawley had to say. Crawley gives us his theory of religion in his book, *The Mystic Rose*, published in 1927.

Crawley holds that religion or superstition pervades the mental make-up of primitive people who do not distinguish between religion and magic. They live in the world of mystery where subjective and objective realities are all mixed up into one. The main force behind primitive thought is fear of the danger in social relations. For example, while eating, the primitives feel particularly prone to danger. This is the reason why they have so many taboos around food. The idea of a world of spirits is the result of a sense of danger and the feelings of fear. In this way, his theory of religion is more or less built around taboo, a product of fear. For him, wherever people face greater dangers, they are that much more religious. Interestingly, according to him, women face more dangers than men do, they are therefore more religious than men are. For him, god is an outcome of processes of psychology and biology.

Another example of this stream of thought is the writing of Wilhelm Wundt. Like Crawley, he was both an intellectualist and an emotionalist. Wundt (1916:17) held that all the ideas which are not part of one's perception or which are mythological, have their genesis in emotions. These emotions are projected outwardly and then comes the first stage of religion i.e., the belief in magic and demons. In the next phase of evolution, people begin to worship animals. This what he calls the Totemic Age. It is in due course succeeded by the worship of ancestors. This again is replaced by the worship of heroes and then by the cult of the gods. This is the stage of the Age of Heroes and Gods. The final stage of this evolutionary cycle is the Humanistic Age which refers to religious universalism.

One notices in the analysis of Crawley and Wundt is such that "stages" of development of religion were posited by Crawley. This type of theory and conclusion is conjectural and cannot be proved or disproved.

Both Crawley and Wundt were evolutionists to the core. The ideas of Wundt belong more to philosophy of history than to sociology or anthropology. Such American anthropologists as R.H. Lowie, Paul Radin and Goldenweiser also wrote about religion in primitive societies. Let us see what they have to say.

2.4.2 Religious Feelings and Thrill

R.H. Lowie (1925), basing his thinking on his study of the Crow Indians (an Amerindian people of the region between the Platte and Yellow stone rivers), considers that for the primitives, religion is a matter of feeling. It is marked by 'a sense of the Extraordinary; Mysterious or Supernatural'. Instead of religious behaviour, he writes about emotional responses of amazement and awe. Anything that gives rise to those feelings is characterised as religion. Thus, for Lowie, if magic is associated with emotion, it is to be called religion. Without emotional content magic is, for Lowie, akin to science (note the similarity between the views of Lowie and Frazer).

Another American anthropologist, Paul Radin, who studied the Winebago Indians (located around Winebago lake in East Wisconsin in the U.S.A.), also emphasised that religious feelings arise and are centered around beliefs and customs. This sensitivity to belief and custom is expressed in thrill. The religious thrill is generally manifested in time of crises. Paul Radin (1938) considered magic as religion only if it arouses the religious feelings. In the absence of religious emotion, magic is only folklore.

Similarly, Goldenweiser (1921:346) describes two spheres of religion, namely, magic and religion. He holds that in both magic and religion the thrill is experienced. Like the American anthropologists, other anthropologists, particularly in England, paid more attention to observation and recording of information about primitive peoples. One of the more well-known anthropologists among them was Malinowski who was very interested in the role of magic and religion in economic evolution. Although Malinowski is famous for founding the functionalist school of British Social Anthropology, he was an evolutionist in his theoretical interests. For details about his contribution in the field of the study of religion and magic, see Units 22 and 23 of Block 6 of ESO-03. Here, we will briefly discuss Malinowski's views on religion and magic, because he was primarily trying to account for the origin of religion. This was a pursuit undertaken by many evolutionists.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Explain how, according to Crawley, religion is a product of fear. Use six lines for your answer.

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- ii) Give the main arguments of those who explain religious behaviour in terms of feelings. Use six lines for your answer.

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2.4.3 Emotional Stress

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

Emotional stress in contemporary times is closely linked to the stress factor in modern life. Thus it would be a mistake to imagine that in modern life that there is little emotional stress. Mental tension also sometimes makes the emotional stress very intense.

Box 2.01

Malinowski has also differentiated religion from magic. According to him, religious rites have no future motives. Their objectives are achieved in the very process of holding religious rites. For example, Malinowski (1984:39) says that in birth, puberty and death rites, the very acts of holding these ceremonies fulfil their aims of giving 'a ritual and dramatic expression of the supreme power and value of tradition in primitive societies'. Further, they also serve 'to impress this power and value upon the minds of each generation'. Finally, they transmit tribal lore and therefore preserve tradition and maintain tribal solidarity.

Though different from each other, religion and magic, for Malinowski, are also similar because the function of both is a purification that brings about release from tension. When the people face crises of life, the fear and anxiety cause tension. The performance of religious and magical rites help them to dispel their fears and emotional stress.

Malinowski's explanation of religion and magic in primitive societies has been followed almost blindly by his admirers. Prominent among them are Driberg (1932) and Firth (1955). In the early part of twentieth century, it was common to find scholars following this stream of thought about religion and magic. Evans-Pritchard (1965:40) calls it the Tylor-Frazer formula. He points out that even the psychologist Carveth

Read (1920) writing about superstitions followed the same logic. In his book, *The Origin of Man and His Superstition*, Carveth Read concluded that a person's emotional states of fear, hate, love etc. produce magic whose function is to release tension and give confidence and hope to its practitioners.

While talking about psychology, we should also look at what was said about religion by Freud who was influenced by anthropological writing on religion and who, in turn, influenced the writing of sociologists and anthropologists. His books, *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), contributed a great deal to evolutionist theory.

2.4.4 Feelings of Guilt

Writing about the thinking process among the primitive people, Van Der Leeuw (1928:14) points out that they have strong emotional needs which stand in the way of knowing the truth. They are not able to see any contradictions in their thinking. They then see just what they want to see.

Van Der Leeuw cites the case of magic. A person, faced with a difficult situation, can either try and somehow come out of it or withdraw and turn inwards. Turning inwards takes the person to the world of fantasy where the difficulties can be overcome by working on magic spells. This psychological mechanism helps people to deal with all sorts of difficulties in life.

Freud (1913:145) also found that his neurotic (emotionally unstable) patients deal with harsh realities of life with the help of compulsive acts and protective wall of mere thought. Freud gives us three phases of thought. The first one is the phase of narcissism, that is, love for one's own body. The second phase is that object finding when one is dependent on one's parents. The third one is the phase of maturity. In this state, the person is at one with the reality and adapts to it without problems. Corresponding to these phase, Freud gives three stages of intellectual development. These are the animistic (or the magical), the religious and the scientific. The child is unable to achieve everything through motor activity and, as in magic, imagines she/he has achieved the desired goal by substituting thought for action. A neurotic person also behaves in the same manner, substituting thought for action. Such a person is then like a magician who considers thought to be omnipotent. Here again, the idea is that the tension, the sense of frustration leads to magical rites which in turn release tension.

Having thus explained the animistic stage, Freud discusses the second stage. For him religion, like magic, is an illusion and it comes out of the feelings of guilt. Freud has a very interesting story to account for the origin of religion. He refers to the ape-like phase of human development when the leader of the horde, a father figure, ruled over the group, keeping all the females for his own use. His sons rebelled against the father and wanted the females for themselves. They killed the father and ate him up. Later they repented and suffered the feelings of guilt. As a result they put a taboo in eating their totem (an animal or bird), which was also sign for their father and his authority. They began to ceremonially worship the totem and thus originated religious rites. Secondly, the sons put a taboo on sexual relationship between mother and sons. This is known as the rule of incest. According to Freud as totem is the origin of religion, He incest taboo is the origin of culture.

It is most interesting to note that this, allegory of Freud's has no basis in fact. It is a purely conjectural story which indicates that there is a sort of tension in the human family purely on the basis of gender differences. Yet these differences and desires do not usually erupt into homicidal violence.

Freud elaborates these ideas in his theories of Oedipus complex and Electra complex.

In the former, the son, in his unconscious, wants to have the mother for himself and wants, to kill the father while in the latter the daughter, wanting to have the father to herself, wants to till the mother. In the last analysis, the father is idealised and taken to be God. This is all illusion, so, for Freud religion is also an illusion.

We find that for Freud, both religion and magic are reducible to feelings of tensions, frustrations, emotions and complexes and illusion. As mentioned before, Freud has influenced anthropological writing. For example, M.E. Spiro (1984) has writing a book, *Oedipus in the Trobriands*, which shows that Freud's evolutionist ideas are still being worked on.

Let us now see how all these evolutionist theories accounting for the origin and development of religion could not remain in vogue forever. They were, in due course, replaced by new currents of thought. Over the years more information about the various human groups became available and in its light older theories were challenged by subsequent scholars. Also, new questions were asked and newer methods of answering those questions were discovered. In the following section there is a critique of evolutionist theories of religion.

Activity 2

Read once again sub-sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.4 of this unit and offer, in a note of 250 words, your criticism of the views of Malinowski and Freud on the origin of religion.

2.5 A CRITIQUE OF EVOLUTIONIST THEORIES

Many objections were levelled against evolutionist theories of religion. You have already come to know that such scholars as Lang and Marett criticised Tylor's idea of the soul the giving of soul-like qualities to animate and inanimate objects. **They argued that there was a religion even before animism, which attributed everything with life. This was called animatism.** Lang pointed to texts and sources of knowledge which showed that primitive people had belief in an abstract notion of a creative and all powerful god. This disproved the ther anthropologists' thesis that primitive people were too backward or underdeveloped to conceive in abstract terms of the notion of a God.

Secondly, as you have already learned in sub-section 2.3.3 of this unit, Marret drew attention to the religious belief called **manaism**. According to this belief, all animate and inanimate things were characterised by an impersonal and nonmaterial supernatural power. This supernatural force was called *mana* by the Melanesian people, among whom it was found. In other words, what was being argued was that Tylor was not saying anything new. Moreover, in levelling criticism against Tylor, his critics were able to shift attention from earlier efforts to study about the origin of religion to a closer review of actual ethnographic material about religion.

A major criticism against Tylor and Spencer was that they projected their own ideas regarding soul etc. into the mind of the primitive people whom they had not studied in their natural habital and environment. Thus the evolutionists were arm chair scholars.

It was argued that rather than religion and related beliefs and practices, primitive people were actually more inclined towards magic and superstition. Still representing evolutionary ideas, James Frazer's imposing book *The Golden Bough* attributed to the primitives a magical mode of thought. Frazer argued that it was later replaced by a religious and then a scientific mode. He stressed the role of such religious specialists as magician and priests, in dealing with the world of the supernatural.

As you would have noticed that the evolutionists wrote at length on religion and magic. Some argued for the primacy of religious beliefs while others supported the primacy of magical practices. Much of what was said by them on religion revolved around magic. Today, their theories indeed sound quite illogical and contrary to common sense. No doubt, these scholars were great scholars and their explanations about religion were based on the thinking and researches of their times. They assumed that they could learn the story of the origin and development of religion by studying primitive religions. This led them to explain religious phenomena in terms of primitive thought. The question arises—how were they to know the complexities of primitive thought? Some of them had never even seen even one primitive person. Most of their theories were plain guesses about primitive people's way of thinking. Their theories were quite simple in the sense that they reflected more the ideas then prevailing in the societies to which the respective evolutionists belonged rather than the beliefs and practices of the primitive peoples.

Box 2.02

James Frazer managed to collect information about primitive societies from the accounts of explorers, missionaries, administrators and traders. But the explanation of this information was still based on imagined associations made by 'arm chair' scholars who had never even exchanged a word with a native. The reports used by these scholars were both very poorly recorded and contained highly selective facts about primitive groups, as travellers merely recorded what seemed to them most odd, curious and sensational type of things.

Malinowski, who was the first anthropologist to have carried out a professional field study of the primitive way of life, made fun of the evolutionist way of theorising about religion. The scissor-and-paste kind of putting information together has been well ridiculed by Malinowski who emphasised meticulous recording of minutest details of day-to-day life among the primitives.

No doubt the study of religion by evolutionists provided a gradual building up of an understanding of the phenomenon and this is the reason why we study their ideas and theories. This does not, however, mean that we can fully accept their various schemes of development of religion in human societies. Most evolutionists were progressionists, that is, they believed in progress from less advanced to more advanced stages. For them the primitive societies were examples of crude phases of development. For providing their theories, they looked for appropriate examples from some corner of the world. They had no idea of historical truth. Then, to heap further misinterpretations on an already wrong picture, the evolutionists made special terms to describe religious phenomena among the primitives. Terms like animism, pre-animism, fetishism, manaism, to describe religious made it look as something very difficult to understand. It was quite perilous to take words from different languages without working out their connotations in the communications systems of those groups to which the words belonged. Translating words from other languages into our own can be sometimes quite dangerous and create misunderstandings (see Evans-Pritchard 1965:11-15).

In conclusion we may say that the intellectualist interpretations of religion applied 'if I were a horse' type of method of arguing. It means that they made guesses about what they **thought** the primitive people **thought** about religion. Later the emotionalist interpretations changed the thought part with 'feelings'. They said that the primitives did something because of one of the other type of feeling they were supposed to have. Just like the intellectualists, the emotionalists had very little proof to support their theories. Even those scholars, who made field studies by living among the people, gave interpretations which could not be supported by evidence.

For example, you have learnt that some scholars wrote about the feeling of awe, and thrill as a characteristic of religion. Some described it as a religious emotion, other said that there was no specific religious emotion. You may ask how does one recognise the feeling of awe? How can one measure this feeling? Secondly, emotional states cannot be made a basis of classification of facts about religion. If one was to do so, it would be a very strange list indeed.

Moreover, not all religious acts are results of emotional unrest. Not all religious performances are associated with crisis situations. Also, many a time, expression of emotional unrest is required in certain ceremonies, whether a person is feeling it or not. For example, in some societies, professional mourners are employed at the time of funeral.

We may say that each culture imposes its patterns on individuals who learnt to act in a certain manner. In this way, rites are basically a creation of society rather than a product of an individual's reasoning or feeling. This is the point that is emphasised by Durkheim who shared with the evolutionists the search for early forms of religion. As we shall see in Unit 3 of this block, Durkheim studied totemism which he thought was the earliest form of religion. In his explanation of the role of totemism in Australian aboriginal society, Durkheim differed completely from the evolutionists. His interpretation of religion encouraged new approaches to the study of religion. These approaches considered religion important because of the role it played in maintaining tradition and sense of community. Giving up intellectualist and emotionalist interpretations, these theories emphasised the functional aspect of religion and did not much dwell on its origin and progress from one stage of another. To understand this point further, you are advised to view the video programme on **Religious Symbols**, prepared for this Block.

Before explaining functionalist approaches to studying religion, we shall once again, in Unit 3, discuss the gist of evolutionist theories.

Check Your Progress 5

i) What is animatism? Use about five lines for your answer.

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ii) Is the belief in **mana** different from the belief in the idea of soul? Use five lines your answer.

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iii) Did the primitive people actually think or feel about religion in the manner shown by the intellectualists and emotionalists? Use ten lines for your answer.

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iv) What was the basis on which evolutionists built their theories of religion? Use five lines for your answer.

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v) Describe the method of reasoning employed by the evolutionists in explaining religious behaviour. Use five lines for your answer.

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

We began this unit by discussing the concept of evolutionism and its roots in the ideas of positivism and intellectualism. Then, we described two forms of evolutionist theories of religion, namely, the intellectualist and the emotionalists. Finally, we gave a brief critique of evolutionist approaches to the study of religion. Thus we have seen clearly that religion has been studied by the early and classical sociologists. This has added greatly to the sociological understanding of religion.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Anima: this Latin word simply refers to the idea of the soul.

Animism: this is a reference to a later explanation of the nature of religious phenomena, found in the work of E.B. Tylor. This theory attributes the origin of religion to the belief that all inanimate objects and natural phenomena have a spiritual quality or soul (**anima**) which is the cause of source of some of the peculiar experience that primitives undergo and that create in them feelings of awe and wonderment.

Atheist: a person who does not believe in the existence of God.

Contagious magic: a type of magic that seeks to produce effects through contact

with any belonging, image or the person's body itself. This is usually done to harm someone or to act as a curse.

Contingency: this refers to an unexpected or chance occurrence.

Ethnographic: descriptive account of the way of life of a particular social group.

Etymology: the history of a word shown by tracing its development.

Evolution: a process whereby the form of things changes from a simpler one to a more complex one. The idea of evolution is mostly associated with the origin of the human/animal species but can also be applied to society.

Homeopathic magic: a type of magic that seeks to deal with contingent situation through the principle that the creation of a situation like the one being sought to overcome, would help to overcome the original difficulty.

Melanesian data: ethnographic material about the inhabitants of the islands in the Pacific.

Naturism: this is a reference to a particular understanding of the relationship between primitive man and the supernatural world as the world of natural forces. This theory propounded by Max Muller. It mainly traces the earliest form of religion to the worship of nature and is thus called 'naturism' by Muller.

Pseudo-science: since the word pseudo refers to something that is 'seemingly' like another, here magic is called a pseudo-science as it 'seems' to be scientific in some of its methods.

Sacred: something held in respect as it is considered to be consecrated and special.

Supernatural: this is a reference to certain unseen forces that are above the forces of nature and seem to have influence on humans.

Taboo: refers to a restriction or a number of restrictions, in terms of contact or sight or touch, with the thing that is tabooed. Actions not permitted by society according to custom, tradition and religion.

Totem: a wooden or stone representation of an animal or bird form that is believed to be a mythical ancestor of a community of people.

2.8 FURTHER READING

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1965. *Theories of Primitive Religion*. Oxford University Press : Oxford, pp. 1-77.

Beattie, John, 1964. *Other Cultures*. Cohen and West: London Chapters on Magic and Religion, pp. 202-240.

International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences: Read the two articles on the "Sociological Approach to Religion" and "The Anthropological Approach to Religion". The Encyclopaedia is available in most libraries.

Majumdar, D.N. and Madan, T.N., 1986. *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*. National Publishing House: New Delhi, pp. 112-126 and 151-168.

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Evolutionism refers to a belief in a unilinear direction of change in societies.
- ii) Positivism refers to a commitment to the principles of natural science. In sociology, it means that sociology can, like natural science, offer scientific explanations of social phenomena.
- iii) The intellectualists believe that religion arose as a rational response of the individual to natural phenomena.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) According to the theory of naturism it is believed that human beings and nature stand in a relationship of awe, wonderment, terror etc. What is meant is that, for early human beings, the world of nature presents a world of experiences that they cannot understand or explain and thus end up worshipping it out of fear and awe.
- ii) The major differences between animism and naturism is that, in the case of naturism, early human beings come to worship objects of nature which appeared unusual and seemed to influenced life in some way beyond human control. In the case of animism, objects of nature come to be worshipped as they were all believed to have **anima**, or spiritual quality.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) James Frazer believed that an evolutionary scheme for human intellectual development could be observed in the course of the intellectual development of the primitive mind. According to this, primitive man develops intellectually from a dependence on magic to a dependence on religion to explain the phenomena. Finally, human intellectual development turns to scientific thinking to explain phenomena and human mind becomes rational rather than emotional in nature.
- ii) A B
 - a) i)
 - b) ii)
 - c) iii)

Check Your Progress 4

- i) According for the origin of religion, Crawley looked at the psychological aspects of human behaviour. He attempts to seek answers for associated prohibition and prescriptions in terms of emotions. For Crawley, the emotion of fear of danger in relations among the people led them to observe taboos around particular actions. This resulted in a set of religious beliefs.
- ii) Such American anthropologists as Lowie, Radin and Goldenweiser held that religion among the primitive people is characterised by emotional responses of awe and amazement towards mysterious forces of the supernatural. In fact, this visible and outward behaviour was made by them a basis of defining religion.

Check Your Progress 5

- i) Animatism refers to preanimistic stage in religious development. It attributes life to all animate and inanimate objects.
- ii) The belief in supernatural force called **mana** among the Melanesian people was discussed by R.R. Marett. He criticised Tylor's theory of animism which was only an imagined construction about the thought process of primitive people. Marett's analysis of religion in terms of the belief in **mana** was based on ethnographic material about a particular people. In this sense, we can say that the two sets of ideas are quite different from each other.
- iii) Both the intellectualists and emotionalists explained religion in terms of their respective speculations about the primitive people's way of thinking or feeling. They had no way of actually examining their theories because many of them had never even encountered a primitive person. Such scholars as Lowie and Radin who had studied the primitive communities relied heavily on outward expression of religious behaviour and viewed them as definition of religion.
- iv) The evolutionists built their theories largely on the basis of accounts of primitive societies.
- v) The method of reasoning employed by the evolutionists for explaining religion was to project one's own ideas to the way of thinking or feeling of the primitive people. It is known as 'if I were a horse' fallacy.

UNIT 3 FUNCTIONALIST THEORIES OF RELIGION

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Recapitulating Evolutionism
- 3.3 Functionalism
 - 3.3.1 What is Functionalism?
 - 3.3.2 Traces of Functionalist Thinking
- 3.4 Religion in Terms of its Functions
 - 3.4.1 Totemism : An Elementary Form of Religion
 - 3.4.2 Sacred versus Profane
 - 3.4.3 Functions of Religion
 - 3.4.4 Religion is Eminently Social : The Case of the Arunta
 - 3.4.5 A Critique of Durkheim's Understanding of Religion
- 3.5 Growth of Functionalist Approach
 - 3.5.1 The Role of Religion
 - 3.5.2 Social Continuity and Solidarity
- 3.6 The Coorg Religion
 - 3.6.1 Solidarity of Okka
 - 3.6.2 Village and Caste Solidarity
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Key Words
- 3.9 Further Reading
- 3.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to

- understand what functionalism is
- differentiate between evolutionist and functionalist understandings of religion
- evaluate the functionalist theories
- do a functionalist analysis of religion of your choice.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

To begin with, let me congratulate you for deep and steady enthusiasm towards understanding religion in sociological terms. This course will help you in that endeavour.

Society is a complex reality. It is almost impossible to understand this reality wholly. Every one understands society in one's own way. All the same, we try to develop a commonly accepted way of explaining societal arrangements, known as institutions. Religion is a social institution. There are several ways of understanding religion. Evolutionism is one way of understanding it. In Unit 2 you came to know about it. In Unit 3, we shall discuss the functionalist way of analysing religion.

Let us commence by recalling evolutionism and critically analysing it; then you will be introduced to functionalism. Next, we will elaborate Durkheim's view of religion and try to identify it with the functionalist approach. Before summing up our discussion, we will present an example of the functionalist understanding of religion among the Coorgs of South India.

3.2 RECAPITULATING EVOLUTIONISM

Evolutionist understanding of religion, very much in fashion during the nineteenth century, rested on mixture of positivism, intellectualism and religious sentiments. The evolutionist theories serving from progressionist understanding of religions were most often unsupported by evidence. In other words, the history of religion in particular, and society in general, was constructed in a speculative manner with inadequate materials.

The evolutionist theories of religion explained religion in terms of individual thought processes or psychological assumptions (e.g. 'awe', 'wonderstruck', 'dream' etc.). This is unacceptable, said the critics of evolutionist theories. They considered religion a social phenomena. They argued that social phenomenon can be explained only in terms of social causes without using natural or individual psychological causes.

The evolutionists could not understand religion because they looked on religion as a mark of 'ignorance' and 'vehicle of irrationality'. They sought to explain the origin of religion and society by relying on the reports about or by observing the pre-modern or 'primitive' societies known in their times. Here there was an implicit assumption (which is also known as progressionist view) that the western industrialised societies (to which the scholars belonged) were more advanced and more civilised than the rest. The critics of evolutionism said that the assumption needed to be neutralised in order to build a universal theory. They questioned the correctness of haphazardly collected facts about primitive societies and gave importance to scientific collection of data. However, we should realize the significance of these early pioneering studies. They opened up a new area of research and made important statements upon which the later sociologists built their own theories to account for the presence of religion in society. You will learn more about this area of sociology as you read this unit further.

But the idea of function for assigning meaning to religious and other phenomena existed even before **ethnologists** and **ethnographers** published painstakingly collected data about primitive and nonprimitive societies. Early sociologists wrote about a functional relation between political, religious, economic and moral action. They argued that changes in any one of these areas brought corresponding changes in the others.

Later, with concerted efforts of Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown in England and Parsons and Merton in the U.S.A., functionalist approach gained popularity and made significant contributions to the study of religion. The concepts, which most functionalists used for their explanations of religious behaviour, were borrowed by them from Durkheim. He is not known to be a functionalist but his research on early forms of religion became a basis of functionalists to analyse the fieldmaterial collected by them. This is why in this unit we shall discuss in details the ideas of Durkheim and some of his contemporaries. But before taking up Durkheim's and his colleagues' approach to the study of religion, we shall briefly review the status of functionalism before Durkheim.

Activity 1

Read from page 7 to page 19 Block of ESO-03. If you do not have it acquire its copy from your study center and then write a note of 500 words on evolutionist and functionalist mode of understanding social phenomenon.

3.3 FUNCTIONALISM

In their search for general laws governing society, earlier scholars were trying to

construct conjecturally the historical development of human societies. Functionalists, on the other hand, tried to understand the functioning of contemporary societies. How does a society exist in an orderly manner was the foremost question in their minds.

3.3.1 What is Functionalism?

Let me ask you a question : How does a steam engine function? You might describe the functioning of steam engine as follows: Water is heated intensely to generate steam at a high pressure. The high pressure of steam in the tank moves the piston back and forth. Consequently, the wheel attached to the piston moves at a greater speed. Now, this is roughly, the way in which a steam engine functions or this is how the steam engine works. Now within this functionalist system, i.e., steam engine, there are various parts. These are all interconnected. In relation to the system these parts have specific functions to perform. If any of these parts gets damaged, the system, i.e. the steam engine, may not function at all or may function irregularly. The same story can be applied to society. As a functionalist would do, let us consider society as a system, within which there are various interconnected parts, i.e. institutions. For example, as an institution functions to 'produce' members for the society. The function of the school, which is another institution, is to train the members for future roles. Industry's function on the other hand is to produce goods necessary for the maintenance of society. If one of these institutions breaks down, the society will be in trouble. Isn't it?

For a functionalist, society is a system with interconnected parts. Within this system, parts perform certain functions, so that the systemic whole can be maintained or run. Now, the above version is a very simplified notion of functionalism. It has been simplified so that you will understand it easily. However, there are many different variations within the functionalist thinking itself. In Sociology, functionalism is developed by scholars like Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Talcott Parsons and Merton (for a detailed discussion on their theories of functionalism see Block 6 and 7 of ESO-03).

3.3.2 Traces of Functionalist Thinking

As explained in the earlier paragraph, if you want to do a functionalist analysis of any system, you have to ask as a starting point: What it does. What does a part



According to functionalism most ceremonies help to create and maintain order in society.

perform for the whole? How are the parts in the system interrelated? You must be wondering, why these questions were never asked, before the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly before Durkheim? As a matter of fact, before Durkheim, the question was already emerging in the writing of such scholars as Auguste Comte, Tocqueville and Herbert Spencer. They were already asking questions like, what can religion do for the maintenance and advancement of society? What kind of religion will perform necessary functions for the rapidly industrialising society?

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), a French Scholar, realised, very early that religion can perform certain important functions for society. During his time, it was widely accepted amongst scholars that religion does not foster or support democracy. However, in his study of American *Evangelical Protestantism*, Tocqueville established that it helped the growth of democratic spirit in America. Tocqueville proposed that Catholicism with modifications could foster democratic spirit in France. Auguste Comte, another French scholar, proposed a new 'religion of humanity' to develop greater commitment to society among French people.

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), an English philosopher, established functionalist thinking more systematically. He compared society to a human body. In the human body, as we know, there is natural co-ordination among the various organs. In the same way, in society various institutions must naturally cooperate amongst themselves. To be compatible with the rest of the institutions of the advanced, industrial society.

Malinowski, the famous functionalist, wrote about religion, science and magic and discussed their functions. Though he provided a wealth of material on primitive religious practices and beliefs, he did not add any new concepts to the study of religion. Radcliffe-Brown, another functionalist, talked about functions of religion. He relied heavily on the ideas of Durkheim (see Box 3.01). Durkheim's theory of religion is important for it gave impetus to further sociological research on religious phenomena.

Box 3.01

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), a French sociologist, is considered a father of modern sociology. He taught education and sociology at the University of Bordeaux later at Sorbonne. He was a leading intellectual figure in France and his influence was felt in such diverse field as law, history and economics. His work may be seen as a reaction to certain nineteenth century views about the nature of human affairs. For him, the society was prior to the individual and the social could not be reduced to the psychological. His most important works are. *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), *Society* (1897), and *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912).

Fustel de Coulange, a French historian and Robertson Smith, one time Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University, held their religion had its genesis in the very nature of primitive society. According to Robertson Smith (1927:227), all members of a clan of a tribe were thought to be one blood. The god of the clan was also thought to be of the same blood because he was conceived as the physical father of the clan-founder. In other words, the god was the clan itself. The concrete representation of this god was made in the form of totemic creatures. Sacrificing the totemic creation and partaking its flesh and blood was a sacred communion. Much influenced by this approach, Durkheim tried to show how religion arose out of the very existence of society. He described religion as a social fact (see Box 3.02).

Box 3.02

According to Durkheim (1895), the aim of sociology is to study social facts. He defines social phenomena in terms of those factors which are external to the individual and yet have a controlling effect on one's actions. He characterises social fact as

- i) being external to individual
- ii) exercising pressure on individual
- iii) being objective, in the sense that they cannot be defined by individuals to suit themselves.

As an example of a social fact we can take law which has all the above mentioned characteristics. When Durkheim says that in sociology we study social facts he means that we do not study individuals. This is so because he holds that societies cannot be a total sum of actions and intentions of individuals. Secondly he emphasises the moulding and constraining of individuals by their social settings. In his book *Rules of Sociological Method*, he has shown how law is a social fact. It is not dependent on individuals. It has to be followed and law breakers are punished.

He criticised those who explained religion in terms of individual psychology. He asked if religion had its origin in an illusion, how could it last for so long and how could it be found to exist universally? He argued that many primitive groups took for granted the so-called remarkable natural forces—sun, moon, sky, sea, etc. and looked on them as regular phenomena. He claimed that in contrast, in totemism, an early form of religion, rather ordinary creatures were worshipped. These were, for example, such small things as rabbits, worms, frogs, etc. which do not strike us as being awe-inspiring, mystical or impressive. In accounting for their significance he discovered the importance of religion in its social context. We shall in the following section see how Durkheim explained religion as a social phenomenon.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Give, in five lines two points of criticism of evolutionism.

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- ii) Explain, in five lines, the basic tenet of functionalism.

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3.4 RELIGION IN TERMS OF ITS FUNCTIONS

When scholars were disillusioned about religion, as we have seen in subsection 3.3, 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 ethnography 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.

3.4.1 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.

This 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.

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?

Secondly, he questioned also 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.

3.4.2 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 (see Box 3.03)

Box 3.03

Durkheim (1961:52) wrote about the sacred and the profane that All known religious beliefs...presuppose a classification of all things ...into two classes or opposed group, generally designated by two distinct terms.... profane and sacred.... by sacred things one must not understand simply those personal beings which are called gods or spirits; a rock, tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word, anything can be sacred..... The circle of sacred objects cannot be determined, then, once for all. Its extent varies infinitely, according to the different religions. That is how Buddhism is a religion: in default of gods, it admits the existence of sacred things, namely, the four noble truths and the practices derived from them.....

.... we must now show by what general characteristic they (sacred things) are to be distinguished from profane things....

One might be tempted, first of all, to define them by the place they are generally assigned in the hierarchy of things. They are naturally considered superior in dignity power to profane things.....

The opposition of these two classes manifests itself outwardly with a visible sign by which we can easily recognise the very special classification, wherever it exists.

It was earlier said that only under certain special circumstances, the profane can approach the sacred by performing certain. 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, about which we shall learn in the next sub-section.

3.4.3 Functions of Religion

So far we have discussed how Durkheim criticised evolutionism, animism and naturism. Secondly, we discussed that defining totemism as an elementary form of religion, Durkheim found the sacred-profane dichotomy to be at the centre of any religion. The profane can contact the sacred only by performing certain rites. It must be made explicit that this division or opposition of the sacred and profane is such that it is found in different forms and degrees in various religions. These rites are derived from beliefs. The division of religious phenomena into two fundamental categories, namely, beliefs and rites, corresponds to the difference between thought and action. Hence we can speak in terms of cognitive and social functions of religion.

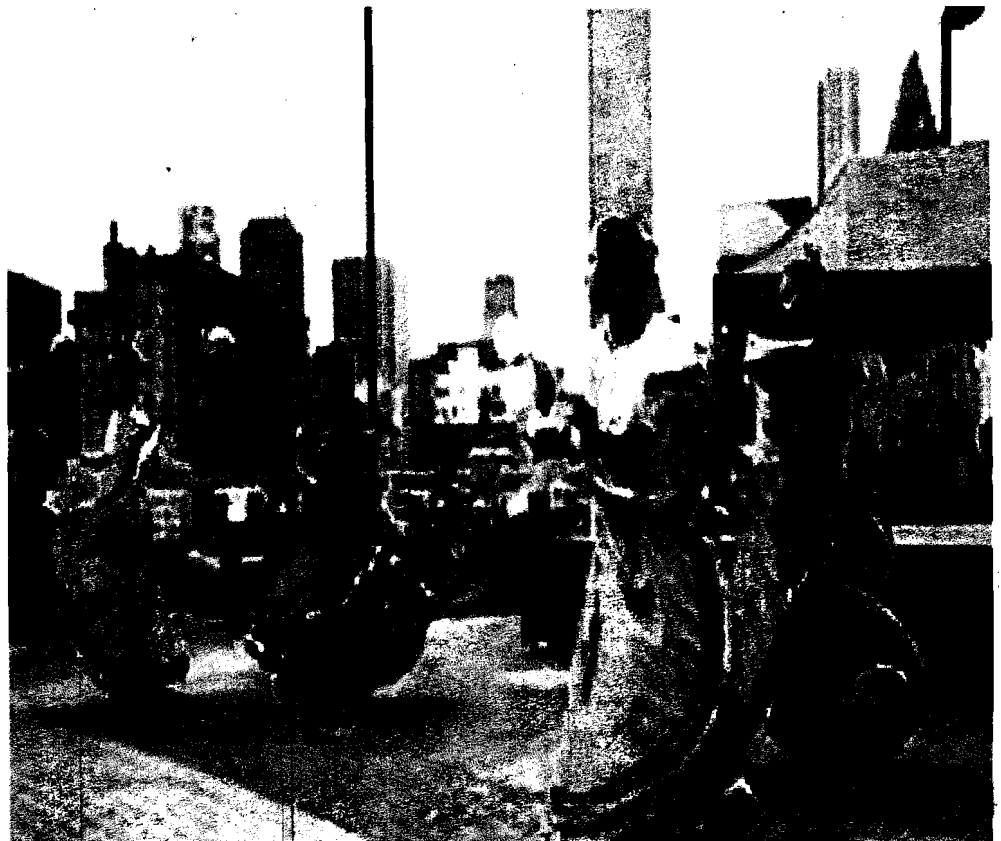
i) Cognitive Functions

Religion can mould people's thinking and so help them to live and adapt to their conditions of existence. One who participates in religious practices, emerges as a superior person with strength and vitality of face the world. This perception of religion has to be understood in the context of Durkheim argument that religious has continued to survive all along, because it has fulfilled certain needs. Religion generates a particular mental state within the individual, which raises one above oneself and helps us to lead a superior life.

Theories with science evoked a sharp criticism from Durkheim. He argued that the fundamental categories of science like time, space, number and cause, came out of one's religious quest. Said Durkheim (1964:9), "Philosophy and sciences were born of religion, it is because religion began by taking the place of the sciences and philosophy". Time, space and numbers in fact reveal the "rhythm of collective activity" towards the sacred. The categories like time, space, number, class, through which we understand the world, came out of the collective activities of the primitives towards the sacred. If that is so, these categories are collective representations. At the level of cognition, these emerge from collective response towards the sacred.

ii) Social Functions

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 are



Colourful attire and stylized dance movements are a part of most rituals in world religions

painful but it is through the pain, one 'transforms' oneself and profane passes over to the sacred.

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.

3.4.4 Religion is Eminently Social: The Case of the Arunta

Let us now, support our discussion of the cognitive and social functions of religion through the case study of the Arunta. The Arunta is a tribe in Central Australia. Spencer and Gillen had originally studied this tribe earlier. Durkheim used their ethnographic 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 identity 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 **ernatulunga** is a sacred spot. It is the sanctuary of the totemic group. It is a place of peace. If an enemy takes shelter in **ernatulunga**, 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. Ask 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.

Activity 2

Write a short note of 500 words in order to show social functions of a religion, with which you are familiar.

3.4.5 A Critique of Durkheim's Understanding of Religion

By now, you would have understood that Durkheim tried to show the origin of religion. He argued that society gives rise to religion. Durkheim could not agree with scholars, who held that the origin of religion was based on what people thought as real. But traces of evolutionism are not completely absent in Durkheim's thinking. The fact that Durkheim has dealt with the functions of religion does not mean that he was a 'functionalist'. Durkheim's functionalism was simple one, very general in nature. It was after the 1920s, that functionalism came to be expounded systematically. The credit for that goes to Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Talcott Parson (see Block 6 of ESO-03).

Evans-Pritchard (1981) lists a number of criticism against Durkheim's thesis on religion.

- i) Sacred-profane dichotomy is not universal. Sacred and the profane are not always antithetical. Especially among the Vedda of Sri Lanka and Melanesians, sacred-profane dichotomy does not seem to exist.
- ii) Totem is not sacred to everyone in the community, it is sacred only for some.
- iii) Totem is not necessarily a clan religion.
- iv) Totem of the clan need not be the totem of the individual.
- v) Durkheim held that the origin and the cause of religion lie in the social domain and have nothing to do with sentiments of the individuals. He contradicted himself when he proposed that religion arises from collective sentiments aroused by community participation in rituals. Note the use of sentiments to account for the origin of religion.
- vi) In his theory Durkheim failed to give the weightage to individual and emotional aspects of religion.

As we look critically at Durkheim's work on religion, we need to also mention, though only in passing, the ideas of his contemporaries. More than contemporaries, they were his colleagues and students, the writers of the **annee Sociologique** school. Durkheim founded and edited the journal, *L'Annee sociologique*. Those who contributed articles to this journal came to be known as belonging to the **Annees Sociologique** school.

One of the well-known writers of this school was Marcel Mauss (1906) who wrote on the Eskimoes. In this study he showed sacred and secular dimensions of time by describing patterns of Eskimo life during the summer and the winter. He said that during the summer when ice in the sea melted away, the Eskimoes lived in smaller groups and pursued various activities. During the winter they could not

pursue hunting and lived in long houses. They had to form larger groups and live in a new social arrangement. During this phase of annual calendar, the Eskimos performed the religious ceremonies. Mauss argued that this pattern showed that religion was an outcome of social concentration and it was reinforced during the winter celebrations. This is exactly what Durkheim's thesis of religion is all about. So we can say that Mauss produced a perfect confirmation of Durkheim's ideas. But do remember that one illustration does not make a law and therefore we can treat this case only as an example of Durkheim's theory and cannot cite it as its proof.

In another essay, Hurbert and Mauss (1892) made a systematic study of Vedic and Hebrew sacrifice. Making study of the logical structure of the mechanism of sacrifice of animals, Hurbert and Mauss show how the act of sacrifice raises mental and moral energies of society. The act of renunciation in sacrifice strengthens social forces and the sacrifice receives the combined force of society. In a way, the social function of sacrifice is carried out for both the individual and the society. This is another example where we can see how conclusions are drawn from a certain social action. Here the conclusions are not derived from the analysis. This criticism should not, of course, stop us from appreciating the masterly analysis of sacrifice by Hurbert and Mauss.

Another member of the Annee Sociologique School, Robert Hertz (1960), made use of Durkheim's ideas of the sacred and profane. He related them to the opposition between the right and the left hands. The oppositions right and left has its parallels in equally established opposition between the male and the female, the powerful and the powerless, the lucky and the unlucky.

Van Gennep (1960), who was a contemporary of Durkheim, was ignored by Durkheim and his colleagues. He criticised Durkheim's theory of religion and observed in his book *Les Rites de Passage*. (*The Rites of Passage*) that all around the world the crises of human life involve a great variety of rites. These rites represent the writing of the self with the group and the universe. Van Gennep's contribution to sociology was to point out that every important event in society especially birth marriage and death had a complex of symbols and ritual activities surrounding it. Van Gennep's views on religion show that even the critics of Durkheim had much to contribute to the study of religion. The very process of criticising Durkheim's ideas gave new insights into religious phenomena.

Our next Section takes us to both traditions. Anti-Durkheimian stream was represented by Malinowski while pro-Durkheimian stream was carried forward by Radcliffe Brown. In fact, Durkheim continued to wield influences over sociological studies of religion even after Radcliffe-Brown. Such scholars as Evans-Pritchard who criticised Radcliffe-Brown, continued to draw inspiration from the writing of the members of the Annee Sociologique school. These scholars became interested in studying magical and religious beliefs in order to identify people's understanding of underlying order in their world. They wanted to find out their ways of discovering and expressing that order. Efforts of this nature to understand religion will be subject of Unit 4 of this block.

Check Your Progress 2

i) What are the basic arguments of Durkheim? Use ten lines for your answer.

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ii) What does that 'Churinga' represent for the Arunta? Use four lines for your answer.

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iii) Explain, in four lines, the significance of sacred-profane dichotomy.

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iv) Match the following:

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| A) Belief in spiritual beings | i) Durkheim |
| B) That which is set apart from Profane | ii) Initiation |
| C) Categories of time and space emerged from | iii) Churinga |
| D) The Elementary Forms of the Religion Life | iv) Animism |
| E) Wooden piece on which design of totem is engraved | v) Religious quest |
| F) Rite which transforms an adult | vi) Sacred |

3.5 GROWTH OF FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH

We do not label Durkheim as a functionalist, but we do label some those who were much influenced in one way or the other by Durkheim's ideas. Under the banner of functionalism, Malinowski criticised Durkheim's views on religion. Very much in the fashion of such evolutionists as Tylor and Frazer, Malinowski too wrote about the origin and development of religion. The difference was that they charged Durkheim with encouraging the acceptance of theories without much basis in ethnographic material. Here, we will first discuss, in brief, Malinowski's ideas on religion; we then move on to a brief consideration of Radcliffe-Brown approach to the study of religion. Unlike Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown was heavily influenced by Durkheim's ideas. Both scholars in their own ways were concerned with Durkheim's approach. Their views are discussed briefly.

3.5.1 The Role of Religion

Malinowski presented a slightly different argument from Durkheim. Again, you find that Malinowski, like Durkheim, was interested in the origin and development of religion. In so far as he asked questions about religion's genesis, he too was an

evolutionist. He became a functionalist when he began to observe and record what role religion played.

Malinowski had studied the Trobriand Islanders in the Western Pacific. The people here were mostly from fishing communities and had to constantly deal with hazardous expeditions for fishing and underwent experiences that could not be explained by them. Malinowski argued that the feelings of fear, anger, sadness, etc. that arose in the mind of primitive people on such occasions were overcome by resorting to religious activities or the performance of certain rituals that would help get over such unsure feelings. Religion functioned here to essentially help one to regain one's stability of mind and readjust to situations of emotional stress that had arisen. In other words, religion functioned as a 'tool for adoption' to any given situation. For example, when the islanders would set out for a long journey, they would perform rituals and magic on the boat so that it would not give them trouble on the way. Such an exercise was carried out in all kinds of situations of mental and physical instability. Ritual and magic have a very great influence on the activities of the society as a whole the rituals flourish greatly in times of acute stress and especially in all events that men are hard put to explain.

Asking similar questions which early evolutionists asked, Malinowski and his followers gave different answers. In this sense they understood religion in terms of its functions; their findings progressed beyond traditional answers to questions of origin and development of religion. They provided the functionalist alternative to evolutionist theories. Not content with simply observing and recording data about primitive societies, Malinowski's successor, Radcliffe-Brown, tried to analyse ethnographic data by using sociological concepts. He was attracted to the Durkheim sociology. Sub-section 3.4.2 deals with Radcliffe-Brown's attempts to organise his theoretical ideas around Durkheim's views on religion.

3.5.2 Social Continuity and Solidarity

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown tried to make Durkheim's theory of totemism into a more comprehensive view of religion. In an article, 'The Sociological Theory of Totemism', Radcliffe-Brown (1929:295-309) showed totemism to be a particular form of universalistic law operating in human society. The universal law is that anything related to material or non-material well being of a society is an object of religious attitude. For example, those who depend on dairy products have ritual attitude to dairy animals. Radcliffe-Brown did not accept explanations of the origin of religion in terms of psychology.

Evans-Pritchard (1965:74) is, however, critical of this position. He points out that in practice, while describing the occasions of dancing among the Andaman Islanders, Radcliffe-Brown explains religious behaviour mainly in terms of the personality of the dancer and mixture of feelings and actions in his dance which produce solidarity in the community. Secondly, on the basis of this case, Radcliffe-Brown generalises that a ritual attitude generates social cohesion and harmony. Evans-Pritchard (1965:74) objects to this tendency of generalising on the basis of one case. For example, the dances in Central Africa, he points out, often cause conflict and disharmony.

Thirdly, Radcliffe-Brown argues that religion functions to keep society together and its forms vary in accordance with types of society. For example, ancestor worship is commonly found in societies with lineage systems. But, then, Evans-Pritchard (1956:75) again, as if to prove Radcliffe-Brown wrong, points out that among some African groups, ancestor cult is found where no lineage system exists.

Evans-Pritchard criticises Radcliffe-Brown's functionalist approach to religion on the following bases

- i) Sociological explanations offered by Radcliffe-Brown did not take into account any negative evidence.
- ii) Radcliffe-Brown's generalised statements are quite vague in nature. They have very little scientific value because it is not possible to either prove or disprove them.

Evans-Pritchard criticised the functionalist approach to the study of religion. In addition he considered the possibilities for showing that certain religious systems are found in societies of a particular type. This was initially undertaken by Levy-Bruhl and later Evans-Pritchard also added new ideas to the sociological study of religion. Ideas of both Levy-Bruhl and Evans-Pritchard will be discussed in Unit 4. Here, we will discuss a case study, made by an Indian scholar, M.N. Srinivas. Srinivas was a student and colleague of Radcliffe-Brown and as such in his study of religion he used Durkheim's ideas via Radcliffe-Brown's theory of ritual (see Box 3.04).

Box 3.04

Beattie (1964:210) writes about Radcliffe-Brown's theory of ritual.

Since people's behaviour is largely determined by what they think to be important, the performance of ritual may have important social consequences. This was the central theme of Radcliffe-Brown's theory of ritual, which he derived from Durkheim. In *The Andaman Islanders* and elsewhere he argued that ritual's main social function is to express certain important social sentiments (or as we should now a days call them values), such as the need for mutual support and solidarity between the members of a community. Unless enough people held and acted on these values the society could not survive, and through the performance of ritual they are constantly in the minds of the performers, and so the maintenance of the social system is secured.

3.6 THE COORG RELIGION

It was pointed out in the last section of this unit, that religion is seen as strengthening solidarity in society. You also came to know that according to Durkheim, religion itself is a product of the collective sentiments aroused by the collective performance of rituals. This view was criticised by many scholars as being unsatisfactory in its explanation of the origin of religion. But Durkheimian understanding of religion via Radcliffe-Brown left a deep impact on M.N. Srinivas' study of religion among the Coorg. The Coorg are the inhabitants of the mountainous district of Coorg, in Karnataka. M.N. Srinivas, a pioneer Indian sociologist, conducted this study in the early 1940s.

Srinivas closely observed the social life of the Coorg, particularly their religious beliefs and practices. He argued that religious rituals and beliefs strengthen unity in the Coorg society at various levels. For a Coorg Hindu, there are three important social institutions. They are the *okka*, the village and the caste. Almost all Coorg are members of one or the other *okka*. *Okka* is a patrilineal group. The village is a cluster of several *okka* and within the village there are a number of hierarchically arranged caste groups.

Religion performs specific functions for these three social institutions. Most important function of all is the *solidarity function*. Each *okka* has a special set of rituals which are performed during festival and other ceremonial occasion. In the same way, village celebrate the festival of their patron deity and perform certain rituals. The village festival mark the differences between castes but also bring them together.

At the same time, they bring together several Coorg villages. Now let us elaborate on these functions of religion separately for the three social institutions listed above.

3.6.1 Solidarity of the *Okka*

Okka is a patrilineal grouping as mentioned earlier. Srinivas (1978:159) writes “A group of agnatically related males who descended from a common ancestor and their wives and children” constitute an *okka*. Only by birth one can become a member of the *okka*. In the society at large, individuals are generally identified by their *okka*.

Each *okka* has ancestral immovable property which is normally not divided. A person is prohibited from marrying within the *okka*. In other words, marriage is generally a bonding of two unrelated *okka*. The ancestral house of the *okka* is fairly large and has many rooms. Members of the *okka* live and grow together. They perform many rituals in unison, especially the rituals to propitiate the ancestors of the *okka*.

There are several occasions when, according to Srinivas (1978:125) “the unity and solidarity of an *okka* find expression in ritual”. Let me elaborate one such occasion i.e. marriage. A Coorg marriage involves two important rites. They are *murtha* and *sammanda* rites. *Murtha* is nothing but an auspicious occasion (time). The *murtha* is also indicated by rites performed by all relatives to the subject, groom or bride as the case may be.

A Coorg marriage has the *murtha*, performed on the most auspicious time of the auspicious day. At the centre of *murtha* rite lies the offering of milk by the relatives to the bride or groom in a *kindi* (a special type of vessel). If the mother of the groom or bride is not widowed, she is the first to offer milk. After the elaborate *murtha* rite is performed thrice, comes the *sammanda* ritual. The first two *murtha* rites bring at one place the groom/bride and his/her kindred. The third *murtha* rite brings the groom and bride’s kindred together for participation in marriage rituals.

The *sammanda* ritual marks the transfer of an individual from one *okka* to another. A person can be a member of only a single *okka* at a time. After marriage, the bride leaves her native *okka* and acquires the membership of the conjugal *okka*. If she becomes a widow, again a *sammanda* ritual may be performed and her membership transferred back to the native *okka*. The *sammanda* ritual comprises an elaborate system of rites. In a nutshell, it is a pledge undertaken publicly by two *okka*, involved in marriage, under the eyewitness of two friendly *okka*.

Apart from marriage, there are several festivals, feasts of village-deities, and occasions when ancestors of the *okka* are propitiated. During these celebrations, a complex set of rituals are performed, which express and strengthen the solidarity of the *okka*.

3.6.2 Village and Caste Solidarity

The social differences in the village community are expressed during village festivals, when members of different castes serve different functions. At the same time, the unity between *okka*, castes and villages also finds expression through religious customs and rituals.

During the harvest festival, every *okka* in the village sends all the adult males to participate in the collective dances. At the end of the festivals of the village deities, there is a collective hunt, to which all the *okka* send their adult males. The collective dance and hunt canalise the inter-*okka* rivalry present in the village,

thereby preventing the destruction of social order, observed Srinivas.

The festival of village deity commences when the villagers take a vow collectively to observe certain restrictions till the end of festival. The restrictions include prohibition of today drinking and slaughter of animals within the village boundary. The prescriptions include keeping the houses clean, lighting the sacred wall-lamp of the house, and joining the singing and dancing. At the end of the village festival, there is a dinner for the entire village. This village dinner is called *urorme* or village harmony. These fact of solidarity of the Coorgi *okka* is found reflected in other village studies in India. In fact village solidarity requires the frequent meeting of members of a village society and also dealing with occasions of stress, tension, and trauma. On such occasion it is religious explanations and ritual which have to be involved and practiced.

Caste finds an expression in the village festival. Srinivas point out the instance of Ketrappa festival in Bengur. During the festival the high caste members bring fowls and pigs as offering to the deity. The fowls are beheaded by a Coorg and the pigs by a Panika. But the animals offered by the lower castes like Meda and Poley, are not decapitated by either a Coorg a Panika. Only a Meda can decapitate the offerings presented by the lower castes. Their are several such instances where caste hierarchy is expressed and Srinivas mentions several of them in his study.

Calender festivals like the harvest festival require the cooperation from several *nad*. *Nad* is a cluster of villages. Rites necessary to prevent epidemics are performed at both the *nad* and village level. To rouse the wrath of a *nad* or a village, it is enough to attack its temple. To take another example, when festivals of certain deities are celebrated, it is customary for certain temples located in other villages to send gifts. Thus religious festivals and rituals unite caste, *okka* and village of the Coorg society.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Explain briefly the significance of *murtha* and *sammamda* rituals.

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ii) How does the festival of village-deity strengthen the solidarity of the Coorg village?

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iii) Mark T for True and F for False against the following statements.

a) *Sammamda* ritual strengthens the solidarity between two villages.

T F

d) Village festivals sometimes express caste differentiations.

T F

c) A Coorg marriage is necessarily a relationship between two different, unrelated *okka*.

T F

3.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit primarily aimed at grasping the functionalist understanding of religion. We started by recollecting the evolutionist theories.

Functionalism emerged as a sequel and challenge to evolution. The seeds to functionalist thought were traced to early sociologists. Then, the meaning of functionalism was elaborated. Functionalism is way of looking at social reality by tracing the functions or utility or religious practices in maintaining the unity and strength of a social group.

Next, Durkheim's understanding of religion was discussed in detail. Firstly, Durkheim chose totemism because the found it so bear relation to the social order, secondly, according to Durkheim totemism has features unique to itself, which are not borrowed. Dealing with the functions of religion it was shown that religion has a cognitive function, by which it helps one to adjust to the exigencies of everyday life. Religion performs many social functions. It transforms the society into a moral community. When society worships God (Whose creation God is), it worships itself. An illustration of the totemic practices of the Arunta tribe was given to explain the arguments. We discussed, in brief, the ideas of Durkheim's contemporaries.

Further, Durkheim's understanding of religion was critically evaluated. It was argued that his sacred-profane dichotomy does not seem to be universal, and his thesis about religion still rested on an individual-psychological explanation rather than on a social cause. This criticism was followed by an account of further growth of functionalist approach to the study of religion. We discussed the ideas of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown.

The concluding section described the functions of religious rituals and festivals among the Coorg. Among the Coorg, the domestic cult of 'okka' in general, and marriage rites in particular, strengthen the solidarity of the okka. The village festivals and festivals of village-deities were shown to strengthen inter-okka, inter-caste, inter-village solidarity in the Coorg society. This was given here as an example of a functional study of religion.

3.8 KEY WORDS

Agnatic: relationship through male descent or on the father's sided.

Agnosticism: belief that nothing can be known about God.

Animism: theory which holds that religion is belief in spiritual beings.

Belief: a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing. In this unit, it refers to a rule or body of rules about religion held by a group.

Catholicism: the faith, practice or system of Catholic Christianity.

Churinga: piece of wood or stone on which design of the totem is engraved.

Clan: groups of men and women united by the name of a totem.

Conjecture: statement without proof.

Coorg: a mountainous district in Karnataka

Ethnography: a descriptive account of the way of life a particular people.

Ethnology: the comparative study of the elements of culture in many societies.

Evangelical Protestantism: religious denomination of Christianity which emphasises salvation by faith in atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the authority of scripture and the importance of preaching as contrasted with ritual.

Functionalist: one who believes that society is a system of interrelated parts; the functioning of the parts has consequences for the whole system.

Function: consequence of a part for the system.

Murtha: a Coorg ritual performed at the most auspicious time of the auspicious day.

Negative rites: interdicts or taboos to be observed before approaching the sacred.

Okka: group of agnatically related Coorg males, descended from a common ancestor, with their wives and children.

Positive rites: preparations or purifactory ceremonies undergone before approaching the sacred.

Profane: that realm which is kept away from and in opposition to the sacred. In other words, profane is the world of human beings.

Rites: prescribed modes of action for a ceremony.

Sacred: the world of the supreme, the venerated, the Holy. According to Durkheim, it is kept away from the profane.

Sammanda: an elaborate Coorg ritual which signifies the transfer of membership of an individual from one okka to another.

Totem: an animal or vegetable or a mythical ancestor. It symbolises the clan and is sacred.

Universal Theory: Theory which applies to the whole of humanity.

3.9 FURTHER READING

Picking, W.S.F., 1984. *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion*. Routledge and Kegan Paul:London.

Robertson, Roland, 1970. *The Sociological Interpretation of Religion*. Basil Blackwell:Oxford.

Srinivas, M.N., 1978. *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*. Media Promoters:Mumbai.

3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) a) evolutionism is based on conjectures and gives explanations without adequate evidences.
- b) evolutionism very often tries to give nonsocial and individual-psychological explanations.
- ii) Functionalism believes that society is a system of interrelated parts. The activity of the parts have consequences for the maintenance of the whole system.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Basic arguments of Durkheim are as follows
 - a) Sacred-profane dichotomy is at the centre of religion, particularly totemism. From profane's attitude towards the sacred emerged the fundamental categories of thought like time, member and class.
 - b) Religion helps human being to understand the world and to adapt to the crises of life.
 - c) Religion and God are creations of society. When society worship God, it worship itself and in the process becomes a single moral community.
- ii) Churinga is a wooden piece or stone on which the totem is designed. The churinga is sacred. It is the symbol of Arunta clan's identity. It can cure sickness and defeat enemies. It is the symbol of peace.
- iii) The sacred-profane dichotomy gives rise to fundamental categories of thought. Moreover, due to the rules and regulations to be followed before the profane can approach the sacred, society becomes a moral community.
- iv) A) (iv); B) (vi), C) (v) D) (i); E) (iii); F) (ii)

Check Your Progress 3

- i) *Murtha* is a ritual performed in a marriage at the most auspicious time. At the centre of *murtha* ritual lies the offering of milk in a *kindi* to the subject of the celebration. Three *murtha* are performed. The first unites the bride and her relatives, the second the groom and his relatives. The last *murtha* unites the bride and the groom's kindred. In a similar way, the *sammanda* ritual strengthens the solidarity between the two okka (the bride and the groom) and their friendly okka.
- ii) During the village-deity's festivals, there are several customs which bring different okka, castes together. For example, to the collective-hunt at the end of the festival, all okka have to send their adult males. At the festival, each okka and castes (low or high) have a definite role to play. At the end of the festival, there is a 'harmony-dinner' held for the whole village.
- iii) a) F
- b) T
- c) T

UNIT 4 THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Belief and Ritual
- 4.3 Levy-Bruhl and the Mode of Thought
- 4.4 Evans-Pritchard's Approach to Religion
 - 4.4.1 The Azande
 - 4.4.2 The Nuer Religion
- 4.5 Religious Beliefs in Literate Societies
 - 4.5.1 The Protestant Ethic
 - 4.5.2 The Religions of China, India and Ancient Palestine
 - 4.5.3 The Sociology of Religion: Weber
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Key Words
- 4.8 Further Reading
- 4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you the study of religious beliefs in both preliterate (or primitive, as they used to be called) and literate societies. After studying this unit you should be able to

- distinguish between belief and ritual
- describe how European thinkers analysed primitive thought
- discuss Evans-Pritchard's approach to religion
- discuss Weber's study of religion in literate societies.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Block 1 on the **Study of Religion** aims at a general introduction to the various aspects of studying religion. In the last two units we discussed some approaches to the study of religion. This unit focuses on a major component of religious phenomena, namely, belief. Here we consider religious beliefs as a universal cultural phenomenon as they are found in all societies. The ideas contained in religious beliefs are mostly acted out in religious ceremonies. The major part of the ceremonies are taken up by rituals. These are performed with the purpose of influencing the human condition by seeking the support of the supernatural.

We begin the unit by first explaining the difference between a belief and ritual. Then we carry on with our discussion begun in Units 2 and 3. We have already shown how questions regarding the origins and functions of religious beliefs were asked and answered by the evolutionists and functionalists, respectively. Now we go on to the next stage when a shift was made from the function to discovering the meaning of religious beliefs and practices.

We first take up Levy-Bruhl's work on mode of thought of preliterate people. Secondly, we discuss Evans-Pritchard's works which explain the meaning of religious beliefs. Both Levy-Bruhl and Evans-Pritchard studied religious beliefs in primitive societies while Max Weber analysed religious systems of literate societies. Section 4.5 of this unit is devoted to Weber's interest in the study of religion. You may say that the earlier two scholars provide us an understanding of anthropological studies of religion and Max Weber takes us to the area of sociological studies of religion.

We have not maintained a rigid separation between the two disciplines. According to their extreme overlapping nature, we include both streams of sociological inquiry in our courses. From religious beliefs we will be, in our next unit, moving to the theme of religious symbols. Before proceeding to discussion of mode of thought, let us first explain the difference between a belief and a ritual.

4.2 BELIEF AND RITUAL

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 is a 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 'whys' of life, like death, suffering, social injustice, etc. A religious belief almost always provides an explanation for happening which are otherwise hard to explain.



A religious ritual is pontificated usually by a specialist i.e. priest. Note the many ingredients that often make rituals complex.

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, we will discuss the issue in Unit 5. 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

- i) What is belief? How is it distinguished from a ritual? Use five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Explain, in five lines, what rituals commonly represent.

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iii) Give, in five lines the various categories of rituals.

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4.3 LEVY-BRUHL AND THE MODE OF THOUGHT

Levy-Bruhl's works on primitive mentality deserve attention for an account of theories of primitive religious beliefs. His basic assumptions are sociological, yet he does not easily fit into the sociological category because his main concern are purely philosophical. Levy-Bruhl (see Box 4.01) held that one could just as well begin a study of social life by analysing ways of thought just as one would study ways of observable behaviour.

Box 4.01

Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1857-1939) was a French philosopher. He had written eight books on philosophy before he turned his attention to the study of 'primitive man' with the publication of his book *Ethics and Moral Science* in French in 1903. Although a contemporary of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), the great French sociologist, his theory of primitive mentality owes very little to Durkheim. He was an arm chair theorist who had not seen nor spoken to a primitive. Therefore, his theory of primitive mentality is largely speculative. He is associated with a set of views about 'primitive' and 'modern' mentalities which he himself largely repudiated in his later years due to criticisms by scholars like Durkheim. His major books on primitive thought are *Primitive Mentality* (1923), *How Natives Think* (1926), and *The Soul of the Primitive* (1928). The first two books set forth the general theory of primitive mentality for which he became so well known.

Levy-Bruhl's best known book is *How Natives Think* which form the basis of our discussion here. In this books he outlined the view of the two broad mentalities—civilised and primitive which he considered as opposites. In terms of this dichotomy primitive cultures are marked by a 'prelogical' mentality which is blind to the law of contradiction. On the other hand, the law of contradiction is a characteristic of modern societies. The primitives substitutes for it a law of mystical participation. According to Levy-Bruhl (1912:30) the word 'mystical' means belief in the supernatural. The representations of primitive peoples have a quality of being mystical and the logical principle of these mystical representation is called by Levy-Bruhl the law of mystical participation. Further, he holds that as the representations are mystical, collective representations of primitives are a network of mystical participation.

This book contains a series of comparison between 'us' (Westerners) and 'them' (primitive people). Westerners, in comparison, appear logical and scientific. The primitive people, by contrast, appear to focus on the mystical rather than logical. This aspect of Levy-Bruhl's analysis makes it different from Durkheim's analysis of religious phenomena.

Levy-Bruhl, focused his attention on primitive thinking and root not on social institutions. He is outstanding in that he recognised that the origins of religion are impossible to explain. He recommended that primitive religious structures and mentalities are

what we should be looking at. He pointed out that every society has its own way of thinking and acknowledge that the mental content of the individual is derived from and explained by the collective representations of one's society. He insisted that these collective representations are functions of institutions of the society.

Levy-Bruhl clearly separated the content of thought of primitive people—his subject-matter, from the psycho-physical processes of thought as Tylor (1871) and Frazer (1890) before him had not. He dealt with the ideas held by the bulk of the members of a society what he called collective representations and what today would be called values. They are collective because they are way of viewing institutions (see key words). The most important point about Levy-Bruhl's theoretical position is that he wishes to emphasize the differences between civilised mentality and primitive mentality. Note that term mentality denotes mental power or capacity or mode of thought. It has no reference to a lower level of intelligence or feeble-mindedness.

Levy-Bruhl thinks that while the Europeans are logically oriented, primitive thought has an altogether different character. It is oriented towards the supernatural. Primitive people do not inquire into natural phenomena because they are prevented from doing so by their beliefs, which are prelogical and mystical. According to Evans-Pritchard (1956) who has saved Levy-Bruhl's ideas from being misinterpreted, what the latter meant by prelogical was prescientific, it does not mean the inability to think. It merely means that most of the beliefs of the primitives do not agree with a critical and scientific view of the universe. Levy-Bruhl does not say that primitives are unintelligent, but that their beliefs cannot easily be understood by the Westerners. When he says that primitive mentality or the primitive mind is prelogical, Levy-Bruhl is not speaking of an individual's ability or inability to reason, but of ways or categories in which one can reason. In fact this theory of Levy-Bruhl is very difficult to accent in its entirety. We cannot talk in terms of 'superiority of western logical scientific thought over the thought of primitive people. We can say however that primitive thought is certainly different than western logical thought. Each serves its own society best.

The word mystical, as it is used by Levy-Bruhl, refers to the belief in the natural-cum-supernatural world of magic and religion and so forth. He is perhaps the first to point out that the distinction between natural and supernatural is not made in most cultures. This lack of distinction he regarded as mystical. What he is saying is only that the primitives see in an event what their culture teaches them to see, and that they structure their perceptions as their cultures have taught them to structure. The logical principle of this mystical representation is what Levy-Bruhl calls the law of mystical participation. Evans-Pritchard (1965) point out that's terms 'participation' resembles the association of ideas of Tylor and Frazer, but Levy-Bruhl's conclusions are different from their conclusions. While, for Tylor and Frazer primitives believe in magic because they reason incorrectly from their observations, for Levy-Bruhl they reason incorrectly because their reasoning is determined by their mystical beliefs in supernatural and representations of those beliefs.

According to Evans-Pritchard, Levy-Bruhl's discussion of the law of mystical participation is perhaps the most valuable part of his thesis. He was one of the first to emphasise that primitive ideas are meaningful when seen as parts of patterns of ideas and behaviour. Each part has an intelligible relationship to the others. He accepts primitive magic and religion as it is and uses it as a base to study its structure and what we learn about a particular kind of mentality is common to all societies of a certain type. In order to emphasise the distinctiveness of this mentality, Levy-Bruhl holds that primitive thought in general differs altogether from the Western thought in quality, and not just in degrees.

In conclusion, we can say Levy-Bruhl brings out a sociological fact of the greatest importance that our interests in phenomena are not the same as primitive interests

in them. This is so because our collective representations of our (or, in his sense, Western) culture differ widely from their collective representations. The main difficulty with his approach, however, as Evans-Pritchard (1965) has pointed out, is that Levy-Bruhl compared the scientific thought of the then Western world with the magical and religious thought of primitive societies, whereas he should have compared both from the same society.

Notwithstanding this criticism, Evans-Pritchard's approach to the study of religion is clearly influenced by Levy-Bruhl's insistence on understanding a particular group's religious ideas and behaviour as parts of its total culture patterns. Evans-Pritchard's studies of religion among certain African groups basically deal with systems of belief. For example, his study, *Nuer Religion*, is about the religious ideas and practices of the Nuer or the Southern Sudan. Undoubtedly Evans-Pritchard has taken into account the social contexts of the ideas and practices he talks about. But his study is primarily concerned with the system of beliefs rather than with that of social relations. Our next section is devoted to Evans-Pritchard's approach to religion. It shows how the study of religion shifted its emphasis from function to meaning of religious beliefs and practices.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Give, in five lines, the two broad categories of mentality as divided by Levy-Bruhl and describe their characteristic.

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ii) Give, in five lines, the difference between Durkheim's and Levy-Bruhl's approach to the study of primitive religion.

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iii) What, according to Evans-Pritchard, is the most valuable part of Levy-Bruhl's thesis on primitive mentality? Use one line for your answer.

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4.4 EVANS-PRITCHARD'S APPROACH TO RELIGION

The early works on religious and magical phenomena, especially those of Tylor and Frazer, offer explanation of religion in terms of origins. It is, of course, quite unrealistic to try to find the origin of some custom or belief in the absence of historical evidence. All the same we continue to read the books of Tylor, Frazer and Durkheim as classics. Considerable advance is made in this field by Evans-Pritchard (see Box 4.02) who explains religious facts in terms of 'the totality of the culture and society, in which they are found'.

For example, he argues that, "To try to understand magic as an idea in itself, what

is the essence of it, as it were, is a hopeless task". He holds that it would be more intelligible when magic is examined in relation to peoples's activities and also in terms of their other beliefs.

Box 4.02

Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973) was a British social anthropologist. He was trained in history at Oxford and in anthropology at the London School of Economics. Earlier in his career he taught at Cairo and later became a professor of social anthropology at Oxford in 1946. During the Second World War he entered active military service and for a period served with the Sudan Defence Force. In 1942 he became the Political Officer of the British Military Administration of Cyrenaica in North Africa. Between 1926 and 1939 he made six expeditions to Southern Sudan, most notably to the Azande and the Nuer peoples. His monograph on the Azande illustrated theories of the rationality of apparently mystical ways of thought. His important publications are *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937), *The Nuer : A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of the Nilotic People* (1940), *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (1951), *Nuer Religion* (1956), *Social Anthropology* (1951) and *A History of Anthropological Thought* (1981, published after his death).

Evans-Pritchard already charted out his approach to religion in three early essays, 'The intellectualist (English) interpretation of magic' (1933); 'Levy-Bruhl's theory of primitive mentality' (1934); and 'Science and sentiment: an exposition and criticism of the writings of Pareto' (1936). He incorporated these articles in his *Theories of Primitive Religion* (1965). He held that everyday knowledge should be compared with everyday knowledge, technology with technology, and theology with theology. In this he followed Durkheim's methodological rule that social phenomena must be explained in terms of other social phenomena. For further details about Durkheim's sociological rules see Block 3 of ESO-03.

In his approach to religion, Evans-Pritchard adopted the task of explaining beliefs as sociologists facts. For this task, he determined that the proper method was comparative. According to Evans-Pritchard, comparative religion must be comparative in a relational manner, that is, we should see whether a common element of more than one religion being compared is related to any other social fact. As an example, he cited Weber's work in relating certain Protestant teaching to certain economic changes (see the section on Weber's approach to the study of religion).

Two of Evans-Pritchard's monographs, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937) and *Nuer Religion* (1956), exemplify his approach to religion, both comparative and structural (see Box 4.03). As for historical scope, both the works are based on his field work in the 1930s. The first book is an attempt to make understandable a number of beliefs, all of which are foreign to the mentality of a European. He shows how they form a complete system of thought and how this system of thought is related to social activities, social structure and the life of the individual. In the second book, Nuer reflections on God, sin, sacrifice, spirit, symbolism are collected together for analysing the meaning and significance of primitive beliefs and symbols.

Box 4.03 Azande and Nuer

Both these peoples are located in Southern Sudan in East Africa, neighboring Ethiopia. Evans-Pritchard studied the Azande (singular, Zande) between 1926 and 1940 and found the people generally hospitable and friendly. By contrast, the Nuer, whom he studied between 1930 and 1936, were a hostile and uncommunicative people.

4.4.1 The Azande

Like Levy-Bruhl, Evans-Pritchard believed that all systems of belief could be explained rationally. With regard to the Azande, he asked such a question as how can a people live with irrational beliefs and false premises without discovering that they are false? In brief, the Azande believe that witches are always evil and any misfortune can be attributed to witchcraft which is afopsyche activity. The witch, motivated by feelings of envy, causes damage to others. The victims place the names of possible witches before their various oracles who tell them which of the suspects are innocent and which may be guilty. The guilty is requested to withdraw his or her evil influence. If the witch does not do so and the victim dies, the kinspersons employ vengeance magic to destroy the witch. Witchcraft, oracle and magic thus form a complex system of beliefs and rites which make sense only when they are seen as interdependent parts of the whole system of belief. According to Evans-Pritchard, in sociological terms, these beliefs are mystical because they are distinct from empirical mode of belief and action.

Evans-Pritchard had the advantage over Tylor, Frazer, Levy-Bruhl and even Durkheim in that he did empirical research. Based on his field data he attempted to show that the beliefs of the primitive peoples, thought absurd to outsiders, can be explained reasonably once you accept the point of view of the believer. His focus was on understanding Azande beliefs as a system of ideas. Here, you can clearly see Levy-Bruhl's influence on his approach to religion. Also, Evans-Pritchard tried to correct Levy-Bruhl.

Evans-Pritchard wrote the Azande book specially with Levy-Bruhl in mind. According to Levy-Bruhl, as we discussed before, primitive people view the world in terms of mystical influences and give little scope to natural principles. He also held that primitives are comparatively simple in their thinking, having little tendency to think about the evidence for their ideas. Evans-Pritchard thought that Levy-Bruhl presented an incorrect image of primitive beliefs and in his book on the Azande he attempted to correct the latter's mistakes.

Evans-Pritchard argued that primitive systems of thought are not as thoroughly controlled by mystical elements as Levy-Bruhl believed. Evans-Pritchard described what he called the dual causality in Azande beliefs, by which he meant that Azande thought contained both mystical and natural causation. He cites the case in which a group of people were sitting beneath a granary which had been weakened by termites. When the granary collapsed causing injury, witchcraft was blamed. The Azande were aware that the natural cause of the granary's collapse was the action of the termites, but to them this only explained how, and not why, the structure fell. Their question was : why was it **this** granary which collapsed, and why did it do so precisely when **these** persons were beneath it? As mentioned before, Evans-Pritchard shows that Azande witchcraft beliefs constitute a logically tight and wholistic system.

Thus it became clear that a primitive set of beliefs and rituals (in this case, primitive) of all the societies have a system of explanation that is as logical and wholistic as any other system of a modern type e.g. western logical mentality.

In addition to explaining what seemed like irrational beliefs of a primitive people, the Azande book also employs structural analysis to build a mode of abstraction. The structural approach involves not only the understanding of particular social system but also the analysing of the principles thought which the human mind operates. The decoding of abstractions from social life includes the principles of opposition, complementarity and analogy (see sub-section 4.4.2). As Kuper (1983) points out, at the heart of the Azande book is an opposition between mystical and empirical

beliefs and activities. Evans-Pritchard showed that the Azande do not make this contrast and that they believe mystical forces operate in much the same way as physical forces. It is sociologists who is able to perceive the opposition.

Activity 1

Write a note of 250 words on beliefs and practices relative to witchcraft in your culture. Try to isolate the mystical from natural causation of events in the cases of witchcraft described by you.

4.4.2 The Nuer Religion

Evans-Pritchard accepted the fact that religions are influenced by their social environment, but as in his study of Azande witchcraft, in his study of Nuer religion, too, he was more concerned to explore systems of thought and their logical interrelations. *Nuer Religion* is concerned not specifically with beliefs, but with a few Nuer conceptions. Evans-Pritchard attempts to convey the meaning of a few key terms or categories of thought, and particularly the concept of spirit, of **kwoth**. **Kwoth** is conceived by the Nuer as having an intangible quality like air. Everything in nature and society is the way it is because **kwoth** made or willed it that way. For example, **kwoth** gives and sustains life; it also brings death, largely by means of natural circumstances such as lightening.

The structural approach to religion is more prominent in *Nuer Religion*. Showing the operation of the principle of opposition Evans-Pritchard makes a distinction between sacred and secular. He demonstrates that the Nuer god is especially in the sky as people are on the earth. In plain language, this division means that the things of above are associated with spirit and those of below with people.

He treated the Nuer statement that human twins are birds as an example of analogy similarity. Because they are in the same class as birds, when Nuer twins die they are not buried but their corpses are laid across the forks of trees. He explained the classification by depicting the general structure of Nuer analogies by which god is to men as the sky above is to the earth below, as birds to land animals. Humans usually give birth to young singly. To the Nuer, twin births are a sign of divine intervention; so twins are to ordinary mortals as birds are to animals. Birds/twins are close to god and a manifestation of spirit.

An example of complementary (the quality of completing or filling up) is that when the Nuer speak of God in the singular form, the context refers to the creator, father, judge, owner, great spirit in heaven. But the plural form gods always refers to spirits of the air and to other spirits attached to particular places or lineages. God in the singular is the same great spirit for everyone, but these spirits in the plural have different importance for different people.

Evans-Pritchard's purpose in *Nuer Religion* is to build a theory and formulate problems on the basis of the study of primitive philosophies. He suggests that when a number of studies on primitive philosophies has been made, a classification can be made for comparative studies which may lead to some general conclusions.

In contrast with primitive religions, we find an entirely distinctive historical and dynamic approach to the study of religion in literate societies. In the next section, we give the German social historian Max Weber's approach to religious beliefs. His approach was mainly concerned with the rational and non-rational aspects of belief system. Sociologically speaking, he was interested in the problem of the meaning of social life. Secondly, he was also concerned with the identify of individuals and groups in relation to each other and their social-cultural environment.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Give, in five lines, the main characteristic of comparative religion according to Evans-Pritchard.

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ii) How does Evans-Pritchard describe the beliefs of the Azande? Use five lines for your answer.

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iii) What is the structural approach to the study of religion? Use five lines for your answer.

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4.5 RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN LITERATE 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, Buddhism, Catholicism and Protestantism, Islam, Confucianism and Taoism, and Judaism. He found that religion restated the basic postulates of a culture in new, vivid terms and reemphasised them in ritual. Weber (see Box 4.04) had a historical and comparative approach to explaining religious beliefs.

Box 4.04

Max Weber (1864-1920) was a German sociologist. Along with Durkheim, he is considered one of the fathers of modern sociology. He taught political economy at Freiburg and Heidelberg universities in Germany. Unlike Durkheim, who sought to develop elementary forms, Weber grounded his theoretical propositions in specific historical situations on the basis of a study of such great historic religions as those of India and China, Judaism and Christianity. Apart from the books discussed here, his most important work is *Economy and Society* (English translation 1968). For more details on life and works of Weber see Block 4 of ESO-03.

The concept of rationality (see key words) is the underlying theme of Weber's sociology of religion as well as the key to the understanding of modern 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 cultural 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" (see key words Unit 1) as a right answer to both the question. He argued that Catholicism (see key words, Unit 3) 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". Let us elaborate this point in the next subsection.

4.5.1 The Protestant Ethic

We have mentioned before that Weber analyses the great religions of literate people in relation to economic institutions. He came to the conclusion that except Protestantism all the religions have laid special stress on religious practices. In his book on Protestant Ethic Weber (1930) mentions that Protestantism does not emphasise orthodox religious practices because it gives importance to the materialistic point of view, unlike the other-worldly views in the other religions. The adherents of Protestant ethic believe that doing one's duty means serving God. It emphasises the importance of time, labour and money. Owing to these traits some European countries with a large Protestant population witnessed the growth of capitalism.

This attempt of Weber's to study religion from the perspective of rationality was an important contribution and Weber found that certainly religion was not just an opinion but a social reality which had clear logic of its own.

In this work Weber holds that the present capitalistic system is based on rationality, savings, time management, competition, and a desire to earn money. He relates this spirit of capitalism to the Protestant Ethic. As against this, Weber believes that the religions of the East—Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam—did not encourage the economic goals and competition which are essential to the development of the modern industrial capitalistic system.

4.5.2 The Religions of China, India and Ancient Palestine

Weber's discussion of the religions of China (Confucianism and Taoism), India (Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism) and Ancient Palestine (Judaism) are a continuation of his initial interest in the influence of the Protestant Ethic on economic activities. His analysis centered on the relations between religious beliefs and the status and power structure of the group composing a society. These constitute the outline of a comparative sociology of the great religions. These studies are governed by certain questions, such as : Can one find outside Western civilisation a religious interpretation of the world which finds expression in economic behaviour which can be compared to the Protestant Ethic?

The objective proposed by Weber's comparative study is to discover the various fundamental types of religious conceptions and the attitudes towards life governed by these religious conceptions. In so doing he outlines a general sociology of the relations between religious conceptions and economic behaviour. This is known as the 'Weber thesis'. The point of his cross-cultural analysis is not to praise modern capitalistic society, but rather to explain the uniqueness of the modern Western form of social rationality by seeing it in the global context. The general observation that Weber makes is that religious values and social behaviour are related.

In the case of religions of China, Weber is primarily interested in the idea of material rationality which is characteristic of the Chinese image of the world. Material rationality is just as rational in the context of China as protestant rationality, but it is contrary and unfavorable to the development of typical capitalism. Parsons (1963) believes that Weber regards Confucianism as less radical than other religions. This religion stresses harmony, traditionalism and family obligations. This is quite different from the relentless pursuit of profit. Within its special framework it is a rational doctrine of adoption of the world.

In the case of the religion of India, Weber observes that a process of rationalisation has occurred in the context of a ritualist religion and philosophy whose central theme is the transmigration of soul. Weber calls Hinduism a kind of Indian Catholicism which reduces the hardness of the pure Buddhist-type doctrine by supplementing it with a ritual significance of caste observances. He holds that religious ritualism is the strongest principles of social conservatism which has hindered the growth of capitalism in India.

Weber regards Judaism as the religion of Ancient Palestine, as one which blocks the development of inner-worldly asceticism. It especially inhibits this development at the social level because it remains attached to a traditionally defined ethnic community. As Parson (1963) says, Judaism does not reject the world, but only rejects the prevailing system of social classes.

Activity 2

Do you agree with Weber's interpretation Hinduism as a kind of Indian Catholicism? Write a short note of 250 words on the link between ritual aspects of the caste system and stunted growth of capitalism in India.

4.5.3 The Sociology of Religion: Weber

At the outset of this work Weber (1963) interprets religion in a manner which is very close to Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. He considers the notion of charisma as the major concept in the study of primitive religions. Charisma is the quality which is outside the ordinary and which becomes attached to human beings, for example, as in the case of a charismatic leader. Weber recognises that there is no known society without religion. Every society possesses some conceptions of a supernatural order in the forms of spirits, gods, or impersonal forces which are different from and superior to those forces conceived as governing ordinary natural events.

Weber's view that a belief in the supernatural is universal has been confirmed by anthropological research (e.g. Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* which we discussed before). He combines his view of the conceptions of the supernatural with an insight into the symbolic character of supernatural beings and their acts. According to him, the help of the supernatural is sought by the primitives in the interest of everyday, worldly concerns such as health, long life, defeat of enemies, etc.

In keeping with the nineteenth century general intellectual interest in origins and evolution, Parson (1963) says that Weber's perspective in the sociology of religion is evolutionary. It is indeed evolutionary, as his sociology of religion does concern itself with the elementary forms of religious life and then the condition promoting the development of religious beliefs systems and institutions in various civilisations. From the starting point in universality of belief in the supernatural, his discussion of the sociology of religion proceeds to a systematic exploration of the directions in which breakthrough from the primitive religious state can occur. His primary interest

in religions is to locate a source of the principle of social change, and not religion as a reinforcement of the stability of societies. This is the basic difference of emphasis between the sociology of religion of Weber and Durkheim.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) What is the central theme of Weber’s work on Protestant ethic? Use four lines for your answer.

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- ii) What is the ‘Weber thesis’? Use two lines for your answer.

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit focused on the study of religious beliefs as systems of knowledge. First, we clarified the difference between a ritual and a belief. Then, we discussed Levy-Bruhl’s studies of the mode of thought among the primitives. Inspired by Levy-Bruhl’s theories of primitive religion, Evans-Pritchard studied some African tribal religious beliefs in order to understand the underlying order in the world of those tribals. We gave brief notes on these studies by Evans-Pritchard. Next, we moved on from primitive societies to the study of religion in literate societies. Max Weber was primarily interested in the problem of meaning of social life and how individuals and groups defined their existence in the world in relation to each other and also in relation to socio-cultural and other conditions of life. Weber showed how social differences were related to different ways of religious expression and belief. Our study of religious beliefs leads us to the next logical topic. This is the study of religious symbols—the theme of our next unit.

4.7 KEY WORDS

Animatism: a pre-animistic stage in religious development. It attributes life as a characteristic of every phenomena.

Animism: belief in spiritual beings.

Belief: an idea or notion which refers to a state or habit of mind in which one places trust or confidence in some person or thing.

Charisma: the quality of an individual (usually a leader) rooted in some magical or religious basis, which is some person of authority.

Cosmology: a theory of the universe and its different parts, the beings that populate it and the nature and hierarchy of these beings.

Divination: foretelling the future by trying to contact the supernatural.

Empiricism: it emphasises experience as the source of what people think and believe.

Institution: in the context of anthropology and sociology it refers to familiar and

well-established social relationships. Social relationships are the ways in which people behave towards each other.

Magic: the performance of certain rituals that are believed to compel the supernatural powers to act in particular ways.

Mana: a supernatural, impersonal force which inhabits certain objects or people and is believed to confer success.

Myth: literary representation of social/religious symbolisation—a story which involves supernatural beings and explains how the world came to exist. The stories are built around heroes and gods and are passed down through tradition.

Oracle: a go-between between supernatural powers and ordinary humans.

Prayers: a petition directed at a supernatural power.

Rationality: a distinction should be made between the truth of beliefs and their rationality. Rationality refers to thought and action which are in accordance with the rules of logic.

Ritual: a patterned activity oriented towards control human affairs.

Sorcery: the use of certain materials to harm people through the manipulation of supernatural powers.

Structuralism: the theoretical approach that human culture is a surface representation of the underlying structure of the human mind.

Supernatural: powers that are believed to be not human or subject to the laws of nature.

Totem: a plant or animal given to a clan as a means of group identification.

Witchcraft: the practice of attempting to harm people by supernatural means through emotions and thought processes.

4.8 FURTHER READING

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1937. *Witchcraft, Oracle and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

—1956. *Nuer Religion*. Oxford: University Press: Oxford

—1965. *Theories of Primitive Religion*. Oxford University Press: Oxford

Gerth, H.H. and Mills, C.W. (editors), 1969. *From Max Weber*. Oxford University Press: Oxford Chapter 11.

4.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) 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.

- ii) Rituals commonly portray importance aspects of religious myths and cosmology.
- iii) The various categories of rituals, among others, are prayers, sorcery, divination, magic, etc.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Civilised mentality and primitive mentality. While the civilised mentality is logical and scientific, the primitive is prelogical and mystical.
- ii) Durkheim felt that the key to understanding primitive religion was through social relations. Levy-Bruhl, on the other hand, focused his attention on primitive thinking and not on institutions or relationships.
- iii) According to Evans-Pritchard, the law of mystical participation is the most valuable part of Levy-Bruhl's thesis on primitive mentality.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Comparative religion must be comparative in a relational manner, that is, we should see if a common element of more than one religion being compared is related to any other social facts.
- ii) Evans-Pritchard characterises the beliefs of the Azande as dual causality which means that Azande thought incorporates both mystical and natural causation.
- iii) The structural approach is a model of abstraction. It involves the decoding of the principles through which the human mind operates. The decoding of abstractions from social life includes the principles of opposition, complementarity and analogy.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) The adherents of Protestant ethic believe that doing one's duty means serving God. Thus, Protestantism emphasises the importance of rationality, savings, time management, competition, and a desire to earn money which are the basis of the capitalistic system.
- ii) The 'Weber thesis' is a proposition by Weber to study the relation between religious conceptions and economic behaviour.

UNIT 5 THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 The Nature and Meaning of Symbols
- 5.3 Symbols in Religion
- 5.4 Interpreting Religious Symbols
- 5.5 Understanding Symbols
- 5.6 Contextual Analysis of Symbols
- 5.7 Symbols and Meaning: Clifford Geertz
- 5.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.9 Key Words
- 5.10 Further Reading
- 5.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- define a symbol and discuss its affinities and dissimilarities with signal, icon and index
- understand and appreciate the various approaches to the understanding of religious symbols
- interpret the symbols of your own religion through an approach of your choice.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous four units of this block, we discussed the sociological understanding of religion, evolutionist and functionalist theories of religion, and the study of religious beliefs. In this unit, you will come to know the way of understanding religion through its symbols.

We begin the unit with a discussion of the nature and meaning of term 'symbol'. Then we focus on the communicative role of symbols in religion. Further, a discussion of the structuralist approaches and its variants is given in order to explain to you the current state of studies of religious symbols. Undertaking a historical journey from Tylor, Malinowski, Firth to Levi-Strauss, Leach, Douglas, Tuner and Geertz, we have attempted to show how communication is the central aspect of religion as understood via the symbols. You are also advised to view the video programme on **Religious Symbols** at your study centre. It will help you to understand better the meaning and role of symbols in our social life.

5.2 THE NATURE AND MEANING OF SYMBOLS

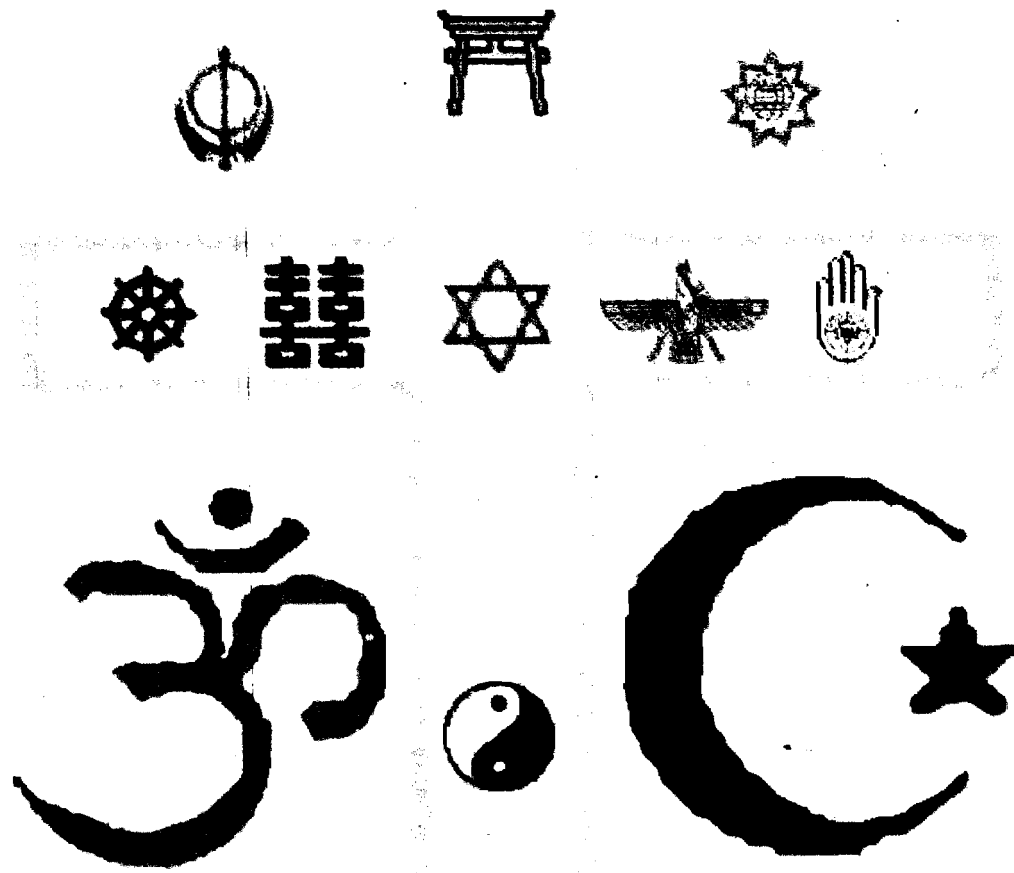
What is meant by the term 'symbol'? Radcliffe-Brown's definition is that everything that has a meaning is a symbol. Here the meaning refers to what is expressed by a symbol, or, what the symbol stands for. This is very wide definition. You are quite likely to come across many things which stand for something else. Regarding all such things as symbols is not very useful to a sociologist who wants to understand religion via symbols.

In order to define the term specifically, we need to examine its nature. It is common

to find in text books a discussion about differences between a signal and a symbol. We have also to show how a signal is different from a symbol. But so also is the case with an icon, index and allegory. In fact, all these terms serve to form an image or representation of something in the mind. Often, one comes across the words sign and symbol being used interchangeably. At times, sign is used when another person may find it more appropriate to use the word symbol or vice versa (for an interesting debate on this point refer to Daniels (1987:15-47).

Such scholars as Ernest Cassirer (1944) hold that symbolic representation is an essential function of human consciousness and it is fundamental to our understanding to human culture, including history, art, science, myth and religion. For Cassirer all these spheres are aspects of a 'symbolic universe'. He distinguished between sign and symbol. For him, a sign refers to the physical world of being and there is always a natural link between the sign and the thing that it signifies. He holds that a symbol is an 'artificial' indicator and refer to the human world of meaning. For Cassirer, human knowledge is essentially symbolic. He argues that symbol and the signified are merged in religion and myth and the two are differentiated in science.

We find that earlier writers generally discussed the similarities and differences between sign and symbol. Later, such scholars as Raymond Firth (1973) wrote about four different signs, namely, index, signal, icon and symbol. Let us follow Firth, who held that an **index** is a sign which is related to what is signified in the same way as a parts is related to the whole or particular is related to general. For example, incidence of smoke is an index of a fire. The dynamic aspect of an index is referred as a **signal**, for example, switching on of a red traffic light is a signal of danger and therefore a signal to stop movement of vehicles. A sensory-likeness



is represented by an **icon**. For example, the statue of a leader is iconic. A **symbol** is that kind of sign which has many associations of a complex nature. There does not exist a clear-cut likeness between a symbol and the thing which is signified. There is usually a kind of arbitrariness, based on convention, for example, the owl is the symbol of wisdom.

Edmund Leach (1976) regards both symbol and sign as subsets of index (see Morris 1987:219). He uses the terms sign to refer to symbols, which displays the part to whole relationship with what is signified.

Secondly, Leach also distinguishes between a sign and the thing signified is expressed by substituting the name of an attribute for that of the thing meant. For example, a crown may stand for king. In the case of symbol, the relationship between a symbol and the thing symbolised is metaphorical. This means there is an application of name to an object to which it is not literally applicable. According to Morris (1987:222) this distinction between a sign and a symbol is 'an elaboration of Frazer's distinction between homeopathic and contagious magic' (see Unit 2, subsection 2.3.4). A significant contribution of Leach's ideas is that symbols can not be interpreted in isolation and there are no universal symbols, though there may be some fairly common symbolic themes. **He argues that symbols usually carry multiplicity of meanings, that is, they are polysemic.** Further, they became meaningful only when seen in opposition to other symbols as parts of a cultural context. He considers it necessary to understand symbolism in a particular ethnographic context.

It is clear that the concept of symbol has been approached in various ways by the sociologists. However basically a symbol communicates indirectly.

At this stage of our discussion, you may not want to enter into the controversies about similarities and differences among different types of sign. It may suffice to say that a sign is a wider term which may share certain features with signal, symbol, icon, index and allegory (see Barthes 1967:35-38). But the context of the study of religion, it is customary to use the term symbol rather than sign. This is so because of the polysemic (multiplicity of meaning) nature of religious symbols.

Further we find that there is a reason or an underlying rationale for a particular symbol to be used in a particular case. In case of signals certain messages are carried through conventionally accepted means. For example, a green light is a signal for a driver to go ahead and a red light is a signal to stop. These signals are part of accepted conventions among all road-users. Similarity, in all languages, certain combinations of certain sounds stand for certain meaning because speakers of those languages have by convention accepted to recognise those sound with particular meaning.

In the case of symbol, there is apparently no connection between the object which signifies and what is signified by it. But the bases for a symbol's appropriation to what is symbolised lie in some actual or imagined similarity between the symbol and what is symbolised. In some cases, the basis may lie in some past event.

You will also find that rationale underlying a symbolic representation may not always be obviously so and may not be so easy to discover. Signals are easy to decipher because they generally stand for a concrete reality and refer to some observable action. Traffic lights are the best examples of signals. Symbols are, on the other hand, usually an expression of such abstract notions as power, authority, solidarity of the group. For example, the yam house. The debate thus is between symbols, which deal with the abstract notion, and signals which are 'concrete' and different from the role of the polysemic nature of symbols.

Symbols provide people with a means of expressing ideas of significance. This is why sociologists find symbols as something very important to study. We already know that Durkheim was interested in the study of 'totem' because he thought that it symbolised the idea of group solidarity among the Australian aborigines (see Unit 3 of this block).

In brief, we can say that the main characteristic of a symbol is that it expresses something significant. This indicates that one cannot remain neutral about something that is symbolised. Take the case of your national flag. It stands for your country. If someone insults your national flag, you feel offended. You can hardly be neutral to what happens to it. In other words, what is symbolised is also respected.

As mentioned before, language, art, history and myths are modes of human experience expressed through symbol. Earnest Cassirer holds that a human being is a symbol making animal (animal symbollicum). In this sense a cultural system is basically the nexus between the various ways of symbolising. This makes it important for a sociologist to identify symbolic elements in human activities. We are here concerned with symbol as means communicating something significant. The communicative role of symbol is very important for studying religion. Communication is the central aspect of religion is understood via the symbol. Both ritual and belief are two sides of the communication process. In Unit 4 we explained in a simplistic manner the differences between ritual and belief. Here we would like to emphasise the fact that ritual and belief as reflected in symbolic activities express both instrumental and expressive aspects. Let us clarify what we mean by the two terms. Before going on to these terms, complete Check Your Progress 1.

Check Your Progress 1

i) What is the main characteristic of symbol? Use five lines for your answer.

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ii) What sort of ideas are best communicated through symbols? Use one line for your answer

.....

ii) What is common between a sign and a symbol? Use one line for your answer.

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By instrumental we mean that action which produces some desired goal and it is directed to an end. By expressive activity we mean saying or expressing an idea. The instrumental action can be directly observed and can be explained in terms of what it is oriented towards. The expressive aspect of behaviour can be, on the other hand, studied by finding out what is being said or communicated. Both aspects of an activity are generally intermeshed and difficult to separate. But sociologists usually distinguish them for purposes of analysing human behaviour in general and rituals and beliefs in particular. In the following section, we will examine how they study the role of symbol in religion, and by doing so they try to understand religion via symbol.

5.3 SYMBOLS IN RELIGION

Both functionalists and structuralist, in their own ways, have tried to interpret the communicative role of symbols in religion. We have already noted in units 2 and 3 the criticisms of explanations by the evolutionists like Tylor and of functionalists like Malinowski and Firth. The evolutionists implied a division between symbolic structures of myths and rituals and concrete structures (kinship, politics and economics etc.). Even Durkheim resorted to this artificial division between religion (a symbolic structure) and society (a concrete structure).

The functionalists, on the other hand, asked the question: what rituals as observed via symbolism do for the society? Rituals are those formal actions which are expressed through symbol. The functionalists studied the process of transactions or regular patterns of interaction and explained them in terms of what a particular transaction or interaction did for a group of people. For example, according to Firth (1973:77), political symbols can be used as instruments of public control. Firth (1973) argues that that a person or a party can control the mobilisational efficacy of symbols by manipulating the meanings assigned to them. The manipulability of symbols arises mainly because system of symbols are not always consistent and coherent. It is the arbitration of association with meaning which makes symbols manipulable. Precisely due to this symbols become instruments of power struggle.

For the functionalist however the important fact is how a symbol or a 'set' of symbols relate to the totality of the symbolising complex of ideas.

Further, in unit 4 we focussed on the meaning aspect of religious beliefs. The shift from function of meaning of religion took into account communicative aspect of human actions. You would agree that every action is a communicative action. This position has now led us to a consideration of religion as a set of symbols which throws light on the communicative dimension of an action as well as the capacity of human beings to create culture through symbols. We find that the structuralists suggest interesting possibilities in the interpretation of religion. They all fasten on to the communicative aspect of such structuralists as Levi-Strauss and, to a lesser extent, Leach emphasise the mentalist (intellectualist) aspect and strive towards a natural science model in the interpretation of religious symbols. Finding it hard to sustain, Evans-Pritchard and others developed an approach which is more interpretive and 'humanities'-oriented. Examples of this approach are the symbolic analyses of Mary Douglas, Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz.

It is a well established notion that religion views human behaviour in terms of cosmic order and reflects that cosmic order in human actions. Geertz (1966) argued that in empirical terms not many tried to inquire as to how this is actually achieved. In sociology we have very good theoretical framework to analyse socialisation process of child, succession to political power, economic processes of production, distribution and consumption, etc. but for a long time little progress was made in the field of religion. It was the study of religion as a system of symbols that provided a break through. Let us first discuss the approaches of Levi-Strauss and Leach. This discussion will be followed by a more detailed examination of the symbolic analyses of Douglas, Turner and Geertz.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Who perceived a division between such symbolic structures as myths and ritual and such concrete structures as kinship, politic and economics etc.? Use one line for your answer.

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ii) State in four lines what the functionalists tried to ask while studying the communicative role of symbols.

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iii) Who tried to strive for a natural science model understanding religious symbols? Use one line for your answer.

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5.4 INTERPRETING RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

Levi-Strauss (see Box 5.01) takes language to be a model for understanding social behaviour. Structuralists like Levi-Strauss try to relate consciousness to the unconscious, individual to the cultural, and objective analysis of experience to subjective experience of individuals. Levi-Strauss argues that mythic structures (symbolic structures) parallel social structure, not because myth mirrors society. But because, both myth and social structure share a common underlying structure of human mind. Put it differently, myths are more than the meaning they offer to an interpreter, and the functions they fulfil for the society which shapes them. Levi-Strauss argues that there are relatively stable mental structures (structures in mind) which give rise to permutations and combinations in the form of culture. These mental structures are universal human nature. These structures are union and opposition between ideas, better put as 'binary opposition'. Like a grammar beneath languages lies the logic or code beneath culture (any symbolic form, myth, for that matter).

Box 5.01

Claude Levi-Strauss has been the most influential thinker among anthropologists in France. He has a large following among scholars in Europe and the United States of America. His primary contribution is related to the study of human mind. He has attempted to identify the underlying patterns, regularities and types of human activities. His major works concern three areas, namely kinship theory, the analysis of mythology, and the nature of primitive classifications. In his analysis of myths he depends on structural linguistics (the study of human speech and cybernetics the science of communication and control theory). Levi-Strauss studies myth as a system of signs. For him, a myth accounts for the basic conceptual categories of the human mind. These categories are made of contradictory series of such binary opposition as raw and cooked, nature and culture, left and right etc. Thus, a myth is a version of a theme which is represented in specific combination of categories.

This logic or code needs to be deciphered for an understanding of that culture. It is important to note that the complexity of symbols makes them difficult and even intractable in certain cases. As such while attempting to work on interpreting the symbol or the set of symbols there is always room for an alternative explanation. While understanding structuralism we need to remember that.

- b) the mental structures are divorced from the actions and intentions of the particular individuals. From the above two aspects it emerges clearly that structuralism is least interested in the 'values' or 'ethos' which is symbol represents and it is unmindful of the use to which symbols are put (especially in the context of the power struggle).

We can say that this kind of structuralist interpretation of symbols denotes mental structures of structures in the mind. This why sometimes Levi-Straussian structuralism is labelled as 'though-structuralism. These mental structures flow out of our minds to create culture in their various combinations. If culture is set of symbolic forms and if we analyse them or decipher or decode them, we get to know the underlying mental structure. Levi-Strauss views it as a binary opposition between nature and culture. Thus, he would say, if raw food is nature, cooked food denotes culture.

Leach (1976) uses the structuralist method to decipher the various symbolic forms. To him, culture is only a manifest physical form and it originates in our mind. Within our mind, it begins as an "inchoate metaphysical idea". Inside our mind categories emerge as a set of opposing categories.

The structuralist model can be used for the analysis of a common a thing as a dress, or costume. You know we dress for certain occasions in a special way. To attend wedding banquets or receptions we wear a grand attire. Why? We inherently believe that our dress 'speaks' (communicates) a lot about us to the other. One's dress reveals one's rank and social status. Note the color of anybody's dress. Will anybody wear a black attire while going for a wedding banquet? No. You would have seen that black is always opposed to white. Black may indicate impurity whereas white indicates purity. Black indicates mourning whereas red colour in an appropriate context indicates joy.

Structuralism can be uses to study almost any sociological or anthropological area of interest or specialization. Levi-Strauss, Leach and other have demonstrated great skill and versatility in using the structuralist theory method and data. For example, Leach has done a structural analysis of traffic signals and their meaning.

Likewise, Leach (1976) applies structural model to 'bodily mutation'. For example, take shaving of the widow's head in certain cultures. This 'loss of hair' (albeit forced by society) indicates a change in the status of a woman. Possession of hair is opposed to lack of hair, and accordingly this idea is applied by the society to indicate change in social status.

I hope you remember, the Durkheimian classification of 'sacred versus profane'. This is a cognitive categorisation created by the society, argued Durkheim. For Levi-Strauss natural and universal to all cultures. If that is so then sacred and profane will be categories ever persistent irrespective of the advancements in science and technology. If you carefully reflect 'time' is a human invention; so is sacred time (for rituals and other religions activities) and sacred space. Sacred time and sacred space are concepts devices by human mind to classify the continuous time and space around us. Years, months, days, public private, drawing room, bed room—are human classifications which flow out from the binary opposition of human mind.

Take another example, 'sacrifice' is an act of communication with the other-world. At its heart lies our belief that we shall die one day, and yet we want to live. Hence the classification 'this world' versus 'other world', 'this-worldly' versus 'other-worldly being', 'this-worldly time' versus 'other-worldly tiem'. At the meeting point of these two worlds, i.e. this world and the other-world, lies the liminal zone in which beings of both the worlds can take part. A church or a temple or a mosque

is the meeting point of this-worldly and other-worldly. A sacrifice held at this spot in the form of killings a goat has a symbolic meaning. It indicates that the sacrifice is willing to undergo a transformation in order to reach the other-world. Leach (1976:71) writes, "Religion is concerned with establishing a mediating bridge between 'this world', and 'the other' through which the omnipotent power of deity may be channelled to bring aid to impotent men". We will now turn to a variant of the structuralist approach, followed by Mary Douglas.

Activity 1

Carefully read section 5.4 and following the concept of mental structures, given by Levi-Strauss, list some binary oppositions which you think are universal.

5.5 UNDERSTANDING SYMBOLS

Different from the Levi-Straussian notion structures, a variant of structuralism, followed by Mary Douglas (see Box 5.02), holds that symbols are not formed out of the structures of mind. In this approach we find a definite slide towards Durkheimian understanding in which social structures have key role in symbolic processes. There is also reflection of Robertson Smith's argument that symbols of divinity were originally drawn from natural symbols. **The 'universalism', advocated by Levi-Strauss for the structures of mind is sidetracked in this approach.** The argument is that meaning is not exhausted in the patterned categories of signs. Mary Douglas (1966, 1970) argues that the origins of symbolisation are related to social structure in general and to processes of human body in particular. Consequently, in her writing Mary Douglas describes the body as a medium through which social structure finds expression. Let us discuss in detail Mary Douglas's approach to the study of symbols.

Box 5.02

Mary Douglas was educated at Oxford where she obtained her D. Phil in 1951. She did fieldwork in the Belgian Congo from 1949-50 and again during 1953.

Mary Douglas has been described by Adam Kuper (1973:206) as one of the leaders of the new British 'structuralism'. She is concerned with the anomalies which imply loss of purity and therefore a source of danger. Influenced by her teacher, at Oxford, Franz Steiner's lectures on taboo and Levi-Strauss's structural method, Douglas (1966) has analysed the dietary rules by reference to system of classification. In her study, *Natural Symbols* (1970), she holds that society as an entity is expressed by ritual symbolism. Here, she focuses on finding structural correlations between symbolic patterns and social experiences.

Mary Douglas (1966) studied the pollution beliefs of Jews recorded in the Bible and also used the ethnographic notes from various societies of the world. Primitive people's understanding of pollution can be understood by exploring our own mentality, according to Douglas. She quotes Lord Chesterfield's definition of dirt, 'dirt is a matter out of place'. What is implied here is an order and contravention of that order. Take a simple example: Will any of us leave our footwear in a bookshelf? No, this is because footwear and books belongs to entirely different realms. We know of an order where footwear belong to footwear stand and a book belongs to a bookshelf. Now, if that order is disturbed, you will draw rebuke from your elders.

It would be most interesting to see what results desire from a study of purity and pollution in the Indian context. To some extent the anthropologist influenced by Levi-Strauss (e.g. Dumont) have already made in roads into this area.

Similarly, we can analyse pollution belief. In many societies, menstrual blood is polluting. Hence, menstruating women remain secluded. In case this rule of seclusion is contravened, grave danger is foreseen for the community and the person/community concerned has to undergo purification processes. Pollution beliefs are cultural and they imply an order and its preservation. Pollution beliefs are mostly related to the bodily processes and emissions: blood, menstruation, exertions and exhalations. Now, what is the significance of these pollution beliefs.?

- a) They imply an order and its preservation.
- b) Pollution beliefs and related sanctions check the deviations from the order.
- c) They help the individuals to clarify social definitions and re-order their experiences.
- d) Pollution beliefs reinforce the understanding of cosmos and the world of nature, as is held by the society.

These pollution beliefs are not universal. Menstrual blood is polluting in one society but in may not be in another. It is in this selection process that social structure intervenes. Douglas (1975:67) clarifies the role of social structure by distinguishing several levels of meaning in rituals which control the bodily conditions. Firstly, rituals have a personal meaning for one who undergoes it and those who witness the ritual. Secondly, there is a social meaning, where every society 'says' something public about its nature, social grouping etc. To quote Douglas (1975:67) "a public ritual is a graphic expression of social forms. In societies where marriage is weak, child-bearing mother will be secluded and father too will have to be secluded.

Otherwise danger might occur. Here, this child-bearing process of body is prescribed or selected as polluting, because, proof of paternity is needed and the marriage is weak. Bodily processes are attributed meanings with a view to defend and preserve the established social order. Says Douglas (1970:xiii), "Body is a symbolic medium which is used to express particular pattern of social relations".

Douglas (1970) explores the cosmology of various societies and their relations with the corresponding bodily symbols. Human body is used to express the experiences of social relations. We present our body in different postures and angles, depending upon the situation whether it is formal or informal. **According to Douglas, experienced social relations are structured in two ways: group and the grid.** Group is a bounded social unit whereas grid indicates a person-to-person relationship on an ego-centered basis.

In societies where group is strong, human body is guarded against attack from outside. The inside/outside definitions are clear cut. Social experience emphasises external boundaries of the body, ignoring the internal structure of the body. In such a society, the social philosophy is that the internal structure can remain undifferentiated. Such societies believe that injustice within the society can be removed by eliminating the internal traitors who ally with the outside enemies. Witch-fearing cosmology is an example. Here, the body symbolism values the boundaries, discourages mixtures and treats sex with caution. The social experience here tends towards austerity, interest in purification, and disregard for bodily function like ingestion. The society celebrates purity of spirit and holds that flesh could be corrupted.

Douglas (1970:ix) argues that in contrast, where grid is strong, a bounded human body cannot be used for expression of social concerns, since the individuals does not feel bound and committed to a social group. Individuals is not constrained by group, but by rules, which facilitate reciprocal transactions. There is no attempt to

secularise mind and matter, and neither they are revered nor despised. People remain secular in outlook.

Bodily concerns differ according to social experience. Applying her model to the student revolts, Douglas says that since the social relations are over structured by grid, the students begin to seek unstructured personal experiences, in the form of rampage and destruction of catalogues and classifications.

This is clearly an example of how wide an application or even series of applications can be a part of study research and analysis. Yet it must be cautioned here that the structuralist method requires deep study to be used adequately as a method to study any aspect of society.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) What is the place of body symbolism in Mary Douglas approach to the study of symbols? Use five lines for your answers.

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- ii) Explain in five lines Mary Douglas concepts of group and grid.

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- iii) Match the following

A	B
a) Binary opposition	1) Firth
b) Symbols have purposes	2) Cassirer
c) Body is medium of expression	3) Durkheim
d) 'Man is an animal symbolicum'	4) Levi-Strauss
e) 'Society is mirrored in symbol'	5) Douglas

5.6 CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLS

Victor Turner (see Box 5.03) is influenced by a version of structural functionalism which assimilated many ideas from conflict theories. Turner's understanding of symbol emerged from his study of rituals in Zambia. Symbols are operators in the social processes, because they help the actors move from one status to another and also to resolve social contradictions. Symbols bind actors to the categories and norms of their society. Turner argued that the meaning of symbols can be understood only in their "action-field" context.

Box 5.03

The tradition of cultural analysis, which resulted in translations of important essays of Durkheim, Mauss, Hubert and Hertz etc. by the Oxford anthropologists, was carried on by such scholars as Victor W. Turner. He was born in 1920, in Scotland and educated at University College, London. He obtained a Ph.D. degree at Manchester. A professor of anthropology, Turner has made significant contributions to the study of religion. Turner's approach to analysis of the function of ritual and symbols has elements from Freud, Radcliffe-Brown and Gluckman. According to Mary Douglas (1970:303), Turner has taken into account the psychic content of symbols and his ethnography of Ndembu life shows clearly how 'the cultural categories sustain given social structure'.

For Turner (1967:26), "symbol is always a best possible expression of relatively unknown fact, a fact which is nonetheless recognised or postulated as existing". He lists three properties of symbols.

- a) **Condensation:** many things and actions are represented in a single form;
- b) **Unification:** a dominant symbol within a ritual unites together many diverse ideas and phenomena;
- c) **Polarisation of meaning** at one pole of ritual, moral and social orders of the society, values and norms are represented by the dominant symbol, at the other pole, meaning related to the outward from the symbol are represented. Turner (1967:28) holds that the former is the **ideological pole** and the latter is the **sensory pole**. Turner (1967:50) identifies different levels in the meaning of ritual symbol.
 - a) **Exegetical meaning:** This meaning is obtained by questioning the laymen and ritual specialists involved in the ritual situation.
 - b) **Operational meaning:** This meaning is obtained by what they do with the particular symbol and how they use it.
 - c) **Positional meaning:** The meaning that a particular symbol acquires by its relationship with other symbols in a totality.

Turner relates the performance of rituals to social process, and also holds that the span and complexity of rituals may correspond to the size and internal complexity of the society. Rituals are divided into two classes, namely the rituals which check deviations and regulate and rituals which "anticipate division and conflict". The latter class of rituals include life cycle (initiation/circumcision rites) rituals and periodic rituals.

Going by Turner, rituals help the individuals to adapt to changing roles and statuses. Ritual symbols motivate people to act, maintain the social structure in spite of contradictions, adjust to the internal social changes and environment. Within the context of action, symbols are dynamic entities which relate human beings with ends, purposes and means, explicitly formulated or observed from behaviour.

Now that I have broadly elaborated the basic arguments of Victor Turner, let me present an illustration of his field work. Victor Turner did his fieldwork among the Ndembu people of Zambia, who live west of the Lunga river in Africa. The Ndembu people lead a simple life, but their ritual symbolism is elaborate and complex. The Ndembu are matrilineal (succession to property and office goes to the daughters from mother). After marriage, wives may have to go to their husband's village, since the husband lives with his **matrikin**. Among the Ndembu, boy's circumcision

ceremony is called Mukanda and girl's puberty rituals are called Nkang'a. Boys are collectively initiated before puberty. Girls are individually initiated with the onset of puberty.

Let us take one particular symbol from Ndembu girl's puberty ritual (Nkang'a), and follow Victor Turner's analysis. During the puberty ritual, a novice is wrapped in a blanket and laid at the foot of the Mudyi sapling. If its bark is scratched the Mudyi tree secretes a white latex and forms milky beads. The milk tree (mudy tree) is the dominant symbol in Nkang'a ritual. There are several meanings attributed to this 'milk tree' Ndembu women attribute the following meanings to the milk tree: (a) milk tree is the senior tree of the ritual; (b) it stands for breast and breast milk; (c) tree of 'mother and child' a place where all mothers of the lineage are initiated. If we closely look at the above responses, it emerges that at one level milk tree stands for matriliney, which is the governing principle of Ndembu social life. At another level, milk tree stands for the tribal custom itself—a total system of Ndembu social relations. Respondents tended to emphasise the cohesive, harmonising impact of milk tree. Like a child's suckling of the mother, the Ndembu drink from the breasts of tribal custom. Milk tree is short hand for Ndembu instruction in tribal matters which follow immediately after initiation.

When a contextual analysis is done, the milk tree seems to represent social differentiation and opposition between various categories of society. In a series of action-situations in the puberty ritual, groups mobilise around the milk tree and worship. These groups represent the differentiations in the society. In Kkang'a ritual, women dance around milk tree initiating the young girl. This group of women oppose themselves to men. Hereby, women come together as a social category. In some cases, the young milk tree will be sacralised by the women. The young tree represents the young girl. The opposition here is between the young girl and the adult women. In another context, the mother of child will not be allowed to join the ring of dancers. Here, the opposition is between mother and her child. Because, a mother is likely to lose her daughter through marriage after the ritual. At the end of the first day of ritual, the mother of the child cooks cassava and beans, brings it in a spoon and asks 'who wants it?' The women dancing around the milk tree rush to eat from the spoon. If women of same village eat from the spoon, the child may reside with the mother. Othereise, she will have to go to a distant village and die there. Here, the conflict between living in mother's village and moving to husband's village finds an expression through symbolic activity.

So far two types of interpretation have been listed. Interpretation of milk tree provided by the Ndembu and the behaviour which emerges from the action field context seem to contradict each other. Ndembu say that milk tree represents the bond between mother and child, but in the action-field context, milk tree separates mother from child. Ndembu tell that milk tree stands for unity of Ndembu society, but in action-field context, the milk tree separates women from men, one group of women from other group of women. The two interpretations whom that dominant symbol of a ritual is related to the social process in the society. On the one hand milk tree enables the child to cross over to adulthood, and on the other it helps the society to resolve social contradictions at various levels.

Activity 2

Follow Victor Turner's idea of contextual analysis of symbols and explain in a note of 500 words, a symbol of your choice in the context of your society.

5.7 SYMBOLS AND MEANING : CLIFFORD GEERTZ

interested in the cognitive dimension of culture. He emphasises its affective/emotional dimension. Geertz refutes the view that meanings are in the minds of people. According to him, symbols and meanings are shared by the actors between them. Meanings are public and are shared. Cultural patterns are things of this world, like rocks and streams. They are not ideas and hence metaphysical. For Geertz, meaning is embodied in public symbol and it is through the symbols that human beings communicate with each other their world view, ethos and value-orientations.

Box 5.04

Born in 1926 in U.S.A., Clifford Geertz was educated at Antioch College and received his Ph.D. degree from Harvard University. This American professor of anthropology represents the hermeneutical or interpretative approach to the study of religion. He draws on the writing of Dilthey and Weber. Geertz argues that religion should be studied as an aspect of interpretative sociology. His study abandoning the insights of his predecessors (Durkheim, Weber, Freud and Malinowski) he widens their perspectives on religion and interprets religion as a cultural system that provides meaning to human existence. According to Geertz (1957:95), symbolic structures 'both express the world's climate and shape it'. For a number of criticisms of Geertz's approach to religion see Asad's (1983:237-59) review article.

Geertz studies culture from the actor's point of view. He rejects the structuralist position, which ignores the role of individual and favours the universal mental structures. For Geertz, culture is a product of social beings, who try to make sense of this world through their actions. If we want to make sense of culture, we have to situate ourselves in a position from where it was constituted. Geertz holds the view that culture is essentially particularistic and hence there cannot be a universal epistemology. In Geertz, we find an emphasis on the creative aspects of culture. Through culture, a cluster of symbols, we learn and interpret the world in which we live. Culture is not merely an inherited or unconscious learning pattern. It is created constantly in our everyday social interaction.

According to Geertz (1973:90), "Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothe these conceptions with such an aura of factuality, that the moods and motivations, seem uniquely realistic". Let us take any religious symbol—feathered serpent, cross or crescent. These symbols are drawn from a myth or ritual. These symbols remind us about a world as it portrays the kind of emotional life it supports. The Cross, you know, is a Christian symbol. It reminds a Christian that Jesus Christ died on the cross. Cross means the sorrow of this life. Cross indicates that a Christian can reach happiness, glory through suffering. A believer is expected to behave in a particular way in the presence of a cross.

A religious symbol helps us to identify fact with value. 'what actually is' and 'what ought to be' are related through symbols. It is through symbols that we create an order, experience it and maintain it. 'what is' and 'what ought to be; reinforce each other in the ongoing process of making sense of this world. 'what is' is converted into a set of priorities for action, in an interaction with 'what ought to be'. In his studies of Javanese culture Geertz found that people were manoeuvring with their religious beliefs, in a bid to interpret the new economic and political situation in the post-revolutionary Java.

In Java of the 1950s, Geertz could see that endurance of tradition as well as the creative manipulation of tradition in the wake of changes. On the one hand, the Javanese peasants remained glued to inherited form of social and economic

organisation. On the other hand, Sukarno could manipulate the many symbols out of the elements of Javanese culture in a bid to forge a new notion of nationalism.

Check Your Progress 4

i) Which aspect of symbols is emphasised by Geertz when he argues that symbols are vehicles of meaning? Use one line for your answer.

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ii) What is the place of particularistic nature of culture in Geertz's study of symbols? Use three line for your answer.

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iii) To what use, according to Geertz, did the Javanese put their religious beliefs? Use one line for your answer.

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5.8 LET US SUM UP

We begin this unit by discussing the nature and meaning of symbols. We stressed on the communicative role of symbols. Then we discussed structuralist mode of understanding religion via communicative role of symbols.

After our discussion on how Levi-Strauss and Leach used the structuralist method to decipher the various symbolic forms of culture, we examined, how Mary Douglas developed a parallel approach to the study of symbols. She argues that body is a symbolic medium through which social experience finds expression.

In order to provide examples of actual studies of symbols, we discussed Victor Turner's study of symbols among the Ndembu of Africa. According to him, meanings are situated in contexts. He opines that symbols are related to social processes, in the sense that they take the individual from one status to another, and also resolve social contradictions. Our other example is from Geertz's approach to symbols who studied Javanese culture. Geertz argues that meanings of symbols are not in the actors' heads, but meanings are shared between human beings in a social context. Meaning are essentially public.

Thus, in this unit, we discussed the various ways in which scholars understand religion through symbols. Now you have to read further and develop skills in the approach of your liking, and apply it to a religion of your choice and its symbols. Our video programme on Religious symbols offers you an exposition of the three styles of studying religious symbols. These styles were evolved by sociologists over the last hundred years. Through visuals, we have tried to give you an experiential understanding of religious symbols. Hopefully, the visual communication will express more than the print-material can do and it will give you deeper appreciation of the world of symbolic representation.

5.9 KEY WORDS

Binary opposite: a union of two contrasting ideas in mind.

Cosmology: system of ideas about universal order.

Cybernetics: the science of communication and control theory. It is concerned specially with the comparative study of automatic control systems.

Grid: a person to person ego-centered relationship.

Group: a bounded social unit.

Linguistics: the study of human speech including the units, nature, structure and modification of language.

Pollution: a magical notion that uncleanness results due to violation of taboos.

Taboo: that which is prohibited.

Teleology: a doctrine which explains phenomena by final causes.

Totem: symbol of a clan.

Witch: one who uses magic for evil purposes.

5.10 FURTHER READING

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Turner, V. 1975. Symbolic Studies. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 4 : 145-62.

5.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The main characteristic of a symbol is that it expresses something significant.
- ii) symbols usually express such abstract notions as power, authority, solidarity of group etc.
- iii) Both sign and symbol stand for something other than what they appear.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) The evolutionists implied a division between symbolic and concrete structures.
- ii) The functionalists tried to find out what rituals do for society. Rituals are basically practical aspects of religion and refer to regular patterns in interaction. These set patterns of interaction are expressed through symbols.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Mary Douglas describes body as a medium through which social structure finds expression. She argues that origins of symbolisation are related to processes of human body.
- ii) According to Douglas describes body as a medium through which social structure finds expression. She argues that origins of symbolisation are related to processes of human body.
- iii) a = 4, b = 1, c = 5, d = 2, e = 3

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Here, Geertz is emphasising the emotional or affective dimension of culture.
- ii) According to Geertz, the particularistic nature of culture places stress on its creative aspects. As culture is constantly created in our daily social interaction, only through learning particular cluster of symbols, we can understand the world we live in.
- iii) The Javanese were manipulating their religious beliefs to interpret the new politico-economic situation in post-revolutionary Java.

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UNIT 6 COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF RITUAL

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 What is a Ritual?
 - 6.2.1 The Nature of Rituals
 - 6.2.2 The Definitions of Rituals
- 6.3 Characteristics of Rituals
 - 6.3.1 Ritual Needs
 - 6.3.2 Ritual as Conscious and Voluntary
 - 6.3.3 Ritual as Repetitions and Stylized Bodily Actions
- 6.4 Types of Rituals
 - 6.4.1 Confirmatory Rituals
 - 6.4.2 Piacular Rituals
 - 6.4.3 Other Types of Rituals
- 6.5 Theories of Ritual
 - 6.5.1 Evolutionary Theories
 - 6.5.2 Functionalist Theories
 - 6.5.3 Fieldwork Investigations of Malinowski
 - 6.5.4 Evans-Pritchard—The African Experience
 - 6.5.5 Symbolic Dimension of Ritual
 - 6.5.6 The Psychoanalytic Approach
- 6.6 The Importance of Rituals
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 Key Words
- 6.9 Further Readings
- 6.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to :

- examine the phenomenon of ritual as it occurs both in the religion as well as everyday sphere,
- to understand what constitutes a ritual, especially as presented by sociologists and anthropologists,
- to appreciate the importance of ritual for those who participate in it as well as for the society.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In our earlier units, we sought to familiarize ourselves with certain sociological explanations in the field of religion. In this unit your attention and enquiry will be drawn to the various theories contributed by the sociologists for studying religious behaviour in the everyday life of a society.

The focus of discussion in this unit is rituals. It is one of the human activities which has drawn the attention of scholars. What is this behaviour displayed by human beings whenever they participate in a religious activity? How have sociologists and anthropologists sought to interpret these human practices as they occur in the religious behaviour of any human group? The present unit will attempt to answer some of these questions.

6.2 WHAT IS A RITUAL?

I am sure all of us, at some stage in life have participated in ritual activity. But we never really thought of interpreting this ritual. What do these rituals mean to the society and individual?

A systematic enquiry of the ritual phenomenon in human society is a field of investigation of fairly recent origins.

A host of scholars from sociology, anthropology, psychology are interested in the field of rituals. They have contributed varied theories and explanations to the understanding of ritual. They study of ritual does not find a distinct area in sociology. It usually forms part of larger studies that focus on religion.

Before we can get down to considering the various definitions of the term ritual, let us very briefly consider what is this activity that is identified as 'ritual'. Nowadays, one often attributes the term ritual to any human activity that is repetitive, patterned and perhaps even monotonous. One thus speaks of—'the ritual of examinations' or the 'ritual of Republic Day parades' or the 'ritualistic character of work'. In all these examples, and many other, the term ritual is used as an adjective to denote the sameness, or the repetitiveness of the particular activity that is being described. Using the term ritual in such a manner is not wrong, as we shall see, such usage of the term contains some important and essential characteristics of the term.

6.2.1 The Nature of Rituals

In the ethnographic description of rituals in diverse cultures given by scholars like Edward Tylor, James Frazer, Bronislaw Malinowski, Emile Durkheim and many others, the term ritual is used to denote two separate sets of activities.

- i) The first is strictly in the sphere of religious practice and refers to a wide range of religious activities viz. prayer, ceremonial worship, chanting, a range of gestures and movements, activities with sacred object, etc. all done with the specific intention of spiritual communication with a Supreme Being. Thus, the various religious activities and practices engaged in by the Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, etc. in their respective temples, mosques, churches and *gurdwaras*, etc. may be referred to as rituals.

Besides, in their respective homes, practitioners of a faith also conduct religious activities that are referred to as rituals. Thus the Hindu family performing '*pooja*' on certain occasions, the Muslims family performing '*namaz*' at the call of the muzeinin, or the Christian family reciting the '*rosary*' at the hour of prayers are all rituals performed by these believers in their respective homes.

- ii) A second set of human activities that are identified as rituals are those associated with individual life cycle as they move from one social setting to the next.

In all societies, from birth to death an individual passes through several stages demarcating a transition from one stage of life to the next. Such transitions, are often marked by activity which is ritualistic in character. Sociologists and anthropologists term such rituals as 'rites of passage'. The next two units of this block i.e. Unit 7 and Unit 8 will give you examples of such rituals as 'Rites of Passage' from African society and South-East Asia society.

Indian society with its diversity of communities and cultures reveals a rich variety of such rituals performed at birth, puberty, adulthood, marriage, death, etc. (See ESO-02, Block 4 and ESO-05, Unit 28 and 29 for a detailed discussion on this). One must however, note that even in such ritual activity, the spiritual or the sacred

dimension is very much present. Invocations are always addressed to some sacred beings for granting a smooth transition to the next stage in the cycle of life.

These two sets of activities are what scholars refer to as rituals in their descriptions of religious practices. In this specific usage of the term, rituals constitute a major component of any organised religion. It is this specific usage of term 'ritual' that will constitute the frame of reference in discussing the comparative theories of rituals. We shall begin our discussion on these theories by first working at some of the important definitions offered by scholars concerning the term ritual.

6.2.2 The Definitions of Rituals

Developing a definition of the term ritual is not something on which scholars agree. The reasons for this are many, for one, the theoretical orientation from within which the scholar is working would prompt one sort of definition as opposed to another from some other theoretical orientation. Secondly, depending on what the scholar wants to know about ritual, a definition of ritual would be developed to suit such a purpose. Thus for example, there are those who ask the question—What does a ritual do for those who participate in it? And there are others who would ask the question—What does ritual say for those participating in it? Both questions have a distinct difference in emphasis and would consequently develop distinctly different definitions of the term ritual.

Yet again, there is the added problem, that most scholars discussing rituals have in fact, dealt at greater length on the larger issue of ritual interpretation, rather than the actual phenomena of ritual. Thus in defining ritual these scholar's understanding of religion played a decisive influence.

Notwithstanding such difficulties, it is still possible to present some important definitions of rituals as put forward by some of these scholars working on the subject of religion and its relationship of society.

In the previous Block on **The Study of Religion**, both evolutionary and functional theories of religion were discussed. These theories must serve as background for our own discussion on the definitions of rituals.

1) The Evolutionalist understanding of ritual

The early evolutionary scholars on religion like Tylor, Frazer, Morgan and others located religion like most other institutions of society within an evolutionary mould. Both Tylor and Frazer were inclined to explain religion as an evolving belief system. Rituals are understood as the first stage of this evolution. This original stage was termed as 'magic' or the pre-religious stage or the animistic stage by Tylor. He observed rituals as resulting from the cult of the dead—the early need of human beings understanding dreams, hallucinations, sleep and death led them to believe in a soul or an indwelling personality which became the object of ritual worship. This indwelling personality in the animistic stage is extended outwards to cover animals, plants and even inanimate practices. Tylor in his book **Primitive Culture** (1958) goes on to define rituals as practices in this animistic stage that are highly emotive, expressive to the point of being dramatic, non-rational and rooted in magical beliefs.

The evolutionist definition of ritual proved problematic in two important aspects. Firstly, it was an intellectual perception of rituals as perceived within the larger framework of religion itself undergoing evolution. According to Tylor this evolution involves the transition from magic and animism to religion and finally to science. Secondly Tylor restricted this observations of ritual practices to the first human forms of society, and from a scientific standpoint such conceptions were not only speculative and conjectural, they also failed to explain rituals as they existed in the organised religions of the world.

2) Functionalist understanding of ritual

Starting out from a different orientation to religion and ritual, Emile Durkheim began by asking—What does religion do to those who participate in its beliefs and practices? This functionalist approach (as discussed in Unit 3 Block 1) sought to establish an interrelationship between society and religion. Durkheim (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912-1954) pointed out that all human societies are divided into the opposing domains of 'sacred' and 'profane'. These two domains were separate and exclusive. The domain of the sacred consisted of things set aside and forbidden. The domain of the profane consisted of things not so regarded and belonging to the ordinary level.

According to Durkheim, ritual was that human behaviour that takes place in the domain of the sacred. By specifying the particular location within which religious activities occur, Durkheim laid the grounds for an empirical examination of the religious sphere as well as the relationship that practices and beliefs within this domain had with the larger human society.

It is this empirical emphasis to the study of religion, that brought about a substantive increase in anthropological field studies of the domain of the sacred. Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard and others all studied the religious beliefs and practices of various tribal societies with a view to further examining the inter-relationship between society and religion.

Improving on the definition of rituals offered by Durkheim, and orienting the meaning of rituals within the theory of the Social System, Talcott Parsons, reviewing the work done in the *Sociology of Religion* observes that rituals are human practices within the realm of the sacred that are characterized by their essential non-rational or transcendental nature. What Parsons means by this is that unlike human rational behaviour that occurs within a means-end relationship, ritual behaviour exists outside the means-end relations. They are an end in themselves.

3) Psychoanalytic understanding of ritual

Using almost the same ideas of means-end relationship in understanding human activity Sigmund Freud in his book *Totem and Taboo* (1918) defines rituals as those notably non-rational or formalised symbolic belief of any kind which are distinct from pragmatic, belief that is rationally linked to empirical goals.

Further, distinguishing ritual behaviour from both the scholastic and the common sense, Freud tried to bring out the essential neurotic component of ritual behaviour within religious practices. The basic emphasis in this Freudian perception of ritual is the understanding of how the conscious mind interacts with the world of the sacred. According to Freud, such behaviour is 'neurotic' because it defies any empirical pragmatic explanations. He even sought to see religion as a practice of 'obsessive collective neurosis'. Ritual behaviour was that practice in which both individual and group activity most explicitly brings out this neurosis in the realm of the sacred.

4) The symbolic component of ritual

Treating rituals as symbolic components of a culture, Social and Cultural Anthropology have tried to provide a new interpretation of religious practices. The Cultural Anthropologist, Edmund Leach defined rituals as culturally oriented behavioral patterns which seek to make a symbolic statement about human beings relationship with a Supreme Being.

The symbolic value of rituals was for long stressed by scholars of culture. Leach's definition is important because it stresses the fact that these cultural patterns serve as symbolic statements. In other words, besides looking at what rituals do, Leach is also trying to understand, what rituals say. In bringing out the significance of these symbolic statements, Leach points out that they were derived from the groups social and cultural life. In doing so, Leach, like Durkheim before him, is seeking to emphasise the close interrelationship between society and religion in the domain of religious practices.

Let us now understand the major characteristics of rituals in the next section (Section 6.3).

6.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF RITUALS

In this Section we will study the important characteristics of rituals and what components they include.

6.3.1 Ritual Needs

Let us begin by looking at the ritual at the manifest level i.e., at the level of the existing social reality. Let us know what are the various needs are, that anyone would be having when working at a ritual? Rituals needs includes :

- i) The ritual space
- ii) The participants
- iii) The ritual objects
- iv) Verbal and/or bodily actions

These four components are basic to all rituals in any religion. Let us briefly consider each of them.

i) The Ritual Space

This is a well-defined setting characterized mainly as the domain of the sacred. While in most cases such spaces are permanent and identified by members of the faith as such, there are also temporary settings defined as ritual spaces, during the occurrence of a ritual in such a space.

ii) The Participants

These include all the individuals participating in a ritual. In most ritual settings these would consist of a general audience made up of believers of the faith and the priest performing the main activities of the ritual together with their assistants or helpers. Each of the participant act or has a clearly defined role and is called upon to perform a specific function during the period of the activity.

iii) Rituals Objects

These generally refer to a range of objects that are used during any ritual. As objects whose meaning is basically centered around the fact that they exist in the domain of the sacred, these objectives also come to acquire a sacred character about them.

iv) Verbal and/or bodily actions

Every ritual involves a range of bodily actions from kneeling down, bowing, etc. to

verbal responses whether these be mere recitation of prayers or the chanting and singing of hymns. What is of important is these body actions and oral incantations is that they follow a definite pattern or sequence, and the adherence to such a pattern or sequence is quite rigidly maintained.

Activity 1

Read Section 6.3 and its subsections. Can you think of any other type of ritual? Discuss with students in the study centre and note down your findings.

There is yet another set of characteristics that have to be pointed out about rituals. These concern the nature of activity that occurs during a ritual. Four such characteristics have been mentioned by M. Eliade in his discussions on rituals (*The Sacred and the Profane*, 1959). He observes that rituals are those conscious and voluntary, repetitive and stylised symbolic body actions that are centered on cosmic structures and/or sacred presences. Verbal behaviour is also included in this set of body action.

Let us take some of the major aspects of this characteristics of rituals for further discussion.

6.3.2 Ritual as Conscious and Voluntary

Ritual behaviour is not part of the common behaviour of individuals in everyday life. On the contrary, participation in ritual behaviour demands a conscious engagement on the part of these believers to submit to very highly patterned rules and roles which conform the self to all others who have embodied these 'typical' roles in the past. Hence the self must consciously sacrifice its individual autonomy, its freedom to be except that which is demanded of it within the ritual. Consider for example the Christian ritual of 'Mass'—here what we observe that activity from moment to moment the participants share in a common pattern of gestures, movements, vocal responses, etc. Such involvement reflects the conscious nature of the believers participation within the religious experience. It must be kept in mind that there are many types of ritual activity. Yet the rituals generally involve a raising of consciousness to a greater or 'higher' level.

The voluntaristic component of ritual must be understood from the larger context of ritual being part of a religious system of beliefs and practices. The believer of a faith voluntarily submits to his/her personal will to be collective will of the group engaged in the ritual. It is only through this voluntaristic submission of the self that the believer can enter the realm of the sacred to achieve communion with that which is 'divine'.

6.3.3 Ritual as Repetitions and Stylised Bodily Actions

At the manifest level, rituals are clearly and evidently expression that the human body articulates in the act of worship. The human body becomes an extremely important organ of religious experience i.e. not only does it pattern itself in terms of movements and gestures within a given religious practice but it also becomes the subject of internalising the experience contained in the given religious practices. The importance of the human body is evident from the fact that from childhood onwards the infant builds up an understanding of the world, out of sensory motor experience. This understanding underlies and sustains the adult experience of space, time, number and personal identify. Therefore within ritual the stylised patterned and repetitious nature of actions (for e.g., the chanting of mantras in a temple or the offering of the 'Namaaz' by the Muslims) brings out not only the patterned movements of the body but also serve as vehicles or communication through which the body relates to the sacred. Further, while such repetitive patterns might seem

as being monotonous and meaningless for an outside observer, for the participants themselves they constitute both the form and substance i.e. the implicit meanings that the religious experience must have for them.

Box 6.01

This stylised and patterned behaviour that gets represented in ritual falls into a range of expressions at one end of the spectrum the stylised and patterned behaviour as gets represented with the limited experience of ritual in a set religious experience e.g., the offering of mass. At the other end of the spectrum is a form of ritual activity incorporating the stylised patterned behaviour and circumscribes the entire life of an individual. One observes this extreme form of religious practice when one sees certain religious groups like the monastic Christian orders or the Buddhist monks in their monasteries or the Sanyasis in Hinduism.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Freud tries to bring out the essential component of ritual behaviour within religions.
- ii) Which sociologist observed that ritual behaviour exists outside the mean end relations?

.....
.....

- iii) Who said that ritual resulted from the cult of the dead?

.....
.....

6.4 TYPES OF RITUALS

The occasion of rituals in human society are both varied and diverse. Human nature characterised by its weakness and limited capacities is constantly in need of supernatural intervention in the various activities humans are engaged in within their everyday lives.

The ethnographic literature on the subject provided various types of classifications to contain the various types of rituals in human society. Earlier on, it was pointed out, that two sets of activities are referred to as rituals by scholars studying ritual phenomena. These include :

- i) The rituals associated with the religious practices of any organised religions; and
- ii) The Rites of Passage or rituals performed by a community on various occasions in their life to mark the importance of a particular event in their lives such as rituals at the time of birth, marriage, death, seasonal ritual in nature such as sowing time, harvesting time, etc.

Both sets of ritual activities may be classified on the basis of intentions underlying the same. At the comparative level, in which classification are developed by observing general features of rituals in diverse cultures, we shall provide two such classificatory types.

According to the Social Anthropologist, Evans Pritchard, rituals can be classified into two main types, based on the intention and occasion during which they occur.

6.4.1 Confirmatory Rituals

These are rituals that are concerned with the changes of social status and those concerned with the interaction of social groups. Thus rituals performed at the time of birth, marriage, death, etc. tend to be present in all cultures of the world and they symbolise a change in the status of the individual in any social group. Further, rituals concerned with group interaction, are those that symbolically emphasise the solidarity and the interdependence of various groups for the continued existence of the community. Individuals and groups participating in such rituals display a high degree of emotional solidarity with the larger community. In modern times, rituals in a Temple, Mosque, Church, etc. emphasise such group solidarity. Confirmatory rituals as the term itself would suggest can be explained as rituals that emphasise the identity, integrity and solidarity of the social group.

6.4.2 Piacular Rituals

Evans Pritchard categorized this second type as rituals concerned with the moral and physical well being of the individual or the social group. The need to emphasise this state of moral or physical well being arises from the fact that occasions arise in the life of an individual and group when such a state of moral and physical well being is threatened. An individual faced with catastrophe, an epidemic, or the failure of rains, etc. are situations that call for the performance of Piacular rituals. Such rituals incorporate intentions such as appeasement and atonement. While modern societies with their growing dependence on science and technology, might to some extent diminish the existence of piacular rituals, in traditional folk societies, Piacular rituals form an important part of the ritual behaviour in the life of the individual and community.

6.4.3 Other Types of Rituals

Using a similar criterion of intention but developing a more descriptive classification of rituals, based on their functions, Anthony F. Wallace in his *Religion : An Anthropological View (1959)* proposed the following types :

A. Technology Rituals : The functions of these rituals is essentially aimed at controlling non-human nature. Among this type are :

Divination Rituals : seeking out the cause of affliction, injustice and whether human or otherwise, as well as suggesting remedies for the same.

Intensification Rituals : meant to increase material resources such as increase of food, success in hunting, fishing, etc.

Protective Rituals : meant to avert any form of affliction, misfortune or catastrophe, etc.

B. Therapy and Anti-Therapy Rituals : The function of these rituals is to promote the well being of individuals and groups and include :

Curative Rituals : meant to cure individual illnesses or afflictions.

Witchcraft and Sorcery : meant to cause affliction or injustice on others.

C. Ideology Rituals : The function of such rituals is aimed at the control of the Social Group, its values and traditions. Among these are :

Rites of Passage : Rituals marking the transition in Individual status within the life cycle. These rituals are ubiquitous and part of all religions. As we can see there are many types of ritual for different kinds of situations.

Social Intensification Rituals : Rituals meant to renew group solidarity life Friday prayers among the Muslims.

Rebellion Rituals : Rituals that are meant to allow for catharsis amongst group members.

D. **Salvation Rituals** : The function of such rituals is to help individuals to cope with personal difficulties. Among these are :

Shamanic Rituals : Rituals performed by individuals claiming supernatural powers that may be put to good or bad ends,

Expiation Rituals : meant for forgiveness and repentance of individual misdeeds.

E. **Revitalisation Rituals** : The function of such Rituals is to cure society's difficulties and identify crisis e.g. the millenarian movements.

It is important to note that while the classification provided above is extensive in its categorisation of rituals, it may so happen that a single ritual may come under more than one type of ritual. Such an overlap in the classification of rituals is unavoidable given the integrative thrust of ritual activity in human society.

6.5 THEORIES OF RITUAL

Developing a comparative theory is an attempt by scholars to search for generalisations and universals that go beyond the specific boundaries of a particular culture. Thus comparative theory establishes their generalisations after surveying a vast amount of empirical observations from a wide variety of cultures. It is the common threads or the essential features of a phenomena that finally get represented as a comparative theory.

In this section we will discuss various theories on ritual.

6.5.1 Evolutionary Theories

The earliest efforts at developing theories of ritual were the efforts of the 19th century cultural evolutionists viz. Edward Tylor and James Frazer. In both Tylor's '*Primitive Culture*' (1871) 1958 and Frazer's '*The Golden Bough*' (1890) 1950 there is an effort to provide for an intellectual approach to the understanding of ritual behaviour. Neither Tylor nor Frazer used the term ritual when referring to the practices that we have identified and labelled as rituals. But Tylor observed that the world of human beliefs as passing through three stages—viz. Magic, Religion and Science and it was the practices the primitive man engaged in the stage of magic that interested those scholars.

It is now recognized that these early scholars of religion made an important contribution by bringing religion into sharp focus. All the subsequent sociologists and anthropologists who wrote on religion after Frazer and Tylor had the task of refining the existing theories and providing further inputs into the area.

Such practices were identified by Tylor as being magico-religious practices and he attributed the reasons for these magico-religious practices to the fact that man's intellect needed some form of explanation to understand phenomena like sleep, death, fate, etc. Such a need led to the creation of what Tylor termed as animism. The original form of magico-religious behaviour.

Rituals within animism result from human beings tendency to attribute a spirit or indwelling personality to the world of animate and inanimate objects. It is the

practice evolved out of such an intellectual exercise by primitive man that gives rise to the forms of ritual. It is important to note that Tylor emphasised magic and magical practices as the basis through which ritual worship evolved because according to him there was a distinct difference between the stage of magic and that of religion. Magical practices according to Tylor formed the first cohesive institutional basis for the emergence of societies. In these magical practices or what Frazer called 'Pseudo Science', primitive man was developing systems of explanations through which both, individually and groupwise they could come to terms with the various unknown realities that they had to live with.

The institution of magical practices is thus very much located in the realm of the spiritual and in primitive man's efforts to understand this spiritual. Tylor's and Frazer's observations of rituals as magico-religious practices or pseudo-science are essentially based on a conjecture to explain the origin of religion. Very little ethnographic evidence exists to prove or disprove such theoretical conjectures. But it is important to note that by making distinctions between magic and religion, Tylor set the ground for a future enquiry on the scope and identity of religious practices.

6.5.2 Functionalist Theories

If the nineteenth century evolutionists who studied religion were criticised for an over emphasis on the origins of religion and ritual, scholars on religion who followed them were inclined to shift the emphasis on the study of religions and rituals to answering the questions—what do rituals do in human society or what they ought to do in human society. Such an enquiry which is also termed as functionalism in Sociological theory was an approach adopted by both Emile Durkheim and Malinowski. In his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1954) Durkheim observed that in all human societies there exists a dichotomy between the world of the sacred and the world of the profane. Using this dichotomy of sacred and profane, Durkheim put forward a theory of religion in which religious beliefs and practices are seen to have a social function for the community that follow them, Durkheim identified this social function as the integrative function of society.

To illustrate Durkheim focuses on the Arunta Tribesmen of Western Australia whose elaborate religious ceremonies of worship of their totem symbolised the community worshipping itself.

The ritual thus took on the twin function of reinforcing collective values and reaffirming the community among individuals. In other words, Durkheim's emphasis on religion and rituals as an integrative force in society which must be seen as part of his idea of the 'collective consciousness of a society'. Religious beliefs and practices are the mechanism by which the collective consciousness of a society gets institutionalised and is reproduced from one generation to the next. Rituals in such a context must be seen as creating the ground for group solidarity amongst the individuals participating in them. The elaborate procedure in which individuals come to take upon themselves various roles performing various gestures and movements, engage in various forms of vocal recitations, chanting and so on are all means through which rituals bring about a sense of group solidarity among its participants. Through rituals, Durkheim tried to emphasise that the participants acquire the knowledge of what is good, required, accepted and desired by the community and in this sense brought the individual closer to the collective identity of the group.

Further Durkheim observed that at the symbolic level, rituals represented the collective identity of the social group. Thus, the sacred objects in ritual practices were sacred because they symbolized the collective identity of the group. Likewise the stylized pattern of movements and gestures should be perceived as symbolic forms whose

meanings and values were known to the members of the social group. These meanings may not be known to every member of a society. Instead there are usually priests whose specialization is in ritual, whose function it is to disseminate meanings. This emphasis on the importance of the social group in the understanding of ritual, is perhaps the most important aspect of Durkheim's explanation of rituals and their relationship to society. In doing so however, he argued that magic could not be in the domain of sacred as it was not obligatory on the part of the community. Magic does not have a set of beliefs which a church has—he argued further.

In general however, Durkheim's theory of rituals sought to establish a universal character of rituals in all human cultures. The domain of the sacred and the profane existed in all cultures that claimed to have a religion. The problem however, was that Durkheim never sought to elaborate on what exactly were the criterions on which the distinction between sacred and profane was to be made. Were there a set of sacred objects and symbolic forms that could be sacred to all cultures? Or was this distinction embodied in the mind of the individual participant taking part in the ritual? Or was the distinction a mere label of convenience developed by the European mind unable to explain the complex phenomenon as it occurred in non-European societies? Durkheim himself recognised a number of these problems in his distinction of sacred and profane. It was the fieldwork studies of later day anthropologists that sought to resolve some of these queries concerning the distinction of sacred and profane. Yet we must remember that later scholars have pointed out that the distinction between sacred and profane may not be absolutely distinct.

6.5.3 Field Work Investigations of Malinowski

Anthropological field studies of non-European cultures at the beginning of this century enriched the theory of rituals by actually investigating the domain of the sacred as it actually exists in the everyday life of tribal society. Important amongst such studies are the explanations offered by Malinowski and Evans Pritchard. Malinowski's Functionalist approach to the study of ritual is based on his field investigations of the Trobriand Islanders in the *'Argonauts of the Western Pacific'* (1922). Malinowski's functional theory of religion has already been discussed in a previous unit. Like Durkheim, the basic thrust of Malinowski's approach to rituals is that rituals have a social function for the community in which they take place. He disagreed with Tylor's reasoning that rituals are the result of primitive man's rationality at coming to terms with unknown and unexplainable forces in nature. The rituals of the Trobriand Islanders were neither the result of speculation nor the product of an underdeveloped intellect. In their everyday life, the Trobriand people were quite capable at distinguishing between those acts that they considered magical and those that belonged to the realm of common sense or technological activities.

The magic practices of the Trobriand Islanders had also an accompanying set of beliefs which were very much a part of the community and even if they did not have anything like a church as perceived by the European mind, their magical beliefs did create a strong bond of solidarity within the community.

The social function of ritual according to Malinowski was to create and enhance emotional solidarity within the community. Every individual or group in their everyday life has to grapple with a range of anxieties, sufferings, fears, moral problems of good and bad, problems arising out of severe problems such as epidemics, death etc. In such moments of tensions and emotional strain, rituals helps reaffirm solidarity with the group by creating a sense of security and oneness with other members of the group. The experience of a ritual thus unites them through its systematized and symbolic actions, which create a new integrative state of mind for the members of the group.

Ritual in the above sense performed both explanatory and validating functions. As an explanatory function Malinowski pointed out that rituals explained the larger 'why' questions of life and existence, or explanations about the uncontrollable forces of nature, or explanations of providence concerning the maintenance and welfare of the group, or explanations of the life cycle concerning birth and death. Such queries are to be found in all cultures, in primitive societies. Rituals as symbolic expression offer explanations to such queries for members of the social group.

As a validating function, rituals support and affirm the continued existence of the structure of the social group. Thus, the social relations, the institutions, the values, the goals of the social group etc. are supported by ritual practices so that such aspects of the social group are seen as righteous and rituals uphold with the threat of sanctions what is considered as desirable in the conduct of individuals towards the social group.

Malinowski also emphasised the interrelated and interdependent nature of rituals in primitive society. In the Trobriand Islands, he observed that the rituals linked up to every facet of the social life of the community. In the political sphere there were ritual and ceremonies for the physical well-being and strength of the leadership. In the economic sphere, rituals represented the continuity of certain forms of property relations, or rituals seeking divine intervention for a successful harvest or to avert some natural catastrophe etc. In short we can say that in the life of these primitive societies, rituals play a prominent role at any point of time in the life of the individual or social group, that is recognised as being crucial.

There does exist a great deal of similarity in the ideas of both Durkheim and Malinowski with regard to rituals. It must be remembered however, that Malinowski laid the real foundation for the scientific examination of ritual practices by actually studying these in the context of the Trobriand Islanders. In doing so he was able to not only prove Durkheim's views on magic as wrong, he was even able to empirically prove the distinct domains of sacred and profane amongst the community of the Trobriand people. Further, while Durkheim sought to emphasise integration as the basic social function of ritual practices, Malinowski emphasised emotional solidarity as the key social function of rituals within a social group.

6.5.4 Evans-Prichard—The African Experience

Finally, at a time when fieldwork based studies were becoming more and more important to anthropological investigation, Evans Pritchard's study of witchcraft among the Azande came to a very different perception of ritual behaviour and the domain of the sacred as observed amongst the Azande tribe. (*Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, 1937). Pritchard's observations do not necessarily contribute to a theory of rituals but they certainly make an important difference to the distinction of the sacred and profane as provided by Durkheim and further proved by Malinowski.

Pritchard observed that amongst the Azande tribe the conception of 'ritual as well as the clear distinction between sacred and profane' is both vague and confusing. Seen from the individual point of view, Pritchard observes, it becomes very difficult to distinguish when a particular activities takes on the character of a ritual and when it is not. Thus, for the Azande tribe, blowing burning barkcloth smoke into a termite mound while holding magical plants in one hand might mean both an ordinary technological activity to keep away the termites, as well as a magical rite in which the tribe explain the barkcloth as being termite medicine. In such a situation Pritchard points out that much depends on how the anthropologist categorises his or her observations, this in turn is based on how the European mind has come to classify what is ritual and what is not.

Box 6.02

Concerning the distinction between sacred and profane, Pritchard observes that amongst the Azande, such clear cut distinctions simply do not exist. Categories of explanations that one would normally associate with the realm of the sacred are at the same time used in the very same way to denote a range of activities in the domain of the profane. Thus the Azande would use the term 'soul' when explaining what is happening during a magical rite, which is justified in that such an entity belongs to the domain of the sacred. But in the same manner they would use the term soul to explain the process by which a seed put in the ground germinates to become a plant. In fact, for Evans-Pritchard the rituals and the beliefs of the Azande clearly denote that for these tribes, the natural and the supernatural, the sacred and the profane, the ritual act and the non-ritual act are all inextricably intervened in their everyday life.

The observations of Azande witchcraft clearly question Durkheim's claim that the distinction between the sacred and the profane were universal to all human cultures. The problems of developing criteria to distinguish the sacred from the profane has continued to bother anthropologists and sociologists. What Evans Pritchard was able to do was to emphasise the culture-specific context of the activities being referred to as magic or rituals. It also stressed the need to find out how individuals from a community perceived and explained what they understood as the meaning and practice of activities others label as rituals, as well as, how they understood the meaning of sacred within their culture.

6.5.5 Symbolic Dimension of Ritual

One of the important aspect of rituals emphasised by Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim, Malinowski as well as other scholars working on rituals was the symbolic dimensions of rituals. As symbolic expressions, what do rituals have to say? This is an area in which structural anthropology has also attempted to provide some explanations. You have already discussed the structuralist approach to religion in a previous unit. Unlike the functionalist approach to rituals which understands them primarily in terms of the social functions they fulfil in a society, the structuralist points out that rituals need not be reduced to their social functions but they can be studied in themselves as systems of symbolic expressions that are internally consistent and reflect the logic of the primitive mind in its effort to explain the unknown. The structuralist would point out that the division of the world into the domain of sacred and the domain of profane, is in keeping with the structural rule followed by the primitive mind in naming and classifying the world. Thus, sacred and profane are binary opposites resulting from the structuring of reality by the unconscious. In other words, the underlying symbolic value of rituals must be understood in terms of their relationship with the sacred as opposed to the profane.

Edmond Leach goes on to add that within the context of these oppositions, rituals are symbolic statements derived from the social and cultural dimensions of a community.

Finally, there is one more approach that we must consider in this study of rituals and that is the Psychoanalytic approach.

Activity 2

Do you think that sacred and profane are absolutely distinct? Talk to other students at the study centre and note down your findings.

6.5.6 The Psychoanalytic Approach

The Psychoanalytic theory on rituals is best articulated by Sigmund Freud in his book *Totem and Taboo* (1918) wherein he discussed the primeval manifestations of the oedipal myth. According to Freud, totemism, the original form of religious behaviour comes into being as a result of patricide in the primitive groups. The 'father' in the primitive group was an authoritarian patriarch who reserved his rights over all the resources of the group both human and natural. This led to jealousy among the other male members of the group (sons), who then conspired to kill their father. Having committed the patricide they were overcome with horror and feeling of guilt and shame. To rid themselves of this collective guilt, they create a totem which is a personification of the father image and begin to worship it with the accompaniment of various rituals. The rituals then play the psychologically useful role of an elaborate laying out of the shame that had engulfed every individual in society. Freud observes that ritual behaviour is at the same time non-rational and exists outside a pragmatic objective consideration of means-end relationship. Thus, while rituals might be seen to have components of group solidarity they are in the final instance, a pathological outcome contained in the collective neurosis of a society.



The symbolic value of rituals must be understood in relation with the sacred as opposed to the profane.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Who wrote the book 'Totem and Taboo'?

.....

ii) Write five lines on what Evans-Pritchard had to say about rituals.

.....

.....

-
-
-
- iii) Which sociologist emphasised the importance of social group in the understanding of ritual?
-

6.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF RITUALS

We go back to a point we made in the introduction. In traditional agrarian societies where the social structure is comparatively less differentiated, religion tends to be intricately woven into the very fabric of the social order. We must consider the importance of rituals in the Indian society, against the background of such an observation. Despite the continuous growth of industrialisation and urbanisation, large sections of Indian society continue to exist as basically peasant societies guided by their traditions and customs. Even in the metropolises of the country, the majority of inhabitants continue to offer resistance to giving up their old traditions and practices. In such a society, religion plays a very dominant influence. Ritual behaviour tends to take place on various occasions and for a variety of purposes. They intervene at various moments in the everyday life of the individual and the group. Indian society is a mosaic of religious communities and hence the magnitude of ritual behaviour in our society is very great.

One way of appreciating the importance of rituals in such a society is to restate the views of Durkheim and of Malinowski. Rituals are important because they create social integration of the group and they provide for emotional solidarity amongst members of the group.

The transition of Indian society from a traditional agrarian society to a modern society, based on democratic secular pattern has brought to the foreground the problem of compatibility amongst various religious communities having to exist together within a larger secular framework maintained by the State. In its political manifestation the problem is witnessed in the way religious beliefs and practices are used for political ends by various political parties within the country. This has led to heightening of religious sensitivity amongst growing sections of the population. Thus we observe that in modern Indian society, besides the importance of both integration and emotional solidarity, ritual behaviour also reinforces a sense of



Holi festivities and rituals in Baarsana village near Mathura (U.P.)

religious identity amongst members of a given religious community. Such efforts at reinforcing the religious identity of a group through ritual behaviour has sometimes threatened the secular fabric of modern Indian society.

The fact of the matter however is that most scholars of Indian society and culture have maintained that the collective conscience of the Indian society is deeply religious in character. The various religious groups and communities have a life-style and world view that is replete with religious symbolism and ritual practices. In such a situation religion in the form of ritual activities may well be seen to serve as a moral guide to both the individual and the group. Such a moral guide or moral code has indirectly also served towards the continued maintenance of the social order.

Other units in this course will deal more in detail with various religions in the Indian society. You will have an opportunity there to appreciate the importance of rituals in each of these religions. For the present, it will suffice to note that in Indian society rituals are important in the every day life of the various communities because they act as mechanisms for social integration, offer emotional solidarity to group members, regulate moral life within a group and offer both the individual and the group, with a group identity.

6.7 LET US SUM UP

This discussion was of comparative theories of ritual have sought to emphasise two major aspects of the discussion on rituals. Firstly we have highlighted the difficulty amongst scholars in defining the ritual activity. While Tylor and the evolutionist associated rituals with magic and animism, the functionalists perceived rituals as activities that take place in the domain of the sacred. The structuralists would seem them as attempts of the primitive mind to structure human activity into that which belongs to the realm of the sacred and that which is part of the everyday world.

Secondly we have tried to highlight how the various scholars have tried to explain rituals. For the evolutionists rituals were seen as primitive attempts to rationally explain the various unknown forces acting upon them in their life. Among the functionalists rituals are seen as having social functions for the social group whether they are of social integration or of emotional solidarity. Amongst the structuralists rituals are seen as system of symbolic expressions derived from the social and cultural order. Finally Freudian psychoanalysis has explained rituals as expressions of collective neurosis resulting from feelings of guilt and shame amongst the group members.

6.8 KEY WORDS

Affliction : Serious, often chronic maladies.

Animism : A belief that animate and inanimate beings possess a soul.

Empirical : Verifiable experience by logical deduction and reasoning.

Neurotic : Disease of the nervous system.

Pragmatic : A thing or an idea has significance if it has useful or practical consequences.

6.9 FURTHER READINGS

Gennep, Arnold van (1909) 1960, *The Rites of Passage*, London : Routledge.

Durkheim, Emile (1912) 1954, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London : Allen and Unwin.

Leach, Edmund R. (1961), *Rethinking Anthropology*, London School of Economics and Political Science, Monographs on Social Anthropology, No. 22. London : Athlone.

David L. Sills (ed.), (1968) *Ritual*, pages 520-526 in '*International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*' Vol. 13, New York : Macmillan.

6.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Freud tried to bring out the essential **neurotic** component of ritual behaviour within religions.
- ii) Talcott Parson observed that ritual behaviour existed outside the means-end relations.
- iii) Tylor thought that rituals resulted from the cult of the dead.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Sigmund Freud wrote the book '*Totem and Taboo*'.
- ii) Questioning the claims of Durkheim that the distinction between the sacred and the profane were universal to all human culture, Evans-Pritchard argues that among the Azande tribe there is no clear distinction between sacred and profane. Pritchard observes that it is very difficult to distinguish when a particular activity takes on the character of a ritual and when it does not. Thus for Azande tribe blowing burning barkcloth smoke into a termite mound while holding a magical plant in one hand, might mean both an ordinary technological activity to keep away the termites, as well as a magical rite in which the tribe explain the barkcloth as termite medicine. In such a situation Pritchard points out that much depends on how the anthropologist categorizes his or her observations. This in turn is based on how the European mind has come to classify what is ritual and what is not.
- iii) Durkheim was one of the first few sociologists to emphasise the importance of a social group in the understanding of ritual and their relationship to society.

UNIT 7 RITUAL-I : A CASE STUDY FROM AFRICA

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Ndembu Society
 - 7.2.1 Geographical Setting and Economic Life
 - 7.2.2 Matrilineal Descent and Virilocal Residence
 - 7.2.3 Types of Ndembu Rituals
- 7.3 'Mukanda'—The Rite of Circumcision
 - 7.3.1 The Stage of Induction
 - 7.3.2 The Stage of Seclusion
 - 7.3.3 The Rites of Return
- 7.4 Turner's Analysis of 'Mukanda'
- 7.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.6 Key Words
- 7.7 Further Readings
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to

- describe the physical and social setting of the Ndembu of Zambia
- describe the Mukanda or circumcision ritual practised by the Ndembu
- summarise Victor Turner's analysis of Mukanda.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The first unit of this block made you familiar with major sociological theories dealing with rituals. This unit, as well as the next one, will deal with case studies which will help you to appreciate the crucial role that rituals play in human society, particularly tribal society. In this unit, we shall be dealing with a case study from Africa. You must by now be familiar with the work of Victor Turner. Turner studied the social structure of the tribal group known as the 'Ndembu' inhabitants of North-West Zambia in South-Central Africa. His extensive field work, conducted mainly in early 1950, culminated in a number of important monographs and articles.

In this unit, we shall concern ourselves with the book entitled *The Forest of Symbols : Aspects of Ndembu Rituals* which is a collection of articles and papers dealing directly and indirectly with aspects of the Ndembu ritual system. Turner has aptly named this work a 'forest'; and it is not within the scope of this unit to examine all the 'trees' in this forest. We shall primarily concern ourselves with Turner's detailed analysis of one particular ritual, namely 'Mukanda' or the initiation rite of boys through circumcision.

Before we describe 'Mukanda', it is important to familiarize ourselves with Ndembu society and understand the different kinds of rituals observed by them. This is what we shall do in the first section. In the second section, we shall describe Mukanda in some detail. The third section will touch upon some of the analytical points made by Turner in his study.

Before we move to the first section, a word of advice is in order. Many of the

names and much of the information you will read about in this unit will seem unfamiliar and sometimes confusing. You should therefore read this unit slowly and carefully. If you do so, you are bound to find Ndembu rituals as fascinating and interesting as Turner did.

7.2 NDEMBU SOCIETY

As has been mentioned earlier, the Ndembu inhabit the North-West region of Zambia in South-Central Africa. (They believe themselves to be the descendants of the great chief 'Mwantivanvwa' of Congo.) In many parts of Zambia, contact with the European and their customs resulted in a disintegration of tribal religions which stressed values like tribal unity, kinship ties and respect for elders. The members of different tribes were increasingly interacting in a non-tribal environment and participating in a modern economic system, seeking employment in new industries and services. Turner was fortunate enough to do his research amongst a people and in a region where the process of religious disintegration as described above was not taking place so swiftly and completely.

7.2.1 Geographical Setting and Economic Life

Turner did his fieldwork in the Mwinilunga territory, which was then inhabited by 18,000 Ndembu. These people were dispersed in scattered villages, containing about a dozen huts each, in an area as vast as 7,000 square miles. This area was mostly woodland, cut through by numerous rivers and streams.

The Ndembu have a subsistence economy. By that we mean that they produce just enough food for their needs. Women grow 'cassava' the staple vegetable food, in addition to finger-millet and maize which is used for making beer. Men hunt—hunting is a strictly male occupation and a number of rituals and taboos are associated with it. Let us now briefly describe the major structural principles along which Ndembu society is organised, namely, matrilineal descent and virilocal residence. This will help us go deeper into the heart of Ndembu rituals and religion. We will then be able to put our attention to studying the type of descent and rituals that are peculiar to Ndembu religion itself.



Tribal unity, kinship ties and respect for elders are the key religious values of
Zambian's tribals

7.2.2 Matrilineal Descent and Virilocal Residence

The Ndembu reckon descent from the female line. In other words, a child belongs to the lineage of his/her mother. This is known as matrilineal descent. In most societies with a matrilineal mode of descent, residence tends to be matrilocal. However, in Ndembu society, virilocal residence is the cultural norm, i.e. a male takes his wife to reside in his own village. This combination of matrilineal descent and virilocal residence results in certain complications.

Since a man reckons descent from his mother's line, he is entitled to a share in the property of his matrilineal kin, primary or classificatory. Simultaneously, he has the right to take his wife away from her kin to reside in his village. Thus, women, on whom the social continuity of villages depends, do not live in these villages but their husband's villages. Divorce and widow-remarriage are highly prevalent. So a woman is constantly shifting from village to village. Men try to keep their sons with them as long as they can, and the father-son-relationship is highly ritualised, as we shall see later. Competition results between maternal uncles and fathers for the mother and her children, owing to the strong 'patrilocal' tendencies in this matrilineal society. Spatial mobility of individuals, families and villages is very high in the Ndembu society. Villages are not stable, enduring groupings as they are in Indian society, for example. They are constantly being formed and dissolved. They are in a state of flux. Having briefly described the physical and social setting of the Ndembu, let us now acquaint ourselves with the major subject matter of this unit, the Ndembu ritual system. It is clear then that the whole concept and ideology of the Ndembu is quite different from societies in which the village is a stable unit of analysis, and not in flux.

7.2.3 Types of Ndembu Rituals

Victor Turner did 21½ years of fieldwork in Mwinilunga, during which time he observed, attended and gathered information about many Ndembu rituals. As he says, "It was an astonishing and enriching experience to note the contrast between the relatively simple and monotonous economic and domestic life of these hunters and cultivators and the ordered arrangement and colourful symbolism of their religious life." (Turner, 1967:87), Ndembu rituals are basically of two types according to Turner, namely : 1) life crises rituals and 2) rituals of affliction.

1) **Life-crises rituals** : These mark "an important point in the physical or social development of an individual such as birth, puberty or death." (Turner, 1967:7). In all types of societies, a number of rituals exist which mark the shift from one stage of life and social status to another. These 'crisis' ceremonies are concerned not only with the individuals around whom they are centered, but they also mark changes in various social relationships. To take an example from Indian society, the rituals of marriage mark a change in a person's social status. He/she is no more just a son or daughter, but a husband or wife. Relationships with parents, with siblings and friends undergo subtle changes as a result of this life-crisis ritual. The phase of irresponsible childhood and adolescence is over and the individual becomes a 'family man or woman'. Life-crisis rituals of the Ndembu include the initiation ceremonies of boys and girls. The form and purpose of these rituals differs with gender. Boys are circumcised (the foreskin of the male sex organ, (the penis) is removed) but the corresponding procedure, clitoridectomy (cutting off the female's clitoris) is not performed for girls. The initiation ceremony for girls called 'Nkang's' involves a day-long ordeal, during which the girl has to lie absolutely still for an entire day, covered with a blanket beneath a tree known as 'milk-tree'. Boys are circumcised collectively. Boys are initiated before puberty whilst the girls are initiated at the onset of puberty.

The main purpose of the initiation rite for boys is the inculcation of tribal values, hunting skills and sexual instruction, whilst the girls' initiation rites symbolise preparation for marriage and motherhood. Initiation qualifies a man to enter hunting cults and a woman to enter fertility cults. Whilst men's role as hunters is highly ritualised, women's role as cultivators is not emphasised. In a nutshell, initiation rites stress productive activity for men and reproductive activity for women.

However, one of the tribal values that permeates both the rites is that of respect for elders.

Activity 1

Identify any one life crisis ritual in your society. Describe the ceremonies involved and the changes they mark in the life of the participants. Write an essay of about 500 words and compare it, if possible with the essays of other students at your Study Centres.

2) **Rituals of Affliction** : Rituals of 'affliction' are roots in the major theme of Ndembu religious life, namely that; classes or misfortunes are associated with the activities of the spirits of the dead of "shades". It is believed that shades of dead relatives come out of their graves to trouble or afflict their kinsfolk because they (the shades) have been forgotten, neglected or displeased. Being "caught" or afflicted by a shade makes an individual, the centre of a great ritual gathering. If cured, one can become a minor "doctor" and later help to cure other similarly afflicted. As Turner says, "the way to religious fame is through affliction" (Turner, 1967 : 10). There are three types of applications identified by the Ndembu. These are as follows:

- i) A hunter's shade may cause problems in hunting;
- ii) A women's shade may cause reproductive disorders (like excessive menstrual bleeding, repeated abortions and infertility) in her kinswomen;
- iii) Shades of both sexes may cause illnesses like pains, shivering, loss of weight etc. to kin of either sex.

To handle these afflictions corresponding sets of rituals exist, namely, 'hunters cults' for i) above 'fertility cults' for ii) and iii) curative cults. Let us briefly describe these cults :

- 1) **The Hunting Cult** : As has been hinted at earlier, hunting is invested with tremendous ritual significance for the Ndembu. It is more than a mere sport or an economic activity, it is a calling. It is believed that a supernatural force "tells" a Ndembu youth that he is to become a great hunter through dreams about the shade of a hunter relative. These dreams are followed by bad luck at hunting, in other words, affliction. The afflicted hunter enters the hunter's cult through the performance of rituals. As his performance of rituals increases, his bad luck at hunting is believed to decrease, and over a period of time, he gains mastery in the art of huntsmanship. Mastery in huntsmanship is thus linked to greater and greater involvement in the performance of hunting rituals which the Ndembu believe confer increasing supernatural powers on the young hunter. This power it is believed, enables the hunter to "see animals quickly", "to draw them where is" and "to become invisible to them".
- 2) **Fertility Cults** : Turner attended a number of rituals concerned with reproductive disorders. His wife was often requested to assist in cases of difficult childbirth or abortions. The Turners observed that many women suffered from anaemia (lack of blood) and their diet too was deficient in protein, which is essential for good

health. However, the Ndembu attributed reproductive disorders to affliction by female shades who come out of the grave and 'sit' in the bodies of their female kin until placated by the performance of rituals. Most frequently the offended shade was held to be that of the women's maternal grandmother or the women's mothers who had been forgotten by the afflicted women. Turner regards this as highly significant. He explains that "...women, through whom succession and inheritance are reckoned, go to their husbands villages after marriage, often far away from their own villages, and may, in the course of time cease to remember their older kin on the mother's side who have died...being "caught" by a matrilineal shade serves as a sharp reminder that their own first loyalty is to their matrilineal villages and that they bear children not for their husbands, but for their mother's brothers and brothers "back home". (Turner, 1967 : 15).

- 3) **Curative Cults** : According to Turner, the 'Chihamba' and 'Kalemba' cults are the only thinly indigenous Ndembu curative cults. Other cults noted by Turner include 'Kayong'u', 'Tukuku' and 'Masundu' which have been borrowed from other tribes. In these cults, doctors administer medicines both to themselves and the patient, after which both undergo fits of trembling. The Tukuku and Masundu cults have become very popular in Mwinilunga, and are performed for patients suffering from tuberculosis (T.B.). It is believed to be caused by shades of Europeans and other tribals. As part of the treatment, European food is served, European dress is worn and European songs and dances are mimed.

Thus we see that for the Ndembu, ritual informs every aspect of life, right from individual life-cycles to illness and productive activity. Having gained an insight into the nature of Ndembu society and central importance of ritual, let us now move to the next section. This section will focus upon one particular ritual, already referred to earlier, namely Mukanda or the initiation of boys.

We have chosen the particular ritual because through it we can observe the various tensions and strains in Ndembu society. Simultaneously, we can also gain an insight into the forces of cohesion which make for tribal unity and solidarity. But before we begin, why not check your progress?

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) State whether the following are 'True' or 'False'.
 - i) Hunting is a strictly female occupation amongst the Ndembu.
 - ii) Clitoridectomy is performed to initiate Ndembu girls.
 - iii) Male initiation rites emphasise tribal unity and sexual instruction.
- 2) Complete the following statements :
 - i) In Ndembu society, matrilineal descent is coupled withresidence.
 - ii) Competition between ...and ...exists for Ndembu women and their children.
 - iii) The first phase of fertility rituals comprises of ... and ...

7.3 'MUKANDA'—THE RITE OF CIRCUMCISION

Before we get down to describing the Mukanda ritual, let us acquaint ourselves with the manner in which Turner defines and plans to study ritual. Turner defines ritual as "prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings as powers". In other words, the elements present in a ritual situation are certain prescribed ways of acting, the belief, that the occasion is 'sacred' or out of the pale of the mundane, profane world and consequently, the propitiation or calling upon of supernatural forces.

Box 7.01

What are the criteria Turner keeps in mind while studying ritual? He identifies three; the first is the external appearance. This is a purely descriptive criterion. The second is 'exegesis' or the interpretation of the external appearance offered by the participants themselves. The third criterion is the analysis of the anthropologist, which may at times contradict the analysis or integration of the participants. The anthropologist, Turner believes, is in a unique position. He has access to knowledge about the society under study which may not even occur to the members of the society.

Turner's treatment of the Mukanda ritual exemplifies the criteria outlined above. He presents Mukanda as a series of episodes based on his observations (external appearance) along with comments and exegesis of its symbolism by Ndembu participants.

Muckona, one of Turner's Ndembu informants, narrated to Turner the myth which is the foundation of the Mukanda ritual. The story is that once upon a time, a child was left playing in the grass by his mother, the sharp grass blades cut the foreskin of his penis! When the men of the village saw what had happened they completely removed the foreskin with a razor. The wound healed, and all the men decided to adopt the practise. Mukanda is thus a 'healing' process. Uncircumcised men are regarded as polluting because dirt gathers under the foreskin. A circumcised man is "white" or pure because what was once hidden and unclean is made clean and visible. **The social significance of Mukanda is the separation of the boy from his mother and his ritual identification with the father.**

As you have read earlier in the unit, Mukanda has a group dimension, i.e., a number of boys are circumcised together from a cluster of neighbouring villages which may range in number of two to twelve. As you have read earlier, villages have short histories. Vicinages are therefore highly unstable groupings, as villages often dissolve and disperse and may later get linked up with another vicinage. In each vicinage, at least two villages claim more superiority over the others. The struggle for prestige by a particular village headman may be won if he manages to organise a Mukanda ceremony. The successful staging of Mukanda helps a headman gain moral and ritual superiority over the others. Turner keenly observed the rivalries and scheming at work in the vicinage which made Mukanda more than just an initiation rite, but a trial for strength. We will not go into the details of these rivalries, but it must be kept in mind that a Mukanda ceremony has strong political undercurrents. Let us now read about the ritual proper.

A Mukanda performance is broadly divided into three stages. These are (1) 'Kwing'ija' or the stage of induction; (2) 'Kung'ula' or the stage of seclusion and (3) 'Kwidisha' or the rites of return to normal life.

Mukanda begins with a formal invitation to the Senior Circumcisor once the elders of the vicinage agree to perform Mukanda and the decision is endorsed by their womenfolk. The oldest and best developed of the boys to be initiated (the novices) is sent to the Senior Circumcisor. The boy, known as the 'Kambanji', abuses the Circumcisor thus, "old man...you have become lazy and your knife is now blunt. Nowadays you are no use at circumcising boys. Why should we call you to circumcise us at Mukanda?" (Turner, 167 : 186). Pretending to be very angry, the circumcisor tells Kambanji to inform the headmen of the vicinage that they are to make preparations for Mukanda. The 'Establisher', whose job is to organise supplies of food and beer for the 'Kwingija' or induction phase gets down to business. Mukanda has officially begun. From now on, the novices are to maintain certain food taboos.

7.3.1 The Stage of Induction

Before the rites begin, food and beer are stocked at the sponsoring village, and a camp-site is cleared for the novices and their kin. On the day before circumcision, the circumcisors set about preparing 'Ku-Kolisha' medicine whose ingredients are the leaves and bark scrappings of certain species of trees. Kukolisha is used in several episodes in Mukanda. Its most important ingredient is the bark scrapping of the 'chikoli' thorn tree. The chikoli tree has tremendous ritual significance; it symbolises the penis and masculine virtues of courage, hunting skills and endurance. Whilst the medicine is being prepared, the circumcisors dance and sing songs. The words of these songs reflect their power over the novice and the separation of the novice from his mother.

While the medicine is being prepared by the Circumcisors, the novices arrive with their kin. That night, all participate in a grand dance. The novices are carried by their parents as their feet are not allowed to touch the ground. Remember, they are at the centre of one of the most important rituals of their tribe, and thus have a very special status. Early the next morning (this is the great day that all have been preparing for), Ku-kolisha medicine is applied to the novices, their mothers and all the officials who will participate in the ritual. After being fed a big meal of fish and cassava prepared by their mothers, the novices go down the path to the circumcision site. They must pass through on the Mukula poles, symbolically enacting the shedding of childhood and entry into manhood. A Mukulu log is placed at the circumcision site. Small beds of leaves are made for the boys to lie on. As they are carried in, their mothers cry and wail as if at a death. Interestingly enough, the circumcision site is known as 'if wilu' or 'chifwilu', the place of dying. The circumcisors work in teams of three on the boys. After the operation, the boys are carried and seated on the mukula log and the blood from their cuts is soaked up by grass pads. Their penises are supported by strings so that they don't rub painfully against their bodies. After being fed sweet beer cassava mush and beans by their anxious fathers, they are lead back to the camp where their weeping mothers greet them. It must be noted that women are strictly forbidden from going near the circumcision site. Note how the world of men and that of women and infants is symbolically separated by means of these rites. Before we move on to the next two stages of Mukanda, let us revise what we have just learnt.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Staging 'Mukanda' is a trial of strength between Ndembu headmen. Explain in about five lines.

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- ii) Why is the 'Chikoli' tree used in Ku-kolisha medicine? Explain in about two lines.

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- iii) What are the main themes in the songs of the circumcisors? Give your answer in two lines

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iv) What does the entry into the 'mukula' gate symbolise? Answer in five lines.

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7.3.2 The Stage of Seclusion

The stage of seclusion normally lasts for a period of three to four months. However, in the particular Mukanda ritual recorded by Turner, it lasted only two months. Such long lasting rituals which take from 2-4 months to complete are very much an important aspect of Ndembu society. It also indicates to us that such tribal customs are very important for societal cohesion and specific role playing e.g. the role of a 'headman'. The building of the novice's lodge is the first part of this stage. The lodge is a crude structure built out of twigs and grass. Novices enter the lodge and eat and sleep in groups based on friendship rather than kinship. They are in the charge of a Lodge Instructor, who takes care of them, ensures that they maintain feed taboos. The secrets of the lodge may never be revealed, although this rule is being increasingly violated. Until the wounds of the novices heal, neither they nor their parents may consume salt. Parents must also refrain from sexual intercourse. Salt, semen, blood and intercourse are symbolically linked, it is believed that consumption of salt or indulging in intercourse prevent's the novice's wounds from healing. In the lodge, the values of discipline and obedience to elders are instilled into the novices. As Turner describes, "they had to maintain a modest demeanor, only speak when spoken to, fetch and carry as required at the double, and run errands". (Turner, 1967 : 236). Novices are given instructions by lodge officials and visiting elders. They are told not to steal or lie, or jeer at the aged, courage and hospitality are prescribed. When they have fully recovered both physically and psychologically, 'chikula' rites begin. 'Makishi' masked dancers representing the shades of dead chiefs of the tribe perform a dance. This dance symbolises the healing of the boys. Salt is then distributed to the parents who may now resume sexual relations. After the chikula rites are completed, the boys are taught tribal lore; riddles, proverbs, hunting dances and songs. They learn how to dance the 'ku-tomboka' war dance which each boy must perform at the end of Mukanda.

Activity 2

Try and collect some information regarding initiation ceremonies practised by any one tribe of India. Compare your findings with those of other students at your centre.

7.3.3 The Rites of Return

After their period of seclusion is completed, novices are decorated with patterns of white clay for their public appearance after Mukanda. This decorative disguise marks the fact that they are changed persons, especially for their mothers. They are no longer children, they have entered the adult, more moral, community. They are taken to their parents camp and greeted with songs and rejoicing. There is a night long dance in which the novices participate. This is a sight tabooed to women and uncircumcised children. That night, the boys are carefully dressed and decorated for the final grand celebration. The Lodge Instructor makes a final speech, commanding the novices to maintain food and sex taboos. The 'Ku-tomboka' dance then begins. **The performance of the boys is discussed and evaluated.** The boys then go back to their own villages where further celebrations will take place. The Mukanda officials are given their payment. Mukanda is over.

7.4 TURNER'S ANALYSIS OF 'MUKANDA'

To gain an insight into Turner's analysis of Mukanda, it is important to acquaint ourselves with the theoretical orientations that he brought into the field. One orientation could be termed that 'social structural' orientation. In line with this, he gathered data pertaining to the structure of the social system, namely, genealogies, political ties and divisions and the social characteristics of the ritual participants. The second orientation tilted towards unearthing the cultural structure. In this case, he collected details pertaining to the ritual itself, interpretations or exegesis of laymen and experts and also those items of secular behaviour that bore a direct relation with the ritual system.

Box 7.02

Turner's analysis of Mukanda locates ritual behaviour within its social context. In his words, "...it became clear to me that the events both in and out of a ritual context I observed at Mukanda were influenced by the structure of a field that included both ritual and social components". (Turner, 1967 : 262). Let us now briefly review some of the important points brought out by Turner in his analysis.

- 1) **Mukanda helps redefine parent-child relationships** : Mukanda modifies the mother-son and father-son relationships. In Turner's words, "...after Mukanda the relationships between occupants of these three social positions are guided by different values and directed towards different goals than those that prevailed before that ritual. From being "unclean" children, partially effeminised by constant contact with their mothers... boys are converted... into purified members of a male moral community, able to take part in the usual, political and ritual affairs of Ndembu society". (Turner, 1967 : 266). This helps to reshape links outside the family. Through the mother, a boy is affiliated to the matrilineal core of a village. Through his father, however he gets linked up with another village and wider social units like the vicinage, chieftdom and tribe. In Turner's words, "Mukanda strengthens the wider and reduces the narrower loyalties" (Turner, 1967 : 266). Although matriliney governs descent, Mukanda emphasises the unity of males, irrespective of matrilineal ties.
- 2) **Mukanda as a mechanism for restoring equilibrium in society** : Mukanda is usually called for when there is a large number of young "unclean" uninitiated boys "hanging around" the women's kitchens, prolonged attachment to the mother is regarded as dangerous and the boys are sought to be brought under the control of their fathers by ritually separating them from their mothers through Mukanda.
- 3) **Mukanda as a struggle for prestige** : As we have already seen, the holding of Mukanda and the obligations and duties. It involves, providing a mechanism through which rivals may claim prestige and assert their leadership. This gives them certain rights and privileges in any future event of religious or secular importance.

In a nutshell, the entire elaborate ritual of Mukanda is viewed as more than a series of ritually prescribed behaviours and symbols. It is seen by Turner in relation to and as reflecting the social setting in which it is embedded. Social structure and cultural structure are thus viewed by Turner in terms of their intimate interconnections. This is what makes Turner's understanding of ritual meaningful and insightful.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) What are some of the values imparted to the novices in the lodge? Use five lines for your answer.

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- ii) How does Mukanda modify the relationships between parents and their son?
Use five lines for your answer.

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7.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt about the part that rituals play in the life of the Ndembu Zambia as described by Victor Turner. To begin with, you were familiarised with the physical and social setting of this tribal group. You learnt how the conflicting principles of matrilineal and virilocality made Ndembu villages highly mobile and unstable. You read about the two main categories of rituals; identified by Turner, namely, life-crisis rituals and rituals of affliction and their corresponding cults. You read about how the circumcision of boys ritually enacted a separation from the mother and an identification with the father and the male moral community. You saw how Turner studied both the social and the cultural structure of Ndembu society and showed how the two are interlinked. You studied Mukanda not merely as an initiation ritual, but an event which helped redefine parent child relations, which brought about social equilibrium and was used as a device for enhancing prestige.

7.6 KEY WORDS

Exegesis : Critical explanation as interpretation especially of scriptures.

Initiation : To admit an individual into a fraternity, and society.

Seclusion : To remove a person to an isolated or a private place.

Vicinage : The neighbourhood.

7.7 FURTHER READINGS

Evan, M. Zuess, 1987. 'Ritual' in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, edited by Mircea Eliade, New York : Macmillan.

Leach, Edmund, R. 1961. *Rethinking Anthropology*, London : Athlone, 1968.
Ritual in *The International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, Edited by David. L. Sills. Vol. 13, New York : Macmillan.

7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) False ii) False iii) True

- 2) i) Virilocal
- ii) Maternal uncles, fathers
- iii) Treatment, dance.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Headmen of the villages in a vicinage compete with each other for moral superiority and prestige. By successfully staging 'Mukanda', a headman can claim moral superiority over the others.
- ii) The chikoli tree symbolises the male sex organ, the penis and the masculine virtues of courage, endurance and hunting skills. Hence it is used in Ku-kolisha medicine.
- iii) The main themes in the circumcisors songs are their power over the novices and the separation of the novices from their mothers.
- iv) Entry into the 'mukanda' gate symbolises the end of childhood and entry into manhood.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) In the lodge, the novices are taught discipline and obedience. They are told not to steal or lie, not to jeer at the aged and are taught to be courageous and hospitable.
- ii) Mukanda makes "unclean" children into purified members of a male moral community. No longer are they attached just to the mother and her matrilineal kin but are now in a position to get linked up with wider social units.

UNIT 8 RITUAL-II : A CASE STUDY FROM SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 The Setting
 - 8.2.1 Java's History—A Summary
 - 8.2.2 Society in Modjokuto
 - 8.2.3 Cultural Types in Java
- 8.3 'Slametan'—A Core Ritual in Javanese Religion
 - 8.3.1 The 'Slametan' Pattern
 - 8.3.2 The Meaning of 'Slametan'
- 8.4 'Slametan'—Two Examples
 - 8.4.1 The 'Tingkeban'
 - 8.4.2 Marriage—'Kepanggihhan'
- 8.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.6 Key Words
- 8.7 Further Readings
- 8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to

- briefly describe Javanese history, society and culture
- explain the meaning and significance of the core Javanese ritual called 'Slametan' with the help of two examples.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 7 you learnt something about the ritual system of a simple, tribal society in Africa. In this unit, the focus shifts to a complex society characterised by immense diversity in occupation, economic status, cultural and social patterns in South-East Asia. We shall look at some aspects of rituals in Java whose religion has been studied in detail by Clifford Geertz in his monograph entitled 'The Religion of Java'. This monograph first published in 1960 was the first of a series of monographs dealing with various aspects of contemporary Javanese life. Geertz did his fieldwork in a town in east-central Java which he called 'Modjokuto'. (It is quite common for sociologists and anthropologists to give fictional names to the people and places they study for reasons of privacy) Geertz's monograph deals with Javanese religion, not just ritual, but for the purpose of this unit, we shall concentrate selectively on his description and analysis of ritual.

We will begin the unit by giving you a brief outline of the history of Java. We will then move on to describe the economic and social setting of Modjokuto, as given by Geertz, and describe the three major cultural complexes described by him. This will be the first section. The second section will describe 'slametan' or the communal feast, which Geertz regards as the core ritual in Javanese religious life. Some types of 'slametans' will be described in the third and final section.

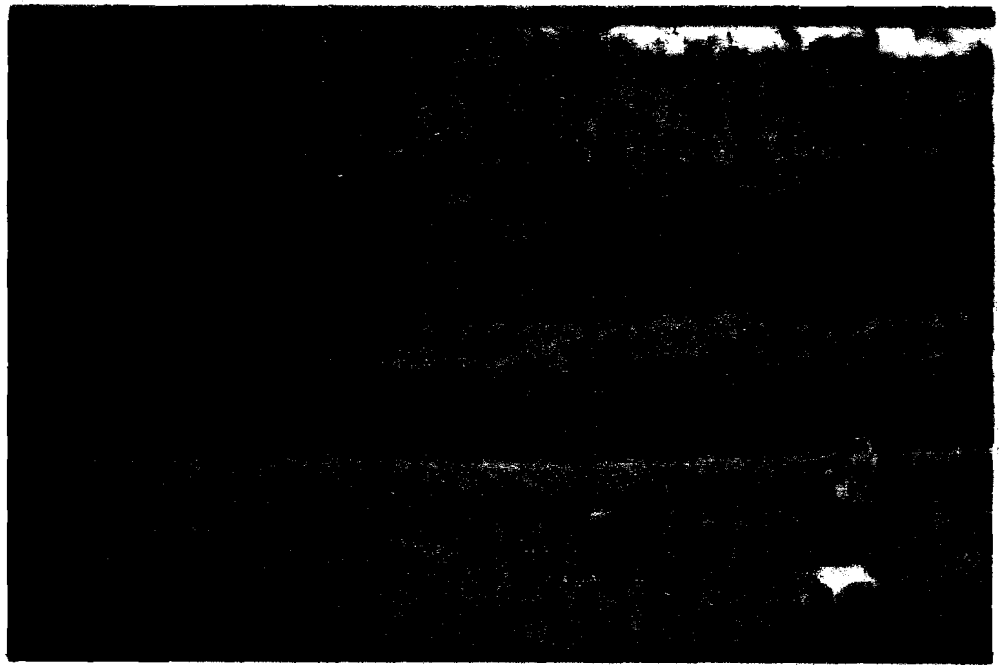
8.2 THE SETTING

Human habitation in Java dates back to pre-historic times. Indeed, the remains of

primitive humans ('Pithecanthropus rectus' or 'Java man') were found here in 1891. Let us briefly review the history of this ancient civilisation.

8.2.1 Java's History—A Summary

The island of Java forms part of the nation-state of Indonesia. It is regarded as the cultural, economic and political nerve centre of Indonesia. Indeed, Indonesia's capital, Djakarta, is Java's largest city. In the 5th century A.D., Hindus entered and settled in eastern and central Java. The Hindu-Javanese state of Majcpahit (found in 1293) marked the peak of Javanese history. In the 13th century, Islam was introduced and the Muslim state of Mataram was founded. Contemporary Javanese culture bears the stamp of both, Hinduism and Islam. 90% of Java's population is Muslim. 1596 saw the arrival of Dutch traders in the form of the Dutch East India Company which gradually absorbed the remnants of the Javanese empire. The company was liquidated in 1798 and Java came under direct Dutch rule, which lasted until 1949, when Indonesia became a sovereign country. It became a republic in 1950 under the leadership of Sukarno. Let us now focus upon the town in east-central Java where Geertz did his fieldwork.



Indonesian men and woman working together in their rice fields

8.2.2 Society in Modjokuto

Modjokuto is the commercial, educational and administrative centre for 18 surrounding villages. It had a population of about 20,000 of which the bulk was Javanese, with a sprinkling of Chinese, Arabian and Indian elements. Surrounded by thousands of rice-fields, Modjokuto's economy was a blend of agriculture and trade. The core of native commercial life was the market where daily, hundreds of Javanese men and women bargained and struggled to earn a living, trading all manner of goods, from textiles to fish to medicines and dry goods for a profit. In Geertz's words, "For the Modjokuto Javanese, whether buyer or seller, the market is the very model of commercial life, the source of nearly all his ideas of the possible and proper in economic behaviour." (p.3). Apart from agricultural and trading activities, white-collar office work is the third major occupational type. White collar workers include teachers and government officials, who form the intellectual and social elite of

Modjokuto. As Geertz says, they are the "...inheritors of a political tradition in which the ability to read and write was confined to a hereditary court class born to rule and venerated for doing so." (p.3). There exists a general attitude of respect and subservience of the uneducated towards the educated.

Geertz identified three main social-structural nuclei in Java, namely, the village, the market and the government bureaucracy. Each of these has a corresponding world outlook in terms of their religious beliefs and political ideologies. In short, they constitute three distinct cultural types. Let us see what these are.

8.2.3 Cultural Types in Java

The three cultural types each associated with its distinct social-structural nuclei are as follows:

- i) 'Abangan' tradition—associated with the village. Javanese villages are originally inhabited by people professing animistic beliefs. With the arrival of the Hindus, and later the Muslims, a syncretic tradition combining animistic, Hinduistic and Islamic elements arose. Geertz describes it as "...the island's true folk tradition, the basic substratum of its civilisation..." (p.5).
- ii) 'Santri' tradition—associated with the market. The 'Santri' tradition is associated with a more puristic version of Islam. It consists of careful and regular performance of the major Islamic rituals, namely, the daily prayers, the Fast and the Pilgrimage to Mecca. A whole complex of social, charitable and political Islamic organisations form an important part of this tradition.
- iii) 'Priajati' tradition—associated with the white-collar elite. The white collar elite descendents of the hereditary aristocracy (which was the only group with access to education) whose roots lie in the pre-colonial Hindu-Javanese courts. The Priajati tradition thus stresses Hinduistic and Buddhist elements. It is marked by a complex art of dance, drama, poetry and mysticism. However, colonialism and the Western influence has lead to this group becoming highly secularised, westernised and anti-traditional. Yet, the elite priajati life-style still remains a model for the entire society.

In a nutshell, then, the Abangan tradition, broadly related to the peasant element of the population, stresses an overall Javanese syncretism. the Santri tradition related to the trading section is associated with more puritanical Islam and the Priajati tradition of the elite group stresses Hinduistic and mystical elements. Geertz points out that this diversity does not suggest that there is no underlying religious unity in Java. His stated intention is "...to bring home the reality of the complexity, depth, and richness of their religious life" (p.7).

In this unit, we shall mainly describe rituals as performed by the Abangan section. But before we do so, why not check your progress?

'Check Your Progress 1

- i) Name the various belief-systems that have contributed to Javanese folk religion. Answer in about five lines.

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ii) What are the major elements of the 'Prijaji' tradition? Answer in about five lines.

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iii) What effect did colonialism have on the Javanese elite? Answer in about five lines.

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8.3 'SLAMETAN'—A CORE RITUAL IN JAVANESE RELIGION

The Slametan or communal feast lies at the heart of the whole Javanese religious system. The communal feast, Geertz points out, is probably the most common religious ritual in the world. The Slametan, in Greetz's words, "...symbolises the mystic and social unity of those participating in it. Friends, neighbours, fellow-workers, relatives, local spirits, dead ancestors, and near forgotten gods all get bound, by virtue of their commensality into a defined social group pledged to mutual support and cooperation" (p.11).

Amongst those belonging to the Abangan tradition, the Slametan still retains much of its original force and attraction, although its efficacy is no longer so great amongst the urban dwellers. Slametans can be given in response to any important occasion, be it a rite of passage (birth, circumcision, marriage, death) or affliction (illness, bad dreams, witchcraft etc.) or an occasion like shifting residence or starting a business. The emphasis, naturally, differs in each case. Let us now describe the usual pattern of the Slametan.

8.3.1 The 'Slametan' Pattern

Slametans are invariably held in the evenings, just after sunset and the completion of evening prayers. An auspicious day is chosen. During the day, the women of the household prepare food, sometimes taking help from women of the wider kin group. The ceremony is an all-male affair, women are expected to stay in the kitchen. The men invited are all close neighbours. The host's messenger (usually his son) calls them only 5-10 minutes before the actual ceremony. They must drop whatever they are doing and go to the host's home. Of course, it is usually a known fact that a slametan is going to be held, and the men are prepared for the invitation. At the host's house, the invitees sit in a circle, around the dishes of food that have already been placed in the centre of the floor.

The host opens the ceremony with an extremely formal speech. He expresses gratitude for the neighbours' presence and hopes that the benefits of the ceremony

may be shared by all. He then gives the reason for the ceremony (e.g. his daughter's marriage, his wife's pregnancy etc.). He gives the general reason for the rite, namely, to secure for himself, his family and his guests the state of 'Slamet'! **This means a state of physical and mental calm and equilibrium.** To achieve this stage, he appeals to the spirits of the village. Finally, he apologises for any errors he may have made in his speech, and for the inadequacy of the food he is providing to his guests. This formal speech is known as the 'udjub'.

At the end of his speech, the host requests one of his guests to give the Arabic chant prayer. On special occasions, the 'modin' or religious specialist may be invited to do so. When the chanting ends, the serving of the food begins. Each guest receives a cup of tea and a banana-leaf dish in which all the different types of food are served. The host does not eat. Each variety of food symbolises something special, as we shall see later in the unit. The host requests his guests to eat. They eat quietly (talking while eating is believed to bring bad luck) and quickly. After eating a few mouthfuls, they stop and ask the host for permission to leave. They go home quietly and eat the remaining food in the privacy of their homes with their families. Such community feasts and ritual are very much part of India's village traditions. Sociologists have discovered that such feasts are context-specific, addressing themselves to particular situations. The Slametan is over. What is the social significance of this ritual? Let us read Geertz's analysis of the meaning of Slametan, based on the views of his Javanese informers.

8.3.2 The Meaning of 'Slametan'

Why do the Javanese hold Slametans? A bricklayer told Geertz, "When you give a Slametan, nobody is any different from anyone else and so they do not want to split up. Also a slametan protects you against the spirits, so they will not upset you". (p.11). The wish for state of 'Slamet' earlier mentioned is defined by the Javanese as "gak ana apa-apa" which means "nothing is going to happen to anyone". The aroma of foods at the Slametan is considered as food for the spirits in order to pacify them, so that they do not trouble the living. It is important to note that spirits are seen as disturbing or disrupting to human and social activity. The Slametan represents what Geertz describes as "...a reassertion and reinforcement of the general cultural order and its power to hold back the forces of disorder..." (p. 11). **The Slametan also dramatises the values of traditional Javanese peasant culture.** The mutual adjustment of individual wills reflects in the way men leave aside everything else because they must attend a neighbour's Slametan. Self-restraint and careful control over outward behaviour can be seen in the formal interaction of host and guests. And, as Geertz suggests, Slametans tend to occur at just those points in Javanese life when the need to assert these values is at its strongest. In the following section, we will cite two examples of Slametan, both concerning life crisis rituals. These illustrations will bring not just the points mentioned above, but also the **rich syncretism** of Javanese peasant religion, that has been spoken about earlier.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) What do the Javanese consider the two main reasons for holding a slametan? Write your answer in about five lines.

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- ii) What is meant by ‘Slamet’? How do the Javanese describe it? Write your answer in about five lines.
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8.4 ‘SLAMETAN’—TWO EXAMPLES

As has earlier been stated, Slametans are held on almost any important occasion. Geertz categorises 4 types of slametans:

- i) those centering around life-crises (birth, circumcision, marriage, death),
- ii) those associated with the Muslim ceremonial calendar (e.g. birthday of Prophet Mohammed, day of sacrifice, the last day of Fast etc.),
- iii) the ‘berish de’s’, concerned with promoting the social integration of the village by driving out evil spirits, and
- iv) intermittent slametans, which may be held on rare occasions like departure for a long trip, change of residence, illness, sorcery etc.

For reasons of space, it will be impossible for us to look at an example of each type of Slametan. We will select two. Both are life crisis Slametans, concerning two of the most significant events in human life, namely pregnancy and marriage. You will see that the Slametan provides a kind of framework around which the details of the special rites are woven. Life-crisis rituals, in the words of Geertz “emphasis both the continuity and underlying identity of all aspects of life and the special transitions and phases through which it passes” (p.38). Let us now deal with the first rite.

8.4.1 The ‘Tingkeban’

The rites concerning birth involve four major Slametans. The first, called ‘Tingkeban’ is celebrated in the seventh month of pregnancy. The second one is held at birth, the third 5 days after birth and the fourth when the child is seven months old. We shall be describing ‘Tingkeban’—the seventh-month ceremony for the pregnant woman.

Tingkeban represents the introduction of the Javanese woman to motherhood. It is only performed for the first day. It is held at the home of the pregnant woman’s mother. The following major items are essential :

- i) A dish of rice for each guest with white rice on top and yellow rice beneath the white layer symbolising purity and love respectively. It is served in a banana-leaf basket held together with a needle so that the child will be strong and sharp of mind.
- ii) Rice mixed with grated coconut and a whole stuffed chicken meant to honour Prophet Mohammed and to secure ‘Slamet’ for all present. Two bananas are also offered to ‘Dewi Pertimah’—or Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet. This is a

classic example of the syncretism we have referred to. Fatima is converted into a Hindu 'Dewi' or goddess !

- iii) Seven small pyramids of rice symbolising the seven months of pregnancy.
- iv) Eight or nine rice balls symbolising the 'Walis', the legendary carriers of Islam to Java.
- v) A large rice pyramid to make the child big and strong.
- vi) A collection of fruit and vegetables which grow underground and which hang on trees. The former symbolise the earth, the latter the sky.
- vii) Three kinds of rice mush, white, red and a mixture of both. The white represents the 'water' of the mother, the red that of the father and their combination is believed toward off spirits.
- viii) 'Rudejak legi', a spicy fruit drink with pepper, spices and sugar. This is the most important Tingkeban food. If it tastes spicy to the woman its believed she will have a girl, if it tastes flat, a boy is believed to be in her womb.

You may have gathered, by now that Javanese peasants have a deeply-ingrained fear of spirits. At all Slametans, special offerings are made to spirits in the form of a 'sadjen'. The Tingkeban Sadjen offerings include string, incense, tobacco, betel nut, a weaving shuttle, an egg, etc. all placed in a large banana-leaf basket lined with bananas. This is kept aside for use in the ceremony proper. Once the introductory speech, the Arabic chant and tasting of the food is completed, the Tingkeban begins. It will be conducted by the midwife who will officiate at the delivery, the 'dukun baji'.

A tub of water (theoretically from seven different springs) is sprinkled with flower petals and scoopfuls are poured over the couple by the dukun baji who chants a spell for the well-being of their descendants.

The string is taken from the Sadjen and wrapped loosely around the pregnant women's waist. The husband then cuts it with a dagger (called 'Kris') while the dukun chants another spell for the easy passage of the baby from the mother's womb. Next, the weaving shuttle from the Sadjen is dropped into the woman's sarong (the sari-like garment worn by Javanese women). It is caught at the bottom by the husband's mother and cradled like a baby in her shawl. Next, two green coconuts, each decorated with the figures of a legendary couple Djanaka and Sumbadra are placed before the husband. He slides at each of them with a large knife. If both break open, an easy birth is predicted. If only one breaks, the unbroken one is said to indicate the sex of the child (a boy if Djanaka, a girl if Sumbadra). If neither coconut breaks, a long, difficult birth is predicted. We can thus see that the ceremony of Tingkeban is quite complex and very rich in the variety of food that is offered to the spirits and all those participating in it.

An interesting rite follows. The pregnant woman keeps putting on one sarong after another, pulling out the previous one from beneath. The seventh and final Sarong is made of heavy cotton which will not fade. It symbolises the lasting, life-long relationship between mother and child. In fact, the Javanese believe that keeping an item of their mother's clothing with them always helps keep a person 'Slamet'. This is because the child has rested for nine long months in his/her mother's womb, in a state of immobility which is compared to religious meditation.

The ritual ends with the couple serving the fruit drink (rudjak legi) to all present and receiving token payment. None of Geertz's informants seemed to know the

significance of this particular practice. Some said that the woman would use the money to buy medicines for her baby. Any other preparation (like making baby-clothes etc.) is frowned upon; it is believed to be unlucky. Thus we see that the Tingkeban ceremony stresses on those aspects which will pave the way for an easy birth and a healthy baby. Spirits are duly placated and deities called upon for this purpose. Let us now move on to one of the most elaborate of Javanese ceremonies, namely, the marriage ceremony. But first, check your progress.

Check Your Progress 3

i) When and why is Tingkeban performed? Answer in about five lines.

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ii) Keeping an item of the mother’s clothing is believed to keep a person ‘Slamet’. Why? Answer in about two lines.

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8.4.2 Marriage—‘Kepanggih’an

Until recently in Java, marriages were strictly arranged by the parents. But in recent times, personal choice and mutual understanding between the boy and girl concerned have become important. Nevertheless, the ‘lamaran’ or formal request by the boy’s parents is still carried out for appearance’s sake. Both sets of parents engage in a highly formal conversation and agree to a ‘nontoni’ or ‘looking-over’.



The boy and his parents visit the girl's home, and more polite formalities are exchanged, whilst the girl coyly serves tea and the boy has a sly look at her. If he likes what he sees, he tells his parents on the way home, and the marriage is set.

The marriage or 'Kepanggih' ('the meeting') is always held at the girl's home. A girl's wedding is the most important ritual she is entitled to (like the boy's circumcision) and her parents are obliged to do the best they can for her wedding. On the evening before the marriage, a Slametan is given by her parents. The groom is not allowed to attend. After the Slametan, the girl is dressed in simple clothes and made to sit very still in the centre of the house for about five hours. It is believed that an angel enters her, which is why brides look so beautiful on their wedding-days. While she is seated, her mother performs the ritual of purchasing large decorations made up of various plants called the 'Kembang majang'. Two each are bought for the boy and girl, which symbolise their virginity. The mother places two of these by her daughter and the evening is over.

At an auspicious moment the next morning, the groom sets off with his entourage to the office of the 'naib', the government's religious officer who has the authority to legitimise and register marriages. The bride does not go; she is represented by her 'wali' (her legal guardian under Islamic law). At the naib's office, the groom is made to recite the relevant Arabic passages, (which he then repeats in Javanese) he then pays the wali the 5-rupiah 'mas Kawain' or 'marriage gold' and the naib concludes the ceremony by pronouncing the boy and the absent girl married.

Back at the bride's home, festivities are beginning. The assembled guests sip coffee, munch snacks and socialise with each other. The girl is dressed up by her female relatives. Traditionally, the bride and groom were dressed up like a princess and prince with elaborate dresses, jewellery and make-up. Such traditional attire is only used by the Prijaji elite these days. Abangan girls use either western dress or more elaborate versions of day-to-day attire with flowers and a little jewellery. Many of us have attended Hindu other marriage ceremonies. It is clear to the viewer that the marriage rituals are highly symbolic and their being present in great density indicates that this ritual is a central one in many societies.

In front of the house, an old sarong belonging to the girl is placed. Beneath it lies a yoke for a pair of oxen, and on top a bowl of flower-sprinkled water and an egg are placed. Sadjens are placed all around the house to ward off evil spirits. At the chosen auspicious moment (when the boy's procession has returned) the girl emerges from the house, followed by two virgin girls carrying her 'Kembang majang' (the plant decorations earlier mentioned). The boy advances from outside followed by two virgin boys carrying his 'Kembang majang'. As they draw nearer, they throw betel-nut at each other. The one who hits the other first is believed to be the dominant partner in marriage. Geertz points out that girls make sure they lose this contest. Both stand on the discarded sarong, which symbolises the girl's nakedness before her husband and touch palms in the Islamic handshake ('salaman'). The virgin girls and boys exchange 'Kembang majang'. This symbolises the mutual giving-up of virginity. The girl kneels and breaks the egg on the boy's foot, indicating her loss of purity. These days, many couples avoid this rite as it runs counter to the notion of gender equality. Both stand on the yoke symbolising their unity and inseparability.

The bride and groom return to the house where they sit immobile receiving their guests. As has been hinted earlier, immobility is associated in Java with meditation and spiritual force, as "the major road to inward strength and outward power" (p.59).

The marriage specialist chants a spell calling upon the spirits to keep the couple

and yellow rice symbolising purity and love are served. Bride and groom taste food from each other's dishes, and then the boy's dish is inverted into the girl's, making them one. This is kept aside and when it starts smelling bad a few days later, the marriage is believed to be consummated.

The Javanese cite marriage and circumcision ceremonies as ideal examples of the value of 'rukun', which Geertz translates as 'traditionalised cooperation'. By this is meant that peasants interact with each other, combine into a group, not just for the sake of group solidarity, but their own material interests as well. The amount of hard work and expense that go into holding such a ceremony would be back-breaking without the cooperation of kin and neighbours. 'Rukun' thus serves the purpose both of individual material needs and social integration.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) State whether the following are 'True' (T) or 'False' (F).
 - a) In a traditional Javanese marriage, boy and girl go to the 'naib's office and marry.
 - b) The girl's wali pays the boy to marry her.
 - c) White rice at the Slametan symbolises love.
- ii) What is meant by 'rukun'? Answer in two lines.

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8.5 LET US SUM UP

We began this unit by describing briefly the history of Java and the specific occupational social, structural and cultural types Geertz found in the town of Modjokuto where he did his field work. We say that Java's tremendous cultural diversity contributed to the richness of its religious life.

Next, we looked at the general pattern and meanings ascribed to the core ritual in Javanese religion, the 'Slametan'. We saw how Slametans are employed at all important occasions where the values of integration and solidarity have to be reinforced.

8.6 KEY WORDS

Auspicious : having a good fortune, success or favour. We often use the phrase 'auspicious occasion' to indicate a favourable or a lucky occasion.

Commensality : coming together or gathering of individuals as an act of goodwill. In this context commensality means eating together at the same table.

Puritanical : One who professes strict moral conduct.

Syncretism : reconciliation or attempts to reconcile different belief systems.

8.7 FURTHER READINGS

Leach, Edmund R. 1968. 'Ritual' in *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* edited by David L. Sills, Vol. 13, New York : Macmillan and Free Press.

Evan M. Zuess 1987. 'Ritual' in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* edited by Mircea Eliade, Macmillan.

8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Animism, Hinduism and Islam, all have contributed to Javanese folk religion
- ii) The Prijaji tradition stresses strict adherence to the Islamic rituals of prayers, fast and pilgrimage to Mecca. It also includes charitable, political and social Islamic organisations.
- iii) Colonization and Western influence lead to the elite becoming highly westernised, secularised and anti-tradition.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) According to the Javanese, the main reasons for holding a Slametan are (a) making everyone feel equal so that they do not split up and (b) getting protection against troublesome spirits.
- ii) 'Slamet' refers to physical and mental equilibrium. The Javanese describe it with a phrase which means "nothing is going to happen to anyone".

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Tingkeban is performed in the 7th month of pregnancy for a first child. It is a ritual to introduce a woman to motherhood.
- ii) The nine months a child spends in the mother's womb are compared to religious meditation. The bond between mother and child is everlasting, and thus keeping some item of her clothing with oneself is believed to keep a person 'Slamet'.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) a) F
b) F
c) F
- ii) 'Rukun' can be translated as 'traditional cooperation'. This means that peasants cooperate during important ceremonies not merely for the group but because their own material interests are also at stake. 'Rukun' serves both individual as well as social goals.

UNIT 9 CIVIL RELIGION

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 The Concept of Civil Religion
- 9.3 Characteristics of Civil Religion
- 9.4 Varieties of Civil Religion
 - 9.4.1 Ancient Greek and Roman Cities
 - 9.4.2 France
 - 9.4.3 America
- 9.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.6 Key Words
- 9.7 Further Readings
- 9.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you will be able to

- define the concept of “Civil Religion”
- outline the nature and development of civil religion
- describe some of the varieties of civil religion.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have studied the comparative theories of rituals. The next two units have given you examples of rituals found in different societies through the two case studies on the rituals of an African tribe and of Javanese society in South East Asia.

The unit which you are going to study now is also closely related with the ritual and religious aspects of society. But how is this so? To answer this questions you must learn about the close inter-relation between rituals, both secular and religious, and the concept of civil religion.

In this unit, section 9.2 gives you the definition of the concept of civil religion. Section 9.3 briefly outlines the nature and development of civil religion and section 9.4 describes some of the varieties found in different societies during different periods of time. Finally, section 9.5 gives you the summary of this unit.

9.2 THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL RELIGION

What is civil religion? Why do we need to study this concept? Let us first learn about the meaning and definition of this concept. Civil Religion has been defined as “the religious or quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions found recurrently in the history of the political states” (Nisbet, 1968 : 524-527).

This regard for the civic values and traditions of the political state is expressed through special festivals, rituals, creeds and dogmas which honour great personages and events of the past. These persons, such as freedom fighters and social and political reformers and eminent Presidents like Abraham Lincoln are some of these who have played a major role in the socio-political history of their society. The same is true about the events of great significance to the state and society.

We can give the example of the celebration of our Independence Day, 15th August when our Prime Minister unfurls the National Flag every year on the historical Red Fort in Delhi. Another example is the Republic Day Parade celebrated on the 26th January every year. This celebration too is marked by a semi-religious fervour. It serves to heighten the sense of national and political identity of the Indian citizens. It reminds them of the sacrifice made by our leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad and several others who fought for our Independence.

This kind of semi-religious fervour in celebrating political events and birth days of great persons is found in all societies at all times. It is religious in the sense in which the eminent French sociologist, Emile Durkheim has defined religion.

According to Durkheim, a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things that is to say things that are set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. He says that cities and nations are just as susceptible to the nomenclature, i.e., naming of the sacred as are the social bodies called church. He gives the example of France during the French Revolution at the end of the 18th Century (Nisbet, 1968 : 524-527).

Carlton J.H. Hayes' in his Book *Essays on Nationalism (1926)* writes that if we examine human history, we will find that the mainspring of frequency and the force of human movements have been of religious emotion. It is very clear that nationalism had become to a large number of persons a veritable religion which was capable of arousing a deep and compelling emotion which was essentially religious in nature.

He wrote that human history reveals that human beings have always been distinguished by what is called a "religious sense". In other words, they are moved by a mysterious faith in some power outside of themselves, a faith always accompanied by feelings of reverence and usually expressed by external acts and ceremonials (Hayes, Carlton J.H. 1926 : 95).

It is in this context of the sense of religion, the feeling of patriotism or nationalism, of belonging to a distinct socio-political group that we have to understand the concept of civil religion. Civil religion is the religion of an advanced modern society with higher technology. As Nisbet mentions, civil religion has been a highly visible aspect of the modern national state in the West.

In the contemporary period, the most distinct form of civil religion can be found in the American society. You will learn more about civil religion in America in the following sections. Let us first understand the characteristics of civil religion.

9.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF CIVIL RELIGION

The concept of civil religion is not a new phenomenon. It has been present in many societies from ancient Greece and Rome to the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance in Western Europe. The ancient sacred kingship of the Mediterranean world had elements of civil religion, such as, the worship of the King or Emperor as a God. This feature has been characteristic of many societies, including our own, in the pre-British period.

The king was supposed to be divinely ordained to rule over his subjects. This aspect was highlighted by rites and ceremonies held at certain times each year. The "rajyabhishek" or the religious ceremony to crown a prince is an example of such a fusion of the political and the religious.

A similar example of fusion of the political and the religious is found in Japanese

history also with respect to the Emperor till at least the World War II. The nineteenth century historian, Fustel de Coulanges, has described in his famous book **The Ancient City (1864)** the civil religions of the ancient Greek and Roman city states. You will learn more about them in the next section of this unit.

As stated earlier civil religion—the quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions found recurrently in the history of the political state—has been a highly visible aspect of the modern national state in the West. Nisbet says (1968) that this was as a result of certain social, political and historical factors. During the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries destructive conflicts were taking place between the European Protestants and Catholics, the two main sects of Christianity. This period was followed by the period of the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment period refers to the Europe of the 18th Century which embodied the spirit of the French philosophers. It marked a radical change from the traditional thinking of feudal Europe (For more details see unit 1, block 1 of ESO-03 : Sociological Thought). During this period the traditional Christianity; as all other kinds of revealed religions; came under attack. This created a vacuum of belief among several groups in Western Europe. At this time efforts were made to establish faith in a deistic god, or a god of nature or progress. This was to replace the traditional conception of Christianity, but this move proved to be unsuccessful.

However, instead of this deistic god what proved to be more effective was the notion of **patrie**. This term was coined by the French philosophers. It refers to a new conception of the political state. For these philosophers a state was one which was paternal, that is, fatherly in its regard for its citizens. For many centuries, the state was considered more or less as a governing body which was the engine of warfare and taxation. Therefore, this new conception of state was a radical change.

Box 1.01

Rousseau, Jean Jacques (1712-1778) was born in Geneva. He spent a large part of his life in France but yet he always claimed a sense of belonging to his “fatherland” i.e. Geneva by using the title of “Citizen of Geneva” along with his name.

He lost his mother at a very young age. She died shortly after his birth. He received his education from his father, Issac Rousseau. Issac Rousseau was an able watchmaker but was an odd and temperamental man. He inculcated in his son at an early age the habit of reading.

At the age of 13, Rousseau by a chance of adventure left his native city for Turin where he became a Roman Catholic without being aware of what it entailed. He wrote at the end of his life that “I became a Catholic but I always remained a Christian”. In Turin Rousseau tried his luck to seek a new occupation from that of being an engraver. He got shelter and hospitality from one Mine de Warens in 1729 at Savoy. This was a decisive period in his life as a writer.

In his seminal work, **Social Contract** as in his other writings Rousseau reveals himself as obsessed with the demands of life in society, by the relationships of dependence and subordination which it creates among men. He was concerned about the rivalries and enmities which such dependence generates. Society which brings people together, in fact sets them apart and makes them enemies of each other. It is in these senses that he wrote the famous words by which he is well known till this day that “man is born free, but found in chains everywhere”.

Rousseau led a very turbulent life during that period of France when the intellectuals of France and other European countries were questioning each and every idea and conception of society. He wrote extensively and for a time was also known as a musician. His death came suddenly on July 2, 1778 in Ermenonville. He was a forerunner of the social sciences and perhaps even a founder. Emile Durkheim said that "Rousseau demonstrated a long time ago that if all that comes to man from society were peeled off, there would remain nothing but a creature reduced to sense experience and more or less undifferentiated from the animal".

Rousseau believed that to rise above this animal level human beings must relinquish the state of nature (Derathe, Robert 1968 : pp. 563-570. International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 13 & 14, Macmillan and Free Press).

It was the concept of *patrie* that Rousseau had in his mind when he wrote his seminal work in political philosophy, **Social Contract (1762)**. He is one of the philosophers whose ideas inspired many of the French revolutionaries including Robespierre. Rousseau has glorified people and what he calls "the general will" in this work. It is in this work that we first find the mention of the concept of civil religion.

According to Rousseau, the religious need lies in everyone. He believed that all the existing religions, especially Christianity, were inadequate in the ideal state. Therefore, he proposed a systematic civil religion "of which the sovereign would fix the articles". In other words, the political head would determine the articles of this religion and these articles are, as mentioned by Rousseau "social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject" (Nisbet, 1968 : 524).

Rousseau took the concept of civil religion very seriously since he even proposed sanctions against those who defaulted. These sanctions included banishment, that is, throwing the defaulters out of the community, and even death. These defaulters would be those who first accepted and then flouted the articles of belief which constitute the civil religion.

During the French Revolution, when it was at its height, from about 1793-1794 a civil religion was instituted. It was led by Robespierre and officially known as the religion of the Supreme Being. This religion worshipped the Revolution itself which was an event that had seized the minds of millions in the West. It has the political state, specifically the revolutionary state as the essence of belief and rite (Nisbet, 1968 : 524).

Activity 1

You have just read the section on the Concept of Civil Religion, nature and development of Civil Religion. From your own experience write a note of about two pages on civil religion in our own society.

Compare your note with those of other students at your study centre.

During the 19th Century the phrase or the idea of Civil Religion seems to have disappeared from the political discourse. However, the spirit or religion of nationalism continued to thrive according to C.J.H. Hayes. He believed that the most impressive fact of the present age, i.e. the nineteenth-century was the universality of the religious aspects of nationalism.

Hayes points out that there exists a parallel between the traditional Christianity and the new national or civil religion which emerged during this time. The "God" of this

civil religion is said to be the national state which itself had emerged in Europe primary due to the Napoleonic Wars. It was during this war that Napoleon spread the message of the nationalist slogan of the French Revolution to all the parts of Europe.

According to Robert Nisbet (1968) the flame of nationalist feelings found during the 19th Century Europe and United States carried with it an enthusiasm of a religious kind which differentiates this civil religion from the civil religions of the ancient and the medieval societies. He gives the example of Hegel, a German philosopher who declared the national state i.e. Prussia to which he belonged as "the march of God on earth". This personal opinion of Hegel may or may not have been accepted by the nationalists of Europe and America but the majority of nationalists came to perceive their respective nations as being touched by divine.



Traditional dance in Republic Day parade

This rise of nationalism combined with militarism and racialism, to a certain extent, became the reason for several mass upheavals or reactions taking place during this time. This kind of phenomena has been observed in human history only during the religious wars of the 16th and the 17th centuries in Europe. Nisbet says that most probably World War I represented the culmination of the nationalist religious fervour in Europe.

This religious fervour for one's nation and what it stood for came under question after the Second World War when rise of Nazi nationalism and the Jewish holocaust brought an image of fear and revulsion in people's mind against excessive patriotism.

Today we find that patriotism of the kind found during the World War I and along with it civil religion had declined throughout the democratic world. However, we can still observe some form of religious-like sentiment associated with one's regard for the nation.

In the next section, we are going to discuss the varieties of civil religions found in different societies, with special emphasis on the American society.

i) Define the concept of civil religion in about 8 lines.

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ii) Describe Rousseau’s ideas on Civil Religion in about 10 lines..

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iii) What is the religion of the Supreme Being? Describe using about 8 lines..

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9.4 VARIETIES OF CIVIL RELIGION

Scholars of sociology of religion such as, R.N. Bellah and Peter Hammond (1980) have found the existence of some kind of common faith in different societies particularly in Japan, Mexico and Italy. These societies had different structures in which this common faith was reflected. Bellah and Hammond also discovered in their cross-cultural comparison that none of these societies possess the full structure of civil religion as found in America. Let us examine some of these varieties of civil religion found in some of the societies during different periods of time.

9.4.1. Civil Religion in the Ancient Greek and Roman Cities

During the history of human societies, the explicit forms of gods of archaic religion had emerged due to certain circumstances and religious understandings. Bellah pointed out that various forms of social organisation are necessary for the emergence of a certain type of religious organisation on the form that it takes.

In this same context Swanson, a scholar who studied religion during the cross

cultural comparison, showed that in statistical terms the presence of a pantheon of gods as characterised by the archaic religions is closely linked with the presence of a number of groups of specialists within the society (Swanson, G.D. 1960 : pp. 82-96). He discovered that there is a pattern of development of superior gods within territorial consolidation and social and occupational differential of society.

According to Swanson, and another scholar Murray, this pattern originates from the family which is the ultimate sovereign group. It is in the family that the first religious practice is directed towards the worship of ancestral spirits or family gods or deities who protect the interests of that particular family or clan. The particular interest of the family is the particular interest of that family's god. This interlinkage becomes more and more differentiated as the societies become increasingly complex. In this evolutionary perspective of religion, the god of one family become associated with a particular occupational speciality.

With the emergence of larger social groups, scholars feel that some local gods may have merged with others to form the single god of the same occupational speciality or particular season. But this emerging itself depended on a clear idea of the final entity so that the process of merging stopped at some stage. Where a clear conception did not exist, the archaic religion did not reach its final phase of religious development.

However, in places where this final merger of local gods could not take place there the social and political differentiation in that society made it more natural for religious expression to take the form of a pantheon of gods. This is where we find the case of civil religion of the ancient Greece and Rome (Hargrove, B. 1989 : 109-112).

Religious practices were held in the family first, then in the city government in both the Greek City-States, as well as, Roman City-States. Each and every family of citizens who belonged to these city-states had their own sacred fires and appropriate rituals to propitiate their gods, for maintaining, using, honouring and renewing this sacred fire. But this ritual activity was conferred to only the Patrician families who claimed full citizenship. The class of Plebians and strangers were left outside the body politic because they in essence did not belong to, that is, had no part in this civil religion.

The plebians shared the religious ceremonies only if they came under the protection of a patrician family in a client relationship, with the patrician family being the patrons. According to Bellah, the most characteristic feature of archaic religions was the presence of the strong two-class system as found amongst the Greek and later the Roman city-states. The religion of the two classes also were not the same.

The upper classes believed that they had higher religious expression. In the Greek mythology we find a dual system of gods. There are the gods who have obviously developed from the primitive ritual divinities such as the mother earth, corn goddess of agricultural people and the lower classes, on the one hand, and on the other there are in the pantheon the Olympian gods of classical Greece imposed over the gods of the lower classes. The nature of these Olympian gods indicate the source of the conquerors who formed the upper class of the Greek society. They were the Aryans who invaded ancient Greece from the north.

Thus, civil religion in the ancient Greek and later Roman society, as reflected in their respective mythologies, reveals the importance given to the state and citizens of that state.

9.4.2 Civil Religion in France

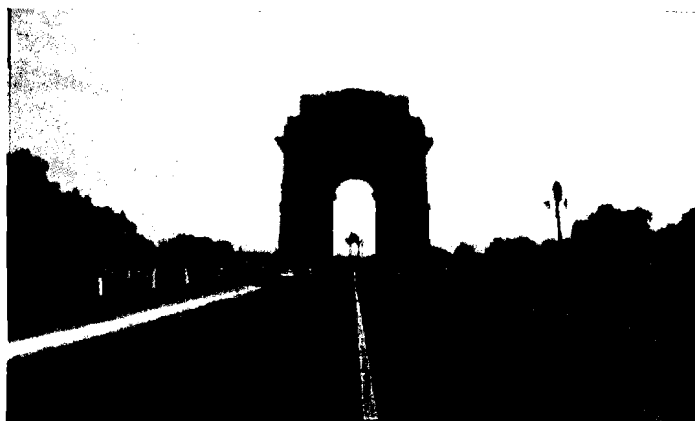
France during the 18th Century witnessed an age of not only socio-economic and political upheaval but also of religious skepticism and theological doubt. This period can be adjudged as the most crucial period in human history as it transformed the European society from a largely feudal to a democratic one.

It was this period of the French Revolution when intellectuals such as Voltaire and other “enlightened” literateurs came down heavily on “supernatural” religion and ecclesiastical institutions. They criticised and mocked Christian tradition as well as the Christian Bible.

Being influenced by the natural sciences, “reason” and scientific approach came to be held as a measure of judgement. In this mental framework, miracles, superstitions, traditional ways of thinking and believing all came to be questioned. Christianity was denounced as superstitious and its clergy as humbugs (You will get a clearer picture of this phase of French history and society if you go through the Unit 1, Block 1 of ESO-03 : Sociological Thought).

For the first time in the Christian history a large number of influential adherents to Christianity had come out openly in the criticism of the truth and the worth of its most fundamental tenets. As Hayes (1926 : pp. 93-125) pointed out, many of the 18th Century intellectuals perceived in the Trinity (i.e. the holy alliance of God, the Father; the son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost and in the Christian sacraments) only the vain imagining of dupes or hypocrites. They saw nothing in Christian Revelation or in any “supernaturalism” to which human beings could justifiably attach any sense of devotion or reverence.

The intellectuals of the 18th century Europe, especially France were logical in their arguments. They refused to follow Christianity. But yet, according to Hayes, these self same intellectuals did possess a religious sense which they have shown in many strong ways. They came to believe in a God of Nature who as he says “stated things which could not stop and who was so intent upon watching numberless worlds go round in, their appointed orbits and so transferred by the operation of all the eternal immutable. Laws which he had invented that he had no time or ear for the little entreaties of puny men upon a pygmy Earth” (Hayes C.G.H. : 1926 : 92-125).



Monuments such as India Gate in Delhi are respects of in icons in civil religion.

Box 9.01

Prof. Albert Einstein on religion :

The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed. It was the experience of mystery—even if mixed with fear that engendered religion. A knowledge of this existence of something we cannot penetrate, our perceptions of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which only in their most primitive forms are accessible to our minds—it is the knowledge and this emotion that constitute true religiosity; in this sense, and in this alone, **I am a deeply religious man** (Ref. Ideas and Options) (Points to Ponder, Reader's Digest, Oct. 1991 : p.127).

Hayes says that this God of Nature was very much inferior to the God of Christians but he was outside of man and these 18th Century intellectuals managed to develop a mysterious feeling about him.

The God of Nature was not the only power that these intellectuals felt a religious devotion about. Some of them also discovered and paid obeisance to a mysterious force outside of themselves called Science. Later it was found that when capitalised this Science proved to be but a theological hand maid to the God of Nature.

There was another “hydra headed monstrosity” which these intellectuals worshipped i.e. the Humanity. These intellectuals were especially devout people. This devotion could be because when the whole of Humanity is deified it will be having a far greater mystery and awe attached to it, than the conception of a single God, Man or even the Trinity.

Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the father of sociology too during the latter half of this academic career propagated a religion of the Supreme Being i.e. the religion of the Humanity amongst the intellectuals of France during the 18th century.

With the waning of faith in Christianity during this time and increasing devotion to Nature, Science, Reason, Progress, Humanity and so on, the intellectuals of this period were giving expression to their inherent sense of religion. During this very phase there was another sort of worship i.e. the worship of the Political State.

The French Revolution was a landmark in the development of nationalism as a religion. As you have already seen, the intellectuals of this period brought about a sea change in the ideas and perspectives of people regarding society, economy, polity and so on.

In the beginning these intellectuals tried to syncretise the 18th Century philosophy with Catholic Christianity in a state church so that it would become democratic in organisation and can be conducted in the national interests. A philosopher of this period Abbe Raynal said, “The state, it seems to me is not made for religion, but religion is made for the state. The state has supremacy in everything. When the state has pronounced, the church has nothing more to say” (Hayes 1926 : 101).

The twists and turns that the history and polity of France took during the revolutionary period too, reveals the nature of the development of the civil religion. It aimed to create a national clergy, under the control of the civil power, with the same standing as other state-officials. This move was however, resisted by the traditional clergy of France which had till then enjoyed very high status, and power.

The civil Constitution was condemned at Rome in April, 1791 and since then this issue was squarely combined in France between the religions of Catholicism and Nationalism. Christianity was not formally rejected but only the clergy who swore allegiance to the Civil Constitution were allowed to perform Christian services. According to Hayes, the Catholic churches in most parts of France were transformed into civic temples. By 1793 the persecution of the clergy who resisted the change began because in the minds of the French Revolutionaries the Catholic clergy as a whole had committed the greatest infamy of all of defying the national state.

Nationalism became a religion in the true sense of the word with the French Revolutionaries. These Revolutionaries believed that a miraculous regeneration would take place in France in the "new order" and this regeneration would extend to the whole human race. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was hailed as "the national catechism", and a sincere belief in this Declaration was prescribed by the Constitution of 1791, drawn in France.

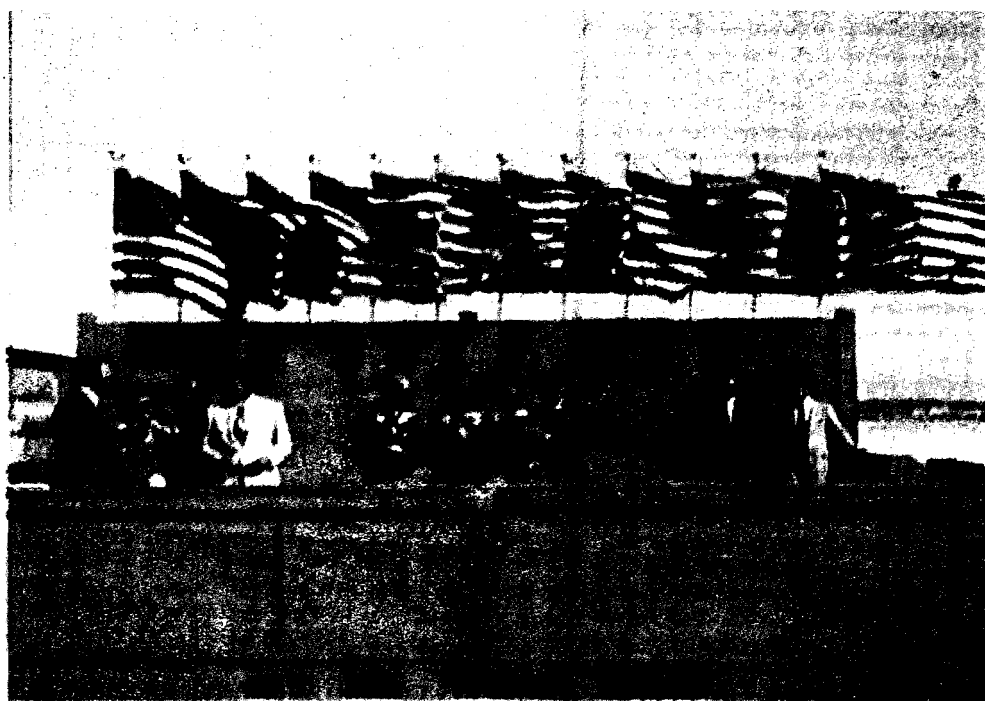
Those who refused to swear by this Constitution and what it stood for were cut off from the community by civil excommunication. The written Constitution embodying the Declaration, became holy writ.

Hayes writes that the religion of nationalism in France, and other countries of Europe, during this period, had lodged deep in popular consciousness. It emerged eventually in many strange forms opposed to the older philosophies and world religions as the most dominant religion of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

9.4.3 Civil Religion in America

Civil religion in its most crystallised and evolved forms is found in the American Society. The American society represents, in the most dramatic way the *religion of nationalism in the West during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.*

The religion of nationalism led to the rise of a political clarity in every country in



The flag of a nation has a complex ritual along with other symbols of national amnity.

Europe which was devoted to the nation in the same way as the clergy i.e. the clergy was devoted to the church during the medieval period. Children were now born into, and received their primary identities from the national state, as they had once been born primarily into the church. Birth, marriage and death all became a concern of the civil state. In the areas such as, family, school, and charity i.e. social welfare measures, the civil government began to take charge instead of the church.

In America the great events like the birth-days of great political figures like Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln came to be celebrated as solemnly as the feasts of the Christian saints and martyrs were once celebrated. Likewise, the great events of historical significance for the nation were also given a religious regard. The fourth of July, just like our Fifteenth of August, took on some of the same religious kind of significance as the Feast of the Nativity did in Christianity (Nisbet, 1968 : 526).

R.N. Bellah (1967 : 1-20) in his article on "Civil Religion in America" writes that "Christianity is the national faith, and others that the church and synagogue celebrate only the generalised religion of "the American Way of Life", few have realised that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well institutionalised civil religion in America".

Nisbet maintains that the American Civil religion had its widely recognised theology. One complete with creed, catechism and dogma. In America, as in many other nations too, a complex ritual surrounds the American flag and other symbols of national civil unity.

He says that during this period Protestants generally scorned the Catholics use of external adornments of faith such as, statues or idols of God, mural, portrait and so on. But yet they saw no harm in the use of these decorations where the worship of their nation was concerned. He says that in America it would be a rare public square which did not have at least one statue of some departed political saint. This is true of all European countries of that time.

We can find a resemblance to this in our own country. After Independence, the statues of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose and others who sacrificed their lives for India's freedom stand testimony to the great historical event of the struggle for freedom of our nation.

Bellah has examined the way in which Americans treat religion on public occasions in community life. He has analysed the inaugural speech of American Presidents to show the great significance of civil religion in America. He pointed out that words and acts of the founding fathers of America, especially the first few presidents, shaped the form and tone of the civil religion as it has existed ever since then. Much of this religion is selectively derived from Christianity but yet it is itself clearly not Christianity. Presidents like George Washington, Adams or Jefferson have never ever mentioned Christ in their inaugural address and nor have any of the subsequent presidents. But it is very significant that none of these presidents have ever failed to mention God in their speeches.

According to Bellah, the God of civil religion is not only rather "unitarian" but is also on the austere side, much more related to order, law and right of people than to the question of salvation and love (Bellah 1967 : 1-20).

Bellah examined Kennedy's inaugural address of 20th January 1961 and found the Kennedy mentioned the name of God in two or three places. Similar references to God is also found in the speeches of other Presidents of America.

Bellah says that the reference to the term God reveals the essentially irrelevant role

of religion in a secular society like America. The reference of God in this speech as well as in public generally indicates that religion has “only a ceremonial significance” : it gets only a sentimental nod which serves largely to placate the more unenlightened members of the community before matters of great socio-political concern are discussed by the President.

Bellah says that a cynical observer of these proceedings might even say that an American president has to mention God in his speech otherwise he will risk losing votes. An appearance of religiosity is a kind of unwritten qualification for the office of the American President.

Kennedy’s speech and his references to God, which reveals the essentially vestigial place of religion in America, raises some important questions regarding the issue of how civil religion relates to the political society on the one hand and the private religious organisation on the other. Kennedy, in his speech mentioned God only in a general sense. He did not use the name of Christ although he himself was a Catholic Christian.

Bellah says that Kennedy did this because the specific reference to the Christian religion or any other for that matter, is the business of the Presidents’ own personal life. It does not in any way concern the conduct of his public office. Thus the principle of separation of church and state guarantees the freedom of religious belief and association but at the same time it also clearly segregates the religious sphere, which is essentially private, from the political one, which is public.

However, the reference to God in the President’s speech is justified in the sense that the separation of church and state does not rule out the religious dimension from the political spheres. Despite the specific elements of religious belief of every citizen, the Americans in general have certain common elements of religious orientation which they all share. These common elements play a crucial role in the development of American institutions and provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere.

Bellah says that this public religious dimension found in American society is expressed through a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals which as a whole constitutes the American Civil Religion. It is in this context that the inauguration of a president is an important ceremonial event which reaffirms the religious legitimation of the highest political authority of the President.

Kennedy, in his speech said, “I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebearers prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago”. Here the oath mentioned is the oath of office, including the acceptance of the obligation to uphold the Constitution. This speech shows that beyond the Constitution, the President’s obligation extends not only to the people but to God.

Therefore, Bellah maintains that in American political theory, sovereignty rests with the people but along with that, implicitly and often explicitly, the ultimate sovereignty has been attributed to God. Thus it shows that the will of the people is not itself the criterion of right and wrong. There is a higher criterion in terms of which this will can be judged. It is accepted that the will of the people may possibly be wrong. The President’s obligation, therefore, extends to this higher criterion i.e. God.

According to Bellah, the whole presidential address reveals the theme or meaning which lies deep in the American tradition. This theme is that of the obligation, both collective and individual to carry out God’s will on earth. This was the motivating spirit of the founders of America and it still continues till today in every generation.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Give in brief the salient aspects of civil religion in the Greek and Roman city-states. Use about 10 lines.

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ii) Why did the intellectuals of the French Revolution period reject the traditional beliefs and ideas? Were they non-religious? Answer in about 8 lines.

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iii) Nationalism became a religion in the true sense of the word with the French Revolution. Explain in about 8 lines.

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iv) The public religious dimension found in American polity and society can be distinguished from the private religious dimension. Discuss using about 10 lines.

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9.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have explained the various dimensions of civil religion. Civil religion has been defined as “the religious or quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions found recurrently in the history of the political state”. You learnt that this concept was associated with a semi-religious fervour or regard in which political events and birth days or martyr days of great personages are celebrated.

Civil religion is not a new phenomenon but was found as far back as the ancient Greece and Roman Societies. In Civil religion we find a fusion of the political and the religious elements. This could be seen clearly in Japanese history till the World War II.

During the French Revolution the notion of “patrie” emerged. It was coined by the French philosophers and refers to the new conception of the political state. For them the state was one which was paternal in its regard for its citizens. You learnt about Jean J. Rousseau who for the first time used the term “civil religion” which forms a chapter of his seminal work in political philosophy, **Social Contract (1762)**.

Finally, in this unit you have learnt about the nature and development of the concept of civil religion in human history briefly. We described to you the varieties of civil religion found in :

- i) ancient Greek and Roman City-states,
- ii) French Society during and after the French Revolution; and
- iii) American Society.

As such you are now in a position to understand and explain the concept and reality of Civil Religion.

9.6 KEY WORDS

Civic : It is related with being a citizen.

Clergy : All persons, such as priests who are in holy order associated with church.

Defaulters : One who goes against the accepted rules.

Holocaust : The large scale killing of Jews during the World War II by the Nazis.

Human Movement : Due to certain socio-political or economic or ecological reasons when a large number of people move from one geographical area to another.

Hydra : an organism which has many tentacles or branches.

Patriotism : The devotion or love that one has for one's country.

Regeneration : The regermination or emergence of new social institutions, body of norms, values and beliefs after a period of decline and decay in a society.

Social Contract : An understanding reached by mankind to accept the norms and values of each other for congenial social existence.

Trinity : The holy alliance of God, the Father, Jesus Christ, the son; and the Holy Ghost. It is part of the Christian belief and theology.

9.7 FURTHER READINGS

Hargrove, Barbara, 1989. *The Sociology of Religion : Classical and Temporary Approaches*, Arlington Heights. Illinois.

Nisbet, Robert, 1968. "Civil Religion" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 1 pp. 524-527, Macmillan and Free Press.

Wuthnow, Robert, 1988, *The Restructuring of American Religion Society and Faith Since World War II*. Princeton University Press.

9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Civil religion has been defined as that feeling of quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions which are found recurrently in the political history of a nation. This regard has a religious or semi-religious nature and is expressed through special festivals, rituals, creeds and dogmas which bestow honour to great political leaders or historical events of great significance to the nation.
- ii) Rousseau, a French philosopher was the first one to use the concept of civil religion in his seminal work in political philosophy, **Social Contract (1762)**. He used this term as the title of one of the chapters in this book. He was influenced by the notion of "patrie", i.e. the new conception of the political state which implies a paternal or fatherly regard of its citizens by the political state as developed by the French philosophers. Rousseau took the concept of civil religion as fulfilling the need of human beings for the religious. He believed that traditional christianity did not fulfill this need adequately. Therefore, civil religion in which the political head would determine the components of this religion was an answer. This components would be the social sentiments without which a human being cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject.
- iii) The religion of the Supreme Being worshipped the French Revolution itself. As indicated, the civil religion emerged during the French Revolution when it was at its height (1793-1794). It was initiated by Robespierre, one of the French Revolutionaries and came to be known officially as the religion of the Supreme Being. It believed in the political state, specifically the revolutionary state as the main focus of and element of its belief and rites.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) In the Greek, and later Roman city-states the religious practices were conducted in the family first and then in the city government or the city-states. Each family of citizens of these city-states had their own sacred fires and gods and goddesses to propitiate. Family unit was responsible for performing the rituals for maintaining, honouring, using and renewing this sacred fire. However, as only the class of patricians i.e. those who were the lords and masters of the land were considered the rightful citizens of the city-state, only they had the right to participate in this civil religion. The class of plebians or the serfs were not considered citizens and as such could not participate in the ritual activity of propitiating their family Gods.

Sometimes they shared the religious ceremonies of their master but only as their clients.

- ii) The intellectuals of the French Revolution rejected the traditional beliefs and ideas as during the Enlightenment Period each and every idea came to be questioned. Nothing was accepted on its face value or because it was God given. Not only socio-economic and political ideas were critically evaluated but the religious ideas of traditional christianity also came to be questioned. However, as Hayes (1926) says this did not mean that these intellectuals were without religious feelings. For they developed a religion like regard for such concepts as “reason”, “progress”, “humanity”, “the Supreme Being” and so on.
- iii) Nationalism became a religion in the true sense of the word with the French Revolution because it was during this revolution that the worship of the political state emerged by the Revolutionaries. The Revolution itself came to be worshipped and the new Constitution and its symbols became part of this civil religion. A national clergy emerged under the powers of the civil state with the same status as that of the state officials.
- iv) The public religious dimension found that in the American polity and society can be distinguished from the private religious dimension. The first one is general and regards the nation and citizenship as the main goal of worship or religious rites and ceremonies while the second one is the private affair of each person as it is specific to their being members of a specific religion.

UNIT 10 RELIGION AND THE ECONOMIC ORDER

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Religion and Society
- 10.3 Religion and Economy
- 10.4 Religion and Capitalism
 - 10.4.1 Karl Marx (1818-1883)
 - 10.4.2 Max Weber (1864-1920)
 - 10.4.3 Comparison between Marx and Weber
- 10.5 Hinduism and Development
 - 10.5.1 Marx on Hinduism
 - 10.5.2 Weber on 'Hinduism and Capitalism'
 - 10.5.3 An Evaluation of Weber
- 10.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.7 Key Words
- 10.8 Further Readings
- 10.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

On studying this unit you should be able to

- describe the relationship between religion and the economic order
- discuss the role played by religion in the development of capitalism
- ask if capitalism failed to originate in India, because of Hinduism
- infer if Hinduism stands as an obstacle in India's path of development.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

As you know this course is about society and religion. You learn from these sets of units, the way in which sociologists understand religion—in terms of its origin, function, and organisation. Relationship between various social institutions, usually attracts the special attention of sociologists. Particularly in this Block 2, after learning about rituals, rites and practices, you are appraised of the relationship between religion and economic order, religion and politics.

Unit 10, draws your attention to the various aspects of relationship between religion and the economic order. After learning about the general aspects in section 10.3, relationship between religion and a specific model of economic order, namely, capitalism, is explained in detail in 10.4. Karl Marx and Max Weber have made significant contributions in this area.

The views of Karl Marx and Weber have special significance for India, hence we discuss their views with special reference to India, in section 10.5. You should be able to reflect, if there is any relationship between India's economic development (or underdevelopment) and Hinduism, after reading this unit.

10.2 RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Have you seen the film 'The Gods Must be Crazy'? It is an interesting film, which gives rich insights on the origin and development of religion. Broadly speaking,

religion is the result of man's attempt to understand the unknown. Religion involves fear of powerful supernatural forces.

As you know, our life is surrounded by mysteries. Death, birth, creation and life itself is a mystery. Religion tries to explain the mysteries which surround us. Religion helps human beings in facing the uncertainties of everyday life. From the beginning of sociology, sociologists have been interested in understanding man and religion.

Religion stands as a basis for our life and influences our words and deeds to a significant extent. It gives meaning to our life, through myths, rituals and ceremonies. It gives us a sense of the past and a goal for the future.

10.3 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 a 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. Meat may not find a market in a region dominated by people, whose religion strictly advocates vegetarianism. If conch shells are of much religious value in a society, they may be preserved or saved. 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. Classical thinkers like Karl Marx and Max Weber have pondered over this relationship, with special reference to capitalism. We will elaborate upon their views, in the next section.

10.4 RELIGION AND CAPITALISM

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 protestant sects arose in many European countries.

Many scholars tried to understand the relationship between capitalism and religion and in particular protestantism. Karl Marx and Max Weber are two scholars who shed significant light on this relationship.

10.4.1 Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Marx was concerned more with the understanding of capitalist order than with the understanding of religion per se. But in his general understanding of capitalism, Marx also developed a general theory of society extending over almost all social institutions, especially religion and politics. Marx's model of society had an economic base which constrains the superstructure constituted by religion, politics, arts etc. As a Jew from Germany, who had but long association with England, Marx owes much to his predecessors Hegel and Feuerbach, for his views on religion. In other words, Karl Marx's views on religion were largely a reaction to what Hegel and Feuerbach had written earlier on the subject.

i) Hegel

Hegel constructed the history of mankind as three stages in the development of the Absolute Spirit. What is this 'Absolute Spirit'? It is the force, which is the unity of the subjective (from within man) and the objective (that which exists outside man). To be simple, it is the dialectical unity of man with social and political order. In the first stage of historical development, the Absolute Spirit takes the 'art form', in the next stage it takes the form of 'religion' and in the third or final stage the form is 'absolute knowledge'. In the second stage, god appears to man. According to Hegel, during this stage, God's relationship with man is reflected in the relationship between man and man. It means two things : firstly, man's life is a material projection of the ideal realm (the divine); secondly, religion could be people's conception of themselves. Going by the first meaning, it can be understood that religion is the base on which many social institutions arise like superstructures. For example, Hegel opines that it was only due to the advent of christianity that a liberal political state became possible.

It seems there is a problem in Hegel's thought. It is true that Hegel dissolves the distinction between God and man. But, it also seems as though religious ideas are independent, as a superior guiding force which have an intrinsic value. This is questionable.

ii) Feuerbach

According to Feuerbach, religion is man's self-consciousness in an object form. God is a projection of purely human qualities in a distant beyond, which stands above and against the individual human reality. Knowledge of God is self-knowledge and consciousness of God is self-consciousness. Man's thoughts are his Gods. Through God, it is possible to understand man's god. Religion, in the thought of Feuerbach, reveals what a man thinks about himself. According to Feuerbach, the roots of religious ideas lie within individual psyche. Since man's capacity to attain what he wants is limited, he creates an omnipotent God, who is perfect and bears all superlatives. The misery of life impels man to seek for an after-life. Feuerbachian thesis, ultimately states that, man's consciousness has to be changed, so that the qualities he attributes to God can be restored back to him.

iii) Critiquing Hegel and Feuerbach

Karl Marx proceeded a step further than that of Feuerbach. He asks : "What are the social conditions which push the man to go in search of religion?". This question

is natural, considering the basic dictum of Marx's thought. As you know, according to Marx, society determines man's consciousness. Hence, the misery which necessitates religion comes not just from within the individual—but from specific exploitative social conditions. Thus religion is anchored in the society, in Marx's thought.

Broadly speaking, Marx's views on religion and its relationship with capitalism has three themes : Firstly, religion is an illusion which veils real exploitative conditions in society; Secondly, religion is a mode of protest albeit in a mild form and it is a form of alienation; Thirdly, religion can be discarded not through a critique of religion, but only changing the societal conditions which give rise to religion.

iv) **Marx : Religion is an ideology**

Religion has a double-function. It acts as an ideology (political ideas of a social class) of the ruling elite. It acts as an opiate of the masses. Much of Marx's understanding of religion seems to have arisen out of his experience of Protestantism of the Prussian state in the early nineteenth century. Marx was critical of the Prussian state which promoted Protestantism, because it helped the state to justify the economic inequalities. It can also be said that protestantism acted as an ideology of the new class which emerged at the break-down of feudalism.

v) **Marx : Religion is a Form of Alienation**

Marx also understood religion as a form of alienation characteristic of the commodity-producing, capitalist society. As you know, a commodity is a product of men's labour. In a commodity, the social character of labour appears as an object. Here, the relationship between producers and their own labour is presented as a relationship not between themselves, but between the **products** of their own labour. Commodities, then are social things whose qualities cannot be understood through the senses—the relationship between human beings become relations between things. Commodities thus become independent. In the same way, religion which is product of man's alienated labour, becomes independent and begins to reign over him. The social relations of man appear as relations of alien objects—both in the world of commodities and the in the world of religion. Thus out of man's alienation, relation arises.

Box 10.01

“Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against the real distress”, says Marx (1975 : 39). This protest does not aim at real conditions of exploitation in society—rather it is directed towards an imaginary construction. Thus men become slaves of what they themselves produce as religion. Religion, here acts as opium because it is an escape mechanism from the misery; it gives illusory happiness; it veils effectively the conditions of exploitation in the society.

When all forms of exploitation are destroyed, there is no need for religion. When men enter into relationships as free individuals—there is no misery—and hence there is no need for religion, says Marx, “The struggle against religion is... indirectly a fight against the world of which religion is the spiritual aroma” (1975 : 38).

10.4.2 Max Weber (1864-1920)

Max Weber is another German scholar, who tried to understand the origins of capitalism, in Europe. Rationalization or Rationality is the unifying theme of Weberian scholarship. Rationalization indicates two almost simultaneous processes : firstly, the displacement of magical elements of thought and secondly, the process in which ideas attain systematic coherence and naturalistic consistency (Gerth & Mills 1952 : 51).

Weber applies his concept of rationalization to understand changes in religion, science, arts, administration and politics. For Weber, capitalism itself was born out of a highest degree of economic rationalization.

Weber argues and demonstrates that ideas can become motor forces in the development process. In the development of capitalism, the ideas supplied by the protestant sects played a major role. Max Weber's 'Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism' was published in German between 1904 and 1905. Since then it has been a subject of debate among social scientists all over the world. Especially, after the Second World War, the debate has earned the attention of third world scholars.

i) West and the East

When contrasted with the East, Weber finds that rationalization has reached a high degree only in the West. Take for example, science, Weber says that only in the Western civilization, science has reached a high stage of development. In his eyes, though India, China and Egypt had great traditions of knowledge, due to the lack of experimental method, they lagged behind in economic development. In various spheres such as music, architecture, legal system, printing system, bureaucracy and capitalism, the West has reached a higher degree of rationalization. Weber points to three aspects, which mark the emergence of rational capitalism : firstly, "rational capitalistic organization of free labour", secondly, "rational industrial organization tuned to regular market" and thirdly "technical utilization of scientific knowledge". Cost-benefit calculation, book-keeping, counting of balance are some indicators of capitalistic organization. Before the arrival of capitalism, there were many magical and religious forces. The protestantism gave rise to an economic spirit, which could overtake all the traditional magico-religious forces and thus paved the way for capitalism.

ii) Catholics and Protestants

Catholics and Protestants were deeply influenced by their religious beliefs in the choice of occupation and type of education. Citing data, Weber says that while protestants sent their children to technical institutions, industrial and commercial training institutes, the catholics sent their children only to humanities education. Protestants outnumber Catholics, among the skilled labourers and administrators.

iii) Spirit of Capitalism

Protestantism, especially Calvinism had an economic ethic conducive for the development of capitalism. "The term 'economic ethic' points to the practical impulses for action which are founded in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of religion" (Weber 1952 : 267). The words of Benjamin Franklin such as "Time is Money", "Credit is Money" and "Money can beget money" capture the essence of ascetic protestantism. Earlier in a traditional set-up, people earned for living. But now after the arrival of protestantism, earning becomes a virtue; an end in itself; it shows one's proficiency in his "calling". The labour too becomes an end in itself. After Protestantism, people earned a lot but did not spend lavishly, people worked hard but did not consume luxuriously. This 'spirit of capitalism', had its roots in ascetic protestantism, whose adherents mainly were the rising strata of the lower industrial middle classes.

iv) Sense of Calling

There are major differences in understanding 'calling' as well as 'labour', between catholicism, lutheranism, and calvinism. For the catholic church, calling meant the renunciation of the world in favour of monastic asceticism, whereas for Luther,

'calling' meant the fulfillment of obligations attached to one's position. 'Labour' is the 'product of selfishness' according to catholicism, and it is an 'expression of brotherly love' according to Lutheranism. Luther said that the division of labour, forces every individual to work for others. Luther's concept of 'calling' only means that one has to accept his position in the world and hence its 'economic ethic' was not progressive. It was Calvin, whose interpretation of 'calling', coupled with the 'Doctrine of Predestination', generated intense drive for development of capitalism in countries like Holland, Netherlands, Switzerland etc.

v) Calvinism and Wordly Asceticism

The 'Doctrine of Predestination' holds the key, to the understanding of capitalist spirit generated by calvinist ethic. The doctrine of predestination states that God has already chosen some men for eternal life (salvation) and some men for eternal death (condemnation). Those who are chosen by God form the invisible church of God. According to Calvin, it is impossible to know God's plan and it is not good to know that. Because, God's grace will not be available to those who are not chosen by them for salvation, whatever they might do. Man has to believe that he is chosen by God and has to work for the glory of God, and thus prove his 'faith'.

The doctrine of predestination creates many social psychological impacts : firstly, the individual is left alone because there is nobody to mediate between him and the God, neither the priest nor the church; secondly, the individual has to find his ways himself, for there is no magical way to attain salvation, like sacraments, religious ceremonies, etc. Now, every Puritan has only one question, at his heart, "Am I one of the God's chosen people?" But, there is no answer for this question; not even through one's deeds can you guess whether he or she is chosen.

The only option left for the Puritan is to believe that he is chosen. Believing so, he has to avoid all sensuous pleasures and enjoyments and has to fight against all sorts of temptations with confidence. The only way to gain this confidence, is hard work for the glory of God. In doing so, it is established that God is acting through the hardworking, confident, ascetic puritan. A puritan has to create the conviction of salvation for himself, and behave carefully at every step in life, for if he commits mistakes there is no place for repentance and rectification. A puritan practices self-control, but works tirelessly to demonstrate his 'faith' that he is one among the chosen.

When a puritan works hard and earns a lot of money, but avoids luxury, naturally capital accumulates. This can be used for further productive investment. Weber cites Holland, as a typical example of a country in which this process took place. Weber could trace, similar stands of asceticism in other protestant sects like Pietism, Methodism, Baptist Sects etc. but when compared to Calvinism, the impulses generated by their ethic was very weak.

Thus the protestant sects had an economic ethic, which helped the growth of capitalism, particularly in Western European countries.

10.4.3 Comparison between Marx and Weber

Birnbaum (1953) points to many similarities between Marx and Weber. Some of them are important ones and worth citing : Firstly, both Marx and Weber agreed that capitalism is not a mere economic system, but it permeates and spreads throughout the society; secondly, both of them agreed that 'social values' which were necessary for the growth of capitalism were not 'natural' but the outcome of historical development; thirdly, both of them agreed that the "new capitalist entrepreneurial classes did not come from the pre-capitalist financial or merchant classes... (rather) the new capitalist class was a rising one..." Apart from these,

it also seems that both Weber and Marx were convinced of the 'end of religion' in the future.

The major difference is that, while Marx considered ideas to be simple reflections of social and economic realities, Weber considered ideas to be important for development. Weber did not establish a one-to-one relationship between religion and development. Weber's thesis allows us to say that, after a certain stage of development, religion may serve as the ideology of those who benefitted out of the development. Another difference between Marx and Weber is that, while Weber asserted the criticism of religion from within, Marx ruled that out. For Marx, the criticism of religion is possible from outside the religion. Moreover, Marx's view of religion as a veiling mechanism applies to all ages, societies and cultural systems, whereas Weber's view of religion as a bearer of ideas for potential development applies to specific historical-cultural systems. In Weber's thesis, we find the emphasis on 'individual', in Marx we do not find the same.



Karl Marx (L) and Max Weber (R)

Apart from the above specific differences between Weber and Marx on understanding religion, there are several general differences. For Marx, history is divided into many epochs, characteristic of particular way of the distribution of ownership of means of production. Capitalism is one such epoch in history. Whereas for Weber, capitalism is the specific stage one long drawn out historical process called 'rationalization'. Capitalism is not just an economic system or social system alone for Weber, for him capitalism is also a cultural system marked by rationalization in all walks of life—namely, administration, judiciary, science etc.

Activity 1

Try to meet some wealthy businessman or traders in your area and ask them about their views on religion. Also observe their religious practices.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark a T or F against each statement :
 - a) Economics is generally a matter of production and distribution.
 - b) According to Feuerbach, religion is outside the individual psyche.
 - c) Marx said that religion is a reflex of the real world.
 - d) It is possible to know, whom God has selected for 'eternal life (or) salvation'.
- 2) Give answers for the following questions. Follow the instructions carefully :
 - i) answers are hidden in the unit itself
 - ii) answers must be brief and precise

- a) What is the similarity between commodity and religion? Use five lines for your answer.

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- b) What is Marx's view on the end of religion. Use five lines for your answer.

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- c) What are the social impacts of the doctrine of predestination? Use five lines for your answer.

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- d) How does the concept of 'calling' differ between Luther and Calvin? Use five lines for your answer.

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- e) Define rationalization. Use five lines for your answer.

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10.5 HINDUISM AND DEVELOPMENT

As you know, this unit appraises you about several strands of relationship between religion and the economic order. In the section 10.4, the ideas of Karl Marx and Marx Weber were presented to you. Karl Marx viewed religion as an effect of alienation and Marx Weber argued that the protestant sects were able to supply ideas to facilitate the growth of capitalism. India and Hinduism has earned considerable attention from both the scholars. Marx argued Hinduism as a natural consequence

of stagnant type of social organization and Weber postulated that Hinduism like many Eastern religions lacks an ethic, conducive for the development of capitalism. This section elaborates their views, and presents some of the reactions to their scholarship.

10.5.1 Marx on Hinduism

Karl Marx had a very limited access to knowledge about India. His sources were travelogues, diaries and reports written by British colonial administrators. From these sources, Marx understood Hinduism as Worship of nature and India as an aggregate of self-sufficient 'little communities'. What interested Marx, in Hinduism was its extreme sensualism on the one side and self-torturing asceticism on the other side. Marx explained these kind of extremes were a natural consequence of a stagnant type of social organization, characterized by community ownership of land—namely, 'village republics'. The type of social organization that India had, subordinated man to external forces and as a result there arose nature worship. He argued that the village republics were mainly responsible for committing Indian minds to superstition. Marx postulated that Hinduism might 'die' when the village republics will be dissolved under the impact of colonialism.

The 'bias' inherent in Marx's sources of data has been pointed out. Many studies have shown that India was not a 'stagnant society', or for that matter even the 'little communities'. The villages were never self sufficient and people had to move out of their village for marriage affiliations, market operations and pilgrimages. Village boundaries were always intersected by ties of kinship, occupational and religious contacts. In contradiction to Marx's prediction, Hinduism has survived for many centuries in this continent—though it changes its forms, as some scholars point out. Also, it is widely pointed out that Marx failed to see Hinduism as an instrument of exploitation or control as he did in the case of Western religions.

10.5.2 Weber on 'Hinduism and Capitalism'

In the sub-section 10.4.2 it was explained that Weber could see strands of ascetic protestantism supplying ideas conducive for the origin and development of capitalism. As a sequel to that Weber argued that, the Eastern religious including Hinduism lacked an ethic conducive for the origin of capitalism. Weber's view on Hinduism, was formulated through his understanding of 'power structure' in Indian society and the 'economic ethic' embodied in the 'caste system' and 'Karma Philosophy'.

Box 10.02

Weber believed that Brahmins dominated the power structure in Indian society. Only the Brahmins, who were educated in Vedas, were the highest status group. Brahmins were the ones, towards whom vertical division of society was oriented. Society was divided into hereditary, occupational groups whose statuses were determined as per their proximity/distance from the Brahmins. Since the Brahmins has the 'ritually' sanctioned dominance over the society, they influenced the practical ethic of Hinduism. The practical ethic, shaped by the Brahmins involved much mysticism and magical elements. Purity and pollution were the major magical elements introduced by the Brahmins. Mysticism, directed the attention of religion towards 'salvation' and inner-wordly (at heart) asceticism. With the help of mysticism and magical elements, Brahmins kept vast mass of people servile to them.

'Karma' and the 'caste system' further supplemented this power structure. 'Caste system' was irrational and hence prevented the origin of capitalism in India. How? Firstly, caste system fixed millions of people as servile labourers attached to their upper caste masters'. Secondly, caste system conferred status on one group and heaped multiple disadvantages for other groups; thirdly, the vertical division of humanity into occupational groups had ritual and religious sanctions. The religious sanction, **stabilised** the caste system; fourthly, since the caste system was hereditary and within it, the occupation, the occupational mobility was prevented. Occupational divisions become stable, when groups monopolies certain kinds of occupations. The Karma philosophy, as per the understanding of Weber, is the belief that actions of this-world/this-life has a consequence for the next-life. Karma is a cycle of rebirth, which guarantees status mobility for the individual in the next birth on the basis of his performance of his duty in this-life. If somebody sincerely carries out the duties assigned through his caste position, his position in the (ritual) status hierarchy will be better in the **next birth**. What is the social impact of Karma philosophy? It prevents the individual from searching for better occupations—it confines him to what is assigned to him through his caste position.

Thus the power structure, coupled with the caste system and Karma philosophy generate a 'spirit' which impedes the development of capitalism in India.

Activity 2

Try to find out which religious community or caste community is influential in business/trade in your town/city. Find out, in what/which trade they are influential and how?

10.5.3 An Evaluation of Weber

Weber's thesis on Hinduism has been refuted by many scholars. Rao (1969) points out many problems in Weber's analysis: Firstly, Weber's units of comparison were mistaken. Like he studied protestant sects, he should have studied a Hindu sect and tried a comparison secondly, Weber's understanding of 'Karma' is partial and it takes into account the interpretation of only a single school of thought, when there are many; fourthly, most of such views constructed from religious texts, consider ideas to be stable and unchanging throughout history, which is wrong.

Most of Weber's arguments have been defeated over the development in the past forty years of Indian independence. By now various studies have established that traditional institutions like joint family and caste have well adapted themselves to development. Caste associations have helped in spreading education, caste communities have helped in building textile industries in Western India. Joint family has adapted to the modern corporate sector (Singer 1972) in Madras. Many studies done in 1950s and 1960s, showed that Indian farmers were very receptive to modern methods of agriculture, especially the 'Green Revolution' technology.

Weber mistakenly held that 'Hinduism' is a homogenous, monolithic religion. Due to his mistaken view, he postulated 'one' spirit for Hinduism, which is again unacceptable. Hinduism is heterogenous, with diverse systems of philosophy, and culture. Within Hinduism itself, there have arisen many sects, which have some similarities with the protestant ethic. Veera Saivism or Lingayatism of the 12th century Karnataka, opposed the idea of ritual pollution, preached that 'work is heaven' and advocated self-control. Scholarly studies establish that Lingayats (members of the sect 'Lingayatism') are very active in many entrepreneurial ventures.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Match the following :

- a) Karl Marx : i) "Work is Heaven"
- b) Max Weber : ii) Joint family adapts itself to modern corporate sector
- c) Milton Singer : iii) Hinduism will die because of colonialism
- d) Veera Saivism : iv) Karma philosophy obstructs development.

2) Give answers for the following questions. Follow the instructions carefully :

- i) answers are hidden in the unit itself
- ii) answers must be brief and precise.
- a) Explain Marx's views on Hinduism. Use five lines for your answer.

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- b) What is the social impact of Karma Philosophy? Use five lines for your answer.

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- c) Can any one agree with Max Weber on his view on 'Hinduism and Development'? Give your own reflections. Use five lines for your answer.

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10.6 LET US SUM UP

Unit 10 had the basic objective of explaining the relationship between religion and the economic order. Section 10.2 demonstrated that religious belief and values affect our words and deeds, everyday. This basic importance of religion was further extended to the realm of economics, namely production, distribution and consumption. This was in Section 10.3.

In 10.4, we chose one particular model of economic life, namely capitalism and its

relationship with religion was discussed. Here, Marx and Weber came to our rescue. It was pointed out in 10.4.1 that Karl Marx's understood religion as a veil over the exploitative conditions of society. For him, religion is only imaginary and it will vanish, when real conditions of exploitation in the society are removed. In 10.4.2 Max Weber's famous thesis on the relationship between protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism was explained. It was pointed out that Calvin's new interpretation of certain doctrines had the potentiality to generate impulses for the origin of capitalism. Weber's analysis of the protestant ethic, made him realise that ideas can play an effective role in development.

In section 10.5, the focus of our discussion was the nature of relationship between Hinduism and the economic order. Here, our main concern was Weber whose statement is that Hinduism lacks an ethic conducive for capitalist origin and development. Weber's statement was elaborated and evaluations in the light of forty years of development experience in India, was prescribed. Both Marx and Weber had understood India, Hinduism in particular, in a partial way since they had very limited access to sources.

10.7 KEY WORDS

Asceticism : Intense self-control or denial of oneself.

Alienation : A process through which a person becomes subordinated to the product of his own activity.

Base and Superstructure (substructure) : A model used by Marx to show the importance of one institution when compared with others. Base generally means 'foundation'.

Calling : One's occupation or Profession.

Capitalism : A system where free wage labour is employed, whose productivity is maximized through machines, and profit is generated continuously, by sale in the market.

Feudalism : An economic system where labour is servile and attached to the master through ties of varying nature and production is only for subsistence.

Ideology : There are two meanings :

- i) Political ideals of any class, especially ruling class.
- ii) A kind of distorted image/thought.

Predestination : 'Chosen already'/'predetermined'.

Puritan : One who adheres to the doctrines any of the protestant sects.

Rationalization : Displacement of magical elements of thought, and systematic coherence and consistency of ideas.

Salvation : 'After-life' or redemption from misery.

Sect : A voluntary association, which gives new interpretation of sacred text.

Socialism : Society where private property is abolished.

10.8 FURTHER READINGS

Giddens, Anthony (1985). *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, Cambridge Cambridge University Press.

Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1976) *On Religion*, Moscow : Progress

Robertson, Roland (1987). 'Economics and Religion', in Elaide (M) ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York : Mac Millan, Vol. 6 pp. 1-11.

Singer, Milton, et al., (ed.) (1975). *Traditional India : Structure and Change*, Jaipur : Rawat.

10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) True
b) False
c) True
d) False
e) False
- 2) a) Commodity and religion, both are men's creations. But they exist over and above men and sedate them.
b) According to Marx, when the real conditions of exploitation are destroyed there is no misery. Then, religion will whiter away.
c) The social impacts of the doctrine of predestination are as follows :
 - i) The individual is left alone, because there is nobody to mediate and their is no magical cure.
 - ii) Work becomes an end, in itself. A puritan has to work for the greater glory of God.
 - iii) Conviction of salvation has to be demonstrated through work and self-control.
 - iv) When a puritan earns but desists from spending, money accumulates, which can be productivity invested.
- d) For Luther, 'calling' is acceptance of one's social position as given by God. In the case of Calvinist, he/she has to work because that position is an opportunity to honour the glory of God.
- e) Rationalization denotes two almost simultaneous processes (i) Displacement of magical thought and action. (ii) The process through which ideas attain systematic coherence and natural consistence. Rationalisation is the unifying theme of Weber's scholarship.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) a) (iii)
b) (iv)

- c) (ii)
 - d) (i)
- 2) a) Marx understood Hinduism as nature worship. For him, this was a natural outcome of the stagnant type of social **organization**, characteristic of Indian villages.
- b) Karma Philosophy advocates that one should sincerely carry out the duties assigned to him (through his caste position), so that he can improve his status in **next-birth**. This tends to prevent an individual from searching for better occupations—it prevents occupational mobility.
- c) Go through the sub-section 10.5.3 carefully and present your own views on Weber's thesis on Hinduism.

UNIT 11 RELIGION AND POLITICS/STATE

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Understand Religion and Politics
 - 11.2.1 Meaning of Religion
 - 11.2.2 Social Significance of Religion
 - 11.2.3 Meaning of Politics
- 11.3 State and Secularization
 - 11.3.1 The Concept of State
 - 11.3.2 Secularisation
 - 11.3.3 The Process of Secularisation
- 11.4 The Nature of Politics
- 11.5 Religion of Politics
 - 11.5.1 Homogeneity/Heterogeneity
 - 11.5.2 Religious Groups and Other Divisions in Society
 - 11.5.3 Nature of Religion(s)
 - 11.5.4 Historical Process
- 11.6 Religion and Politics/State : An Overview
- 11.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.8 Key Words
- 11.9 Further Readings
- 11.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.0 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
- discuss the factors influencing the relationship between religion and politics.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In our previous unit we have discussed the interrelationship between religion and economy.

In this unit we will be discussing 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.

11.2 UNDERSTANDING RELIGION AND POLITICS

In this section we will discuss what we mean by religion 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.

Religion is powerful force of group identity. These groups are an integral part of any political process.

11.2.1 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 (See Block 1, ESO-05). 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. Emile 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.

11.2.3 Social Significance of Religion

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 mobilise 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.

For years Jews and Arabs have fought bloody battles in the Middle East. These, 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 groups with 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.

11.2.3 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.

One such definition refers to 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 conflicts ends up 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 aspects 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. An aspect which is important to the individual and communities.

To put it simply, politics is major social institution involving the organisation 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. Religion is one aspect of community life which affects politics.

i) Write five lines on the social significance of religion.

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ii) Name the three perspectives of politics and political process.

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iii) Distributive Approach to the understanding for politics is associated with the writings.

11.3 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. We will also be talking of the concept and process of secularisation (see Unit 16, Block 7, ESO-05) the state as we understand today has emerged out of the need to separate the domain of authority from the secular and religious realm.

11.3.1 The Concept of State

Max Weber defined that states ‘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.

11.3.2 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 secularisation, 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 understanding 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 of process of secularisation

11.3.3 The Process of Secularisation

The process of modernisation was accompanied by (and if often included) many other developments. 'Differentiation' was one such process which meant that social institutions had exclusive functions and the different functions found 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.

11.4 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 11.01

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.

Religion 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 from society, both in form and in intensity. We discuss this point later in section 11.6.

It has been suggested by some social theories that 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, technoprofessional 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 of 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'. In 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. Thus religions are 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.

11.5 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.

11.5.1 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 primary 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.

11.5.2 Religious Groups and Other Divisions in Society

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 nationality, class and all such cleavages are expected to be 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 Mohr, 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).

11.5.3 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 European 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 are "predominantly Catholic" (Alford, 1963). Because of the history of the emergence of Protestantism, 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' from 'religion'. Put more sharply, 'politics' according to this view, is for religion. Certain other religions are more inclusive, and comparatively, more loosely 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 arises from the various historical forces which have shaped the religion.

11.5.4 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 have 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 linked. In Britain, on the other hand, the issue of religion and politics emerged separately and were resolved separately; as a result, not only was 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.

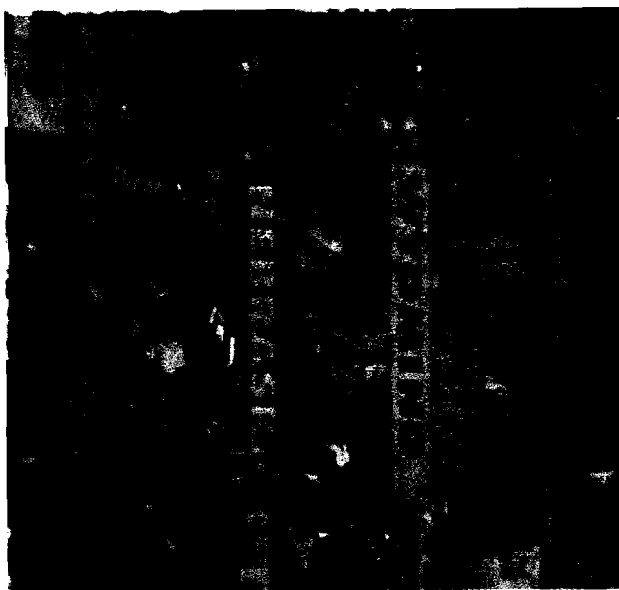
In some countries, the process of the shaping up of the political process itself has been such that religion became an important input factor. Independence in India coincided with division of the country on the basis of religion. While, on the one hand, it made the Indian society and the polity conscious of the importance of secularism in a multicultural, multi-religious country like ours, religious divisions (communal strife) keep reappearing on the Indian political scene at different levels, at times posing serious threat to social harmony and political stability.

11.6 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 anything 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.

Box 2

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 your 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 (see ESO-03, Block 4). It is this element of power and legitimacy which inevitably links politics with religion despite their relative independence.



Political rally concerning religion.

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 or 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 for 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. And hence these inevitable relationships between religion, and politics/state.

Check Your Progress 2

i) What is meant by secularisation? Write your answer in five lines.

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ii) Name the factors which affect their relationship between politics and religion. Write you answer in about five lines..

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

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11.7 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.

11.8 KEY WORDS

Conflict : A struggle or contest between two groups of people.

Integration : The act of process of unification into a whole.

Power : Legal authority which gives the right to and influence people.

11.9 FURTHER READINGS

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11.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 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.

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

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

Check Your Progress 2

- i) The word 'seculum' is derived from the Latin 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.

- iii) 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.

- iii) 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.

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UNIT 12 RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS :

SECTS, CULTS AND DENOMINATIONS

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Understanding Religious Groups
- 12.3 The Genesis of Religious Groups
 - 12.3.1 Social Factors
 - 12.3.2 Development Process
 - 12.3.3 Universal Features
- 12.4 The Church-Sect Typology
 - 12.4.1 Ecclesia (The Church)
 - 12.4.2 Sect
 - 12.4.3 Denomination
 - 12.4.4 Cult
- 12.5 The Religious Groups in India
 - 12.5.1 Dynamics of Math, Marg and Sampradaya
 - 12.5.2 Sangh
 - 12.5.3 Mats
 - 12.5.4 Panth
- 12.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.7 Key Words
- 12.8 Further Readings
- 12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you should be able to

- familiarise yourself with various religious organisations both in the Indian context and the western context
- understand the origins of the religious organisations, their development and their social functions
- compare the religious organisations in India with that of the Western religious organisations
- analyse whether the typologies offered by western sociologists are adequate to understand the Indian religious organisations.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss religious organisations as an important element of religion. The religious organisations discussed in this unit are the ecclesia, the sect, denomination and the cult along with the three Indian groups, viz., the Sangh, the Mat and the Panth. This we hope will enable you to evolve a comparative perspective. This unit also seeks to explain the genesis of religious formations, their development, functions and the dynamics. We hope this discussion will help you understand the dynamic-interactia between ideal and real.

12.2 UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Religion is not only a body of belief but it is practised. Almost all major religions

A religious organisation grows out of and after the religious experience of a charismatic personality (as for example, Christ, Mohammad, Buddha). This religious experience of a charismatic personality gets organised and institutionalised. Its developmental process operates at three levels : (i) formation of the pattern of worship, i.e., the cult; (ii) formation of the pattern of ideas and definitions, i.e., development of myths and theology; and (iii) formation of association and organisation. The problem of interpreting the original religious experience can also be added to this.

Sociologists generally speak of four types of religious groups—the ecclesia (The Church), the sect, the denomination and the cult. Known as the Church-Sect Typology, this differentiation of religious groups is based mainly on the pioneering work of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch and on the basis of development of Christianity in the West.

Does it help to explain religio-social groupings of all types and of all religions other than Christianity? The prevalent sociological stand on this question is somewhat ethnocentric, ambiguous and even contradictory. To some, with certain changes, this typology is universally applicable (Mobergh, 1961), while to others, it is not (Bhatt, : 1969). To Johnson it can be conveniently adopted for 'the purpose of exposition' though he also finds it somewhat 'awkward to discuss oriental religions'. In India, we identify religious groups as **Mat, Marg, Sampradaya, Sangh, Panth, Samaj, Ashram** and **Akhara**. Here, we face a problem, that is, can we explain religious groups in India by the Church-Sect Typology?

To find an answer to the question, we have to look at religious groups from the social-historical perspective. Also, we have to analyse the genesis of religious groupings.

Without emphasizing too much on the uniqueness of India, we have to keep in mind the distinction between two traditions of religious experience—the Semitic, out of which grew Christianity and Islam and the tradition of **netiwad-anebantwad** (the tradition of religious pluralism) out of which grew religious groups in India. Let us elaborate them a little more. As you can already discern the cross over of religious concepts from the Christian tradition as discussed above, are really distinct from each other so far as organisations are concerned.

In the Semitic tradition, religious experience is viewed as revealed and a commandment from God sent through a divinely chosen mediatory between man and God therefore the Semitic tradition tends to be monolithic. This helps in the organisation and spread of this type of religion. But, it sometimes comes in conflict with the political authority and other religions.

In the other tradition, no religious experience is final. There are and can be many paths to reach God. In India, we have both these traditions, growing parallel and cutting across each other. Islam tends to be monolithic though sufism is pluralistic. While there are socio-historical differences between monolithic and pluralistic religions, according to sociologists there are certain characteristic features of religious organisations. These can be made the basis of comparison.

Johnson (1868: 419-20) suggests a seven-point criteria of variables to compare religious groups. They are summarily given below for your reference as they have been made use of in describing religious groups for you:

- i) Group Membership: Compulsory or voluntary

- ii) If voluntary: exclusive or relatively open to new members
- iii) Group's attitude towards other religious groups
- iv) Whether the group proselytises or not
- v) Internal Organisation: autocratic or democratic
- vi) Clergy: Whether clergy regarded as necessary for the salvation of lay members
- vii) Attitude of the group towards the secular affairs of the society as a whole. Such criteria can be used for comparative study of religious groups.

12.3 THE GENESIS OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS

In very general terms we can define religion as a system of belief and practices. It is shared among people and also it sustains over time. As a shared and stable practice of faith religion organises itself into a consistent systematic form. In the sub-sections to follow, we will try and understand the way in which religious groups originate and sustain, over a period of time.

12.3.1 Social Factors

The genesis of religious organisation lies in social groupings which are a part of the society. It also lies in the routinisation and institutionalisation of charisma and in the structural differentiation of society. The solid foundations of a religious organisation are often laid down by the disciples and not by the founder. His religious experience provides a breakthrough.

Death of the originator of the religion or preceptor creates the crisis of continuity and succession. The way they are met has a significant bearing on the subsequent religious organisation. The cultural background of the group in which the preceptor functioned, its kinship and political structure and the material and ideal interests of the followers, particularly the leaders among them, along with the teachings of the preceptor, affect the formation of the religious group.

The crisis of continuity is generally met by collecting, recording and communicating the sayings, precepts, sermons and deeds of the founder. But, socially, of more crucial importance is the emergence of a system of worship, a cultic philosophy which binds and inspires the ensuing religious brotherhood: The cult is the nucleus of every religious organisation.

The crisis of succession can be met in many ways — by the prevalent rule of inheritance (usually primogeniture) or by nominating the successor disciple; or by consensus among the disciples; or by appointment; or through a struggle for power among the disciples/colleagues or among the members of the group itself. Much depends on the gravity of the situation. It may be pointed out that succession in a religious group is not usually smooth and easy. It may involve much infighting within the group before anything about succession is finalised or decided upon by the factions attempting to garner leadership and power.

Since the founder of Islam did not have a successor, **Khilafat** had come to occupy a cardinal place in the organisation of Islam. Christ, too, did not have a successor, nor did he name one but Christianity grew into an ecclesiastical-apostolic order. Buddha decreed that the Sangh which he founded, would be guided by Dhamma (Dharma) and Vinaya after he was no more. It is said that the oligarchic-democratic tradition of the Sangh grew out of the republican traditions of the Sangh grew out of the republican traditions of the tribes among which Buddha was popular.

12.3.2 Development Process

Formation of cult is one level of this process, the other being the formation of myths and theology. The formation of the group is the third level. These three levels operate simultaneously and inter-relatedly.

Myth is a dramatic story in which the Supernatural interacts with humans in the human form(s), the myth reinforces belief in the cultic pattern. Theology rationalises the belief system. Both constitute 'the intellectual level of rationalisation of religion'. Development of theology goes along with the 'development of professional priestly class — the religious specialist'. With theology develops a moral code (O. Dea: 1969: 41-46).

Theology has a strong propensity to develop into a body of dogma. Consequently, it often comes into conflict with the dynamics of class changes and power-structure. It tends to generate protest and a variety of interpretations. It thus precipitates schism and splits which are often linked with the interests of the common people of the laity and literati.

When a cult develops and standardises norms of ritual worship, initiation and membership, of resolving the problems of continuity and succession and doctrinal matters and of managing its expansion, it may be said to have taken the form of a religious organisation (group). The system of worship and rationalisation of its belief-system defines its boundary.

A religious group originates as a primary group, dividing the humanity between believers and non-believers. But, it also grows and multiplies because of inner differentiation of the total society and the group itself and growing enrichment of religious experience. With the emergence of religious specialists such as priests and soon there appears the organisation distinction between laity and clergy. The clergy owes its existence to the hierarchy or ordained offices, having the elements of bureaucracy. The office and not its occupant has the touch of the Supernatural.

12.3.3 Universal Features

Symbolised by its rituals, beliefs and organisation, a religious group displays a new spirit of coherence and unity. Nevertheless, it adjusts with the differences based on position and function and often tolerates the order system of statuses which it desires.

Acquiring a revolutionary character, a religious group may recognise and accept the established society. Or, it may reject the established society only in spirit to promote the attitude of equality within the group, as was the case in Buddhism. It opposed the conservative society and took equality as an ideal. The internal structure of religious group is a dynamic process. It operates at two levels. On one hand it creates internal differentiation and on the other hand it organises and institutionalises itself.

Activity 1

Analyse the characters and contents of a myth associated with a cult in your family/neighbourhood. You can compare your notes with others at your Study Centre.

12.4 THE CHURCH-SECT TYPOLOGY

When a religious grouping establishes its beliefs, norms and practices into an organised form it takes an established religious organisational form. In a very loose sense a

Church can be described as this. At the same time an organised religion has multiple strands because of internal differentiation. In this section we will try and understand the dynamics of church, sect and cult.

12.4.1 Ecclesia (The Church)

The Ecclesia was founded on the religious experience of Christ as described in the Bible. Christ being the divine mediator between man and God, in the ecclesia, his experience is viewed as revealed and, hence, infallible. Since this revelation is for man's salvation, man must adopt it. It must be followed by many and people who oppose it (heretics) must be punished or converted.

This doctrinal and rigid approach has tended to make the Ecclesia a highly proselytising religion, so much so that Raja Ram Mohan Roy distinguished between the precepts and practices of Jesus and Christianity preached by the missionaries (Sarkar, B.K. 1937: 619-624; Bhatt, G.S. 1968: 34). Since it could be organised and people who did not belong to it could be converted (proselytise), it grew to be international with national, regional and local variations.



The Christian religion has a vast number of Church based rites which cover the entire life-span of its members.

Having the organisational distinction of the laity and clergy, the Ecclesia is an apostolical order. The clergy consists of the ministers of Christian religion. They are trained, selected and appointed. They are knitted into a hierarchy of allotted offices, their functioning is bureaucratized. Clergy-hood is a career. A member of the clergy derives his religious qualities from the office which he holds by virtue of appointment and ordination. It is quite obvious that the entire situation is hierarchical and bureaucratic in its functioning.

The priest and his office are pivotal to the Ecclesia. Being viewed as spiritual-religious guardian of the members of his parish, the priest can take confessions and grant pardon from sins. He solemnises marriages and counsels even in the secular needs of the members of his church. His main function is to preach and to convert.

Historically, the Ecclesia is characterised by a conflict and consequent adjustment between monasticism and protestantism. Monasticism is said to have grown out of a view that God cannot be experienced by human knowledge and also they believed in the 'original sin'. Because of the concept of original sin which created a deep anxiety and even fear of sex, self-denial in the service of God became primary. The monastery, however, was open to both men and women.

Protestantism separated the world and God. The world was accepted as real — an area for man's activity and worldly achievement. Charitable social work and management of large charitable institutions was added to the Church's activity and has since remained its trait. In this process of adjustment 'monks became assimilated into clerics and clerics to monks'. Together, they made up the Church — rather its two classes, men of religion (the clergy) and the men who lived in the world (the laity).

Combining the elective and appointed offices, the Ecclesia has tended to grow and expand as a self-contained unitary-federal structure. Its head, the Pope is elected by a small college of appointed officials. The rest of the hierarchy of officials is appointed. Among these, only the office of the priest may be said to be religious in the true sense of the term while all others are managerial.

The Ecclesia trains and recruits its personnel through its theological educational institutions. For a dynamic definition of its creed, it also organises research institutions, study centres, seminars and workshops. It publishes journals and maintains printing presses and publishing houses. It also establishes and controls schools and colleges for secular education where imparting of secular education is combined with preaching as its primary aim is to spread 'the World of God'.

Along with the pursuit of spirituality, the Church also develops vested interests in wealth and temporal power. It also develops vested interest in the established social order which legitimises its power, possessions, privileges and interests. This involvement in secular matters brings it into conflict with the secular-political structure, sometimes leading to schism as in the case of the development of Church of England.

Secular interests of the Church also tend to make the clergy conservative. That may also lead to conflict. But, conflict with the secular world is not a dominant feature of the Church. Many times the Church does come to terms with the secular-political world and accommodate itself to secular life.

12.4.2 Sect

As a religious group, the Sect stands for those who dissent from the interpretation of the doctrine from an established church and (the united works) as a communion of religious brotherhood with a well-defined creed. Its ideal type is a contrast to that of the Church though it may share some traits with the latter. Unlike the Church,

the membership of the sect is not compulsory. It is voluntary, relatively exclusive and often qualified ritually. The fact is that the sect arises from people's dissent with the Church over many differences of dogma and perception of the social situation. These make the sect have a clear dogma and values of its own.

The Sect does not stand for unqualified universal conversion. God's grace is not for all, nor is it bestowed automatically. It is won by the individual's personal faith and ethical behaviour. Therefore, the Sect has a disdain for 'the refined verbal spinnings of ecclesiastical theologians' (Johnson: *ibid*: 427).

The sect is often intolerant toward other religious groups. It may or may not proselytise. Obliteration of distinction between the clergy and the laity is its chief characteristic. In its organisation, the Sect is usually democratic. It may be this worldly as well as other worldly.

The Sect takes birth in protest and rebellion. Its relation with the political authority may or may not be smooth. If rebellious, the Sect may be prosecuted.

Sectarianism has been quite pronounced in Christianity. Its cause is said to be partly in the Christian tradition itself. Christianity grew in protest, so does the Sect. The Christian Sects arose mostly to uphold 'the value of radical individualism, the ideal of love and brotherhood and a conscious concern for the poor'.

Protest against the Church' view that 'religious authority inheres in the office and set of ritual ordination and not in the individual soul' has been another cause of sectarianism in Christianity. A third cause is resentment against the social institutions the Church supports. The sect is an expression of social justice. The question relating to the neglect of the poor and purity of the Gospel often precipitated a sense of injustice, discontent and dissatisfaction.

A sect encompasses not the whole but a part of a society. Attaining identity easily, it tends to provide a sense of greater self-esteem to its members and, thus, it derives its relevance. The greater the rebellion, the greater the criticism, the more is the sect's self-esteem and inner unity. Persecution of a rebellious sect all the more enhances its self-esteem and inner unity.

12.4.3 Denomination

The Denomination grows out of the Sect as the latter grows out of the Ecclesia. As Johnson observes, "The line between ecclesia and denomination is not always clear-cut nor is the line between sect and cult...denomination is what usually results when a sect becomes 'respectable' in the eyes of middle class society and relaxes its religious vigour." (*ibid*. pp. 433-35). It is also observed that a conservative type of sect is more prone to change into a denomination.

A denomination, thus, grows out of a sect and shares many similarities with the Ecclesia. Socially, it is a middle class phenomenon, bound essentially by middle class-status-identity and respectability. Its membership is voluntary and relatively open but is largely defined by the class-status-consciousness. The denomination is thus the result of the Sect becoming larger in terms of members and is in fact much closer to the Church than the Sect ever was. It also means a change of the various dogmas ethics and codes of the denomination.

The binding chord of 'fellowship of love and religious service' which is a distinguishing trait of the cult, becomes weak, almost nonexistent, in the denomination. For the member of a denomination religion is one of his interests, almost one of his recreations. Church-going is just a duty, which he imposes upon himself, his wife and children.

The employment of clergy, too, becomes a status-symbol. Members of the clergy are sometimes trained in psychology and/or in theology. Working as ministers and counsellors, they are not supposed to possess any supernatural powers and are not regarded necessary for one's salvation.

The dilemma of the church becomes more acute in the denomination. It is the dilemma of religiosity vs. secularism, the rich vs. poor and spirituality vs. mundanity.

12.4.4 Cult

The social reality of the Cult is essentially rooted in the 'cultic act' (ibid : 39-44). This act is a system of worship — a complex of feelings and attitudes, symbols (gestures, words, rites and rituals) and primarily a relationship with sacred object and the world beyond. It involves co-activity and a social boundary. In it the relationship between the laity and clergy is not negligible but secondary.

Box 1

O'Dea (ibid. p. 41) Observes :

“...The cultic act is social congregational act in which the group re-enacts its relationship to the sacred objects and, through them, to the beyond, and in so doing reinforces its own solidarity and reaffirms its own values, in it, relationship of fellowship, and of leader and followers, are acted out, reasserted and strengthened. For the individual, it incorporates him into the group which provides him with the emotional support, and by its re-enactment of the religious experience relates him to the source of strength and comfort”.

The Cult is a voluntary organisation, open to all who wish to join or participate in it. But, where secretive, it tends to be highly exclusive. Says Johnson (ibid : 438). “In general cults are not strict except in financial matters”. Yet, it tends to regulate its members as per its doctrine and system of rituals which are well-defined. A cult emphasizes one doctrine (above all others) or it focuses upon a God or Goddess with certain definite characteristics.

Cults seem to flourish in metropolitan centres where culturally heterogeneous populations are thrown together and they widely feel the impact of most rapid and impinging social change. It creates situations of contingency and powerlessness and, thus, the problems of adjustment. The cults help to meet that situation (for details and illustrations see Johnson : ibid : p. 438).

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Write a note on Ecclesia. Use about five lines for your answer.
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
- ii) Name a sect which has acquired the distinction of a denomination.
.....
- iii) Give two reasons for the rise of sectarian tradition in Christianity. Use about five lines for your answer.

12.5 THE RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN INDIA

We have studied the genesis of religious groups and various factors which contribute to the establishment of perpetuation of religious grouping in general. In this section we will try to understand the religious grouping in particular — in the Indian context. We will be studying :

- The Math, Marg and Sampradaya
- Sangh
- Mat
- Panth

12.5.1 Math, Marg and Sampradaya

In the Indian perspective, a religious group primarily originates in a **math**. In the given context, it would mean opinion/viewpoint of a charismatic person (the Original Preceptor) and/or of a group about the existence/non-existence of God and meaning of man's social existence. In this perspective even the atheistic Buddhism in a **math**, the **Buddha math**.

A **marg** (i.e. path) is essentially defined by the rituals of worship relation to its **math**. The **marg** also defines the relationship between the preceptor and his successor and followers in relation to God/Dharma and in relation to themselves. It defines the social circle of the **math**.

When the complex of a **math-marg** grows into a tradition of dogmatic knowledge, handed down both in time and space through an organised body of believers and expounders, it takes the form of a **sampradaya**. Reaction against dogma and/or its interpretation precipitates a new **math**. Hinayan, Mahayan and Virayan are referred to as Sampradayas and as Buddha **Math**. As a hypothesis, it may be propounded that religious groups arise out of the dynamics of **matha, marg** and **sampradaya**. Out of this dynamics, in different periods of India's social history, have arisen religious groups, the main ideal types of which are the **Sangh**, the **Mat**, and the **Panth** and the **Samaj**.

12.5.2 Sangh

Founded by the Buddha the Sangh has grown to be international with significant national variations. It has assimilated from local traditions and also from the Ecclesia. However, it is not an ecclesia. The term Sangh means 'any close contact or any number of people living together for a certain purpose'. It also means 'society and association'. As a religious organisation it has two well-defined objectives : (1) To provide best possible conditions for individual development: (2) To teach **dhamma** (dharma in Sanskrit) to mankind. (Humphreys, Christian: 1951).

Members of the Sangh do not own property individually but the Sangh does own

property as a corporate body. It has a sect of hierarchy of appointive and elective offices. It is secular, empirical and rational. It can easily be compared to an association.

It is structured on the concept of **tri-ratna** (three jewels), i.e., the teacher, the teaching and those who followed it. As Buddha decreed, after him, the **tri-ratna** came to be guided by Dhamma and Vinaya. To Buddha, Dhamma symbolised not religion in the usual sense of the term but a set of empirically-rationally derived rules of conduct and duty which lead the individual to the 'Right Path' and safeguard against suffering and pain. In due course, the Sangh has grown into "...the order of yellow-robed monks requiring two hundred and twenty seven rules of observance and fortnightly confessions of infraction". (Bahm, A. : 1958 : p.131).

The Sangh grew into a democratic-oligarchic-secular organisation (Bapat, H. 1956, 4-6, Panikarak. M. 1954: 20). It grew along with the growth of monasticism of Chaitya and Vihara " the dwelling places of mendicants, in this case, Buddha **Bhikkhus**/monks. The monasteries were organized as disciples grew, grooves and properties gifted and audiences flocked to listen to the teachings of Buddha. The Sangh originated as an assembly of monks to elect and appoint office-bearers to supervise new constructions, to look after property, the distribution of clothing, the allotment of dwelling places and acceptance of property as a gift to the Sangh. Besides its rules of procedure, the Sangh mainly rested on Bhikkhu-hood, i.e., the Order of Bhikkhus are organised in a hierarchical order. At the bottom of that hierarchy stands the Sammera (the novice). When given a new name and robes, he rises to the status of new Bhikkhu. The Jhera (The Elder) belongs to the next stratum and the Mahathera to the highest stratum. The head of the monastery is the Nayak.

One enters the Sangh as a Bhikkhu through a prescribed initiation ceremony. As in Buddhist doctrine one's status in society is determined by one's Karma and not by one's birth, admission to Bhikkhuhood is open to all free men above twenty and healthy. The Bhikkhu is expected to lead the life of celibacy and mendicancy, to seek self-enlightenment through study and meditation and to teach Dhamma to the people.



Buddhist monks at prayer. Note that the monks have a shaven head.

The Bhikkhu is also expected to practice a simple, austere and inquisitive living, taking only as much he needs. His belongings consist of three robes, a waist-cloth, begging bowl, a razor, a water-container and a needle. He may also add to this an umbrella, a pair of sandals and a few books.

A Bhikkhu, particularly the Novice (The Samnera) is obliged to go out for begging in the morning and return by noon to take food. He spends the rest of the day in study, meditation and teaching. Excepting the rainy season, the Bhikkhu is expected to travel and teach all the year around. In rainy seasons, he returns to communal life to study and revise the rules of Dhamma. To carry the gift of Dhamma to the people is Bhikkhu's main duty. To progress on the path of Dhamma is the individual's business and not of his. He is not a priest/missionary in the Christian sense of the term. He does not belong to an 'apostolic order'. He is just a preacher of Dhamma (Humphreys: *ibid*: p.138).

- 1) **Organisation:** Every Buddhist monk could be a member of the Sangh of a particular area. The members were supposed to come from all the four directions (**chaturdisha**). The quorum of ten members is a norm but, today, it is not universally uniform. Deliberation and decisions of an assembly without complete quorum were invalid. They could not be validated by taking the assent of absentee members.

The Sangh had pre-ordained rules for the seating arrangement. The questions to be decided at the Sangh had to be formally presented. Every member had a right to express his opinion and to vote, for, decisions were taken by a majority vote. Complicated questions were referred to the select committee and its recommendations were placed before the Sangh for rectification. To decide the questions of fundamental principles a religious council was convened. However, novices and women were not entitled to vote or to constitute the quorum.

Buddha, though reluctantly, also created the fraternity of ordained female monks (Bhikkhunis or nuns). Always subservient to men in rank and observance, the order of Bhikkhunis declined in India by Ashoka's time. Today, even in countries which have Therawad tradition there is no woman member of the order.

- 2) **The Sangh and Society :** In Buddha math, the Sangh is supreme, the final arbiter almost in all the matters of social life, "I submit to Buddha, to Dhamma and to the Sangh", so runs the prayer of a Buddha. It may be derived to imply willing submission to Dhamma and, ultimately, to the Sangh by following the path shown by the Buddha.



Each religion has a vast set of icons and symbols which communicate religions insights to the believers.

Since Buddha preached to take things as they are, it may be said that the Sangh philosophically takes a neutral view of the political powers that be. By and large, political power was friendly to it but not in all situations. As has been evident recently in Burma and Ceylon, it has tended to dabble in worldly politics (Humphreys: *ibid*: p. 139).

Today, the Sangh largely remains the same though in the process of diffusion and acculturation, it has undergone some modifications as well. The Bhikkhu has lost the role of village-teacher because of growing secular control over education as a part of the process of modernisation. In Japan, a Bhikkhu is just a communicator and-not an exponent. If he likes, he can lead a married life. The Sangh has now lost its earlier vigour.

12.5.3 Mats

The Mat was founded in the eighth century A.D. by Adi Shankaracharya, popularly known as Shankara. He is also the founder of **advaita** philosophy which combines both **gyana** (knowledge) and **bhakti** (devotion) and seeks to unite divergent beliefs at a higher level of thought. The word Mat means the dwelling place of **sanyasins** (medicants) who preach the doctrine of **advait** based on **nirguna** (formless)/ **Saguna** (having a human form) **mat**.

The Mat is also the place where students reside seeking the highest meaning of life and knowledge for the goodness of others. By this the Mat becomes a theologically oriented educational institution, devoted to the cultivation and preaching of the theistic doctrine of its founder. Shri Chaitanya Mat preaches **Krishna Bahkti** of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Ramakrishna Mat teaches the unidirectionality of all religious experiences, mainly of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

The Mat is said to have its ancestry in the Sangh. Organisationally, it shares much **with the Sangh though, doctrinally, it differs. The Sangh is atheistic. Rooted in Vedanta, the Mat is theistic. The Mat and advaita** and their organisational inter-relatedness grew out of protest against Buddhism and the **Mimamsaka**. Shankara established four Maths at the four corners of India (Badrinath, Puri, Dwarka and Sringeri) to “emphasise the growing consciousness about the geographical unity of India” (Nehru, J.L. : 1960: 182). The Mat is also viewed as a product of Hindu reformation in the eighth century (Pannikar, K.M. 99-101).

The Mat was founded to organise and train selfless spiritual preachers to preach **advaita mat** oneness of belief.

This trait of Mat-tradition reverberates with greater vigour and emphasis in the teachings of Vivekanand, the founder of Ram Krishna Mat. Shri Chaitanya Gaudiya Mat aims ‘to build national character’ and ‘to help people to visualise the underlying thread of unity amongst people in spite of diversity’. Combining the sacred with secular (**parlaukik** and **ihlaukik**), the tradition with modernity and theism with charitable social work, the Matis today a medieval-modern tradition of a philosophical worldview and its propagation. Socially, it is an upper-caste — middle-class phenomenon. Its lay members are mostly drawn from amongst the professionals and businessmen, from the new rich. With the growth of middle classes, it has tended to multiply and diffuse.

The Mat is rather like a pendulum, moving between exclusiveness and inclusiveness. Its theistic doctrine, its ritual structure, its clergy and laity and their social background tend to give it the aura of exclusiveness though, theoretically, it welcomes all. As

is clear the **Mat** is an organisation of members who may themselves differ on crucial issues, often leading to one or more schisms over time. This is the usual path taken by a **Mat** when differences of opinion or dogma-interpretation is done with mutually differing stands on almost every issue. This leads to schisms in **mat** over time.

The Mat has three objectives. (1) Its primary objective is theistic—to define, maintain and preach the theism it upholds. For that it creates institutional means to train and appoint preachers of its theism. (2) It strives for inculcation of ethical-moral values, the main aim being to rehabilitate the individual in family, polity and society. (3) Organisation of charitable social work is the third objective. It includes running of dispensaries and hospitals, educational institutions and **Sanskrit** pathshalas (schools). In pursuance of its theistic aim, the Math often maintains a printing press to publish books and journals. It may also maintain a library for education and research.

These days, the Mat mostly functions as a registered society organized under a constitutionally regulated Trust. The tendency to convert the Mat (and also Ashram) into a Trust has been on the increase and for that many reasons are advanced. It is the best available institutional safeguard for the property of the Mat. The customary rule of inheritance by a nominated/initiated disciple creates conflict and cannot, in all circumstances, save the Mat property from being squandered and misused. It also facilitates raising of funds as a certain percentage of one's income is exempted from income tax if given as a donation to a registered charitable institution.

Box 2

The Organisational Structure of Chaitanya Mat

The Math has a seat and head Office which are not located at one place. It has two-tier membership—ordinary and special. Election and nomination is confined to special members who are selected by the Governing Body but that selection is subject to the ratification of President-Acharya. Those paying a donation of Rs. 1000/- or more are its patrons but they do not play any role in its governance.

At the apex, the Governing Body is presided over by the Founder President Acharya and by his deputy. The Executive President is Acharya. There are three categories of secretaries — the Secretary, the Joint-Secretaries and the Assistant Secretaries. By rule, the latter are required to be on a constant tour of India to preach and supervise the branches of the Mat.

The local Mat — a branch — is headed by the Mat Rakshak, appointed by the Governing Body and the President Acharya. Below him are the Mat Sewaks who undertake cooking, cleaning and other menial jobs of the Mat. For them, it is **sewa** (service of the God). The local Mat consists of **Bramacharis** (the student-sewaks), **Vanaprasthis** and **Sanyasins**. After serving the Mat as a **Bramhachari**, one has freedom to return to **grihasth ashram** (the life of the householder). After fulfilling the duties of the householder, one may return to join the Mat as a **Vanasprasthi** and, finally, to get initiated into Sanyas, the service of the Mat and humanity.

The saffron-robed functionaries of the Mat are Prabhus/Maharajas. They are knitted into a hierarchy which is based on seniority, recognition of one's spiritual attainment, learning in the religious lore of the math and meritorious services rendered toward the cause of the Mission. The title of Vishupad is indicative of the highest position and that of Prabhupad of the next

position in the hierarchy. One devoted to the service of the mission by body (*kaya*), mind (*mana*) and speech (*vak*) is Tridandi Swami. The Acharya has the right to initiate one into the order of the Mat, particularly into that of the Sanyasins. This power can be delegated.

12.5.4 Panth

As a religious organisation, the Panth (meaning path) is a distinct type though it draws much from the traditions of the Sangh and the Math. The Panth grew out of the protest and religio-social reform and reorganisation which was generated in India under the politico-religious domination of Islam. The Panth-tradition continues since then.

It is also a product of **Nirgun School of Bhakti** (devotion to the Formless), also called the **Nirgun Panth**. Though monistic, it denies the concept of eternal **moksha**. It is more this-worldly than the **adwait** of Shankar. Socially, it hinges on the **Bhagat** (the initiated) and the **Guru** (the initiator). The **Bhagat** is attached to a guru and his path. He discards ritual formalism and is expected to be a staunch vegetarian and teetotaler. He is also expected to lead a simple and austere life. Devoted to his **guru**, his theistic doctrine and school (the panth), to family and to his caste-based economic pursuit in life, the **Bhagat** is the **Grihastha Sadhu** (one who combines renunciation with family life).

The Panth protests against **varnashrama**, the birth-based inequality of caste, ritual formalism and rigidity of both Hinduism and Islam. It emphasises the piousness of means and **Karma**-based mobility and equality of all before the God. In real life, the Panth could not avoid ritualism of its cult which is simple and not elaborate. The Panth cuts across Hinduism and Islam but it also grows in and along each of them. It denounces and cuts across caste but it also grows along caste. It could not completely avoid the grip of caste.

The Panth is a religious brotherhood bound by the panth shown by the **Adiguru** (the original preceptor) after whom it is often clubbed (**Kabir Panth**, **Dadu Panth** etc.). The successor in line may symbolize the charisma of the **Adiguru**. The poetic compositions of the original Guru or his successor(s) constitute the religious lore of the Panth and explain its theistic doctrine. Besides Guru, the common theistic precept, the cultic rituals and ritual marks and insignia of identity, usually adopted as personal paraphernalia of the followers, bind the panthic brotherhood and endow it with a touch of exclusiveness.

The Panthic political structure is oligarchic. The charismatic **gurudom** of **Adiguru** passes either through inheritance or nomination. Under the **Adiguru** or his successor, there is a hierarchy of **gurus** and **mahant(s)**. The Panth, too, is associated with a seat (the **Gaddi**) where it was originally founded. The original **gaddi** may divide into **gaddis**, i.e., branches located in different centres. A branch is managed by the local **mahants** and functionaries who are appointed by consensus by the local brotherhood.

Activity 2

Identify a religious group of the religion you follow and outline its group characteristics. Repeat the same exercise with a religious group other than yours.

Because of the importance of the Guru, in the panthic organisation, **gurudwara** attains a significant social-communal importance. With **gurudwara**, the **jhanda** (flag) cult occupies a crucial place in the total cultic structure of the panth. However,

Gurudwara is the place of daily, occasional and festive congregations. It strengthens brotherhood. It is a medium of religious-social communication. Panths such as those who have allegiance to a saint or master also experience Schisms when the preceptor dies and different groups emerge in the Panth.

The Panthic grouping is also subject to protest, schism and fission. The fission is not as much caused by doctrinal issues as by internal differentiation and intra-group competition for power, both sacred and secular. The brotherhood is dichotomized between the **sant** (saint) and the commoner (the laity). The **sant** is the theologian of the Panth. He expounds its doctrine and is its preacher, a touring missionary. He may have renounced the world or he may be a householder-saint. He may be dressed in the saffron robe or his robes may be of a prescribed style of colour. He may be ordinarily dressed if he were a householder-saint (**grihastha sadhu**). But he must carry the insignia of the Panth.

Having its distinct initiation ceremony, the Panth is an exclusive-sectarian brotherhood. To be initiated into the Panth means owing allegiance to the Guru or to his ordained successor. In a Panth the Guru and the Mahant may be combined while in another they may be different. Mahant, in fact, is not a **guru**; he is head of a Math or of a group of saints. A highly exclusive **panth** may have secret rituals and a code language. Till recently, the Shivanarainis did not admit the uninitiated into their **gurudwara** and they have a code language which is now dying out. They also did not allow women to enter the **gurudwara**. A Shivanaraini is expected to carry with him his identity card (the parwana) issued by the presiding Mahant of the **gurudwara** he belongs to.

Box 3

Through the doctrine of **bhakti** and organizational instrument of the Panth, the high elite took the Sanskritic way of life. The doctrine of **bhakti** emerged in the South and its early preceptors were Brahmins though as a thought its ancestry is deeper. In the North, it was introduced by Ramanand, but the founders of the Panth mostly came from the castes of the middle and lower levels. Nanak was a Khatri and so was the founder of Radhasoami panth. The Shivanaraini panth was founded by a Rajput (Shivanarain). Ravidasa was a chamar by caste and Kabir came from the Muslim weaver caste (the **Julaha**).

Significantly, the followers of the Panth have been and are mostly drawn from lower levels of caste-structure and only occasionally from the middle level. Opposing **varnashrama**, the Panth stimulated a strong popular version of sanskritisation. Not being complex ritually, it tended to stimulate doctrinal and ritual-social mobility of caste though it could not go very far.

By protesting against **varnashrama**, it tended to protest against the power-structure entitled therein. In some cases it received political patronage from the political power and in some it came into conflict with it. The conflict is often caused by the secular interests of its leaders. However, the sharper the conflict, the more aggressive is the Panth.



A Sikh ceremony in progress.

Today, like the Math, a panth may be constitutionally regulated and functioning as a Trust. It tends towards fundamentalism and political throwback. At certain levels, as among the Chamar, there has been a shift in panthic allegiance. In the Ravidas panth, in Bijnore, they moved towards **Sikhism**. At Dehradun, the Chamar migrants from Bijnore moved towards Arya Samaj. Now, neo-Buddhism seems to make a greater religio-reformist appeal. Many times inner differentiation of the caste also tends to generate schism and fission (Bhatt, G.S. 1961:229-241).

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Write how the Sangh is different from the Ecclesia. Use about seven lines for your answer.

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- ii) Who is the founder of Advaita Philosophy?

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- iii) Name the four Mats established by Adi Shankaracharya.

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- iv) Write a five lines on the Panth as a religious organisation. In what way it is similar to a sect?

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12.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed and observed the following.

Complex religious organisations grow essentially out of and after the religious experience of a charismatic personality (e.g. : Christ, Mohammad). It then develops into a pattern of ideas and practices or rituals (see Unit 20 of Block 6 of ESQ-1—The Study of Society for a discussion on complex form of religion).

The Semitic religions like Christianity and Islam are monotheistic which enables them to organise on a more systematic way. The Church or the Ecclesia is thus

far more organised than its equivalents that we may find in India. This raises the question whether we can use the Church-Sect typology, offered by Western sociologists to understand the Indian religious organisation. Though we find no exact equivalents to the Church-sect typology, it enables us to have a comparative perspective.

This unit also discusses the dynamic process of a religious organisation, the origins and development. For any religious group to be an established organisation and a creed it evolves a system of worship, a philosophy which binds and inspires ensuing religious brotherhood.

The sect and the cults are results of internal schisms and dynamics, which soon institutionalise themes for the survival of the religious organisation. This aspect has also been discussed in this unit.

12.7 KEY WORDS

Ecclesia : The organisation of Church.

Dogma : Belief or system of beliefs, put forward by some authority

Laity : All those persons who are not clergy.

Literati : The learned, who have studied the Scriptures.

Transcendental : Going beyond human knowledge, that which cannot be discovered or understood by practical experience.

Creed : System of beliefs or opinions especially on religious doctrine. Also, the summary of Christian doctrine.

Atheist : A person who does not believe in the existence of God.

Renunciation : Denial, giving up the worldly possessions, desires and attachments.

12.8 FURTHER READINGS

O'Dea, Thomas F. 1969. *The Sociology of Religion*, Prentice-Hall, New Delhi : (Chapter III).

Johnson, Harry M. 1968. *A Systematic Introduction*, Routledge and Kegan Paul : London (Chapter 16).

12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The literal meaning of Ecclesia is a popular assembly. However Ecclesia as a Church has a religious connotation. The Ecclesia was founded on the religious experience of Christ as compiled in the Bible. Christ being the mediator between God and man his experience is viewed as revealed and infallible. This revelation must be preserved and carried on to serve as a guide to man's salvation.

The Ecclesia or the church functions like a bureaucracy with hierarchy of offices. The member of the church-clergy derives his/her religious status qualities from

the office he holds the virtue of appointment and ordination. Its head the Pope is elected by a small group of officials. The rest of the hierarchy of officials is appointed.

The Ecclesia trains and recruits its personnel through its theological educational institutions. It organises research institution, study centres, seminars and workshops. It also establishes schools, colleges for secular education where imparting secular education is combined with preaching on God.

- ii) Calvinism arose as sect of Protestantism to become a denomination.
- iii) Sectarianism is quite pronounced in Christianity, the cause for it lying only partly in Christianity. One of the chief reasons for the rise of sects is the value for individualism. Another important reason has been a resentment against the social institutions the church supports. And by opposing, it hopes to bring social justice.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) The Sangh was founded by Buddha which essentially meant as an organisation or association coming together of people for certain purposes. The Sangh is different from Ecclesia by the fact that it is secular, empirical, rational. The Dhamma that it teaches is not, religion in the usual sense of the term but a set of empirically rationally derived rules of conduct, a duty which guides the individual in his life. The Dhamma that is preached is not a revelation of God and thus is not infallible.
- ii) Adi Shankaracharya or Shankara as he is popularly known is the founder of adwaita philosophy.
- iii) The four Mats established by adi Shankaracharya are at Badrinath, Puri, Dwarka and Srinegeri.
- iv) The Panth grew out of the Bhakti movement. It is basically a protest and social reform movement.

The Panth protests against the birth based inequality of caste, ritual formalism and rigidity of Hinduism and Islam. The followers have their own rituals, insignia and identity which gives it a touch of exclusiveness. The followers are expected to lead an austere and simple life of devotion to a formless Govt.

The Panth is similar to the sect for like the sect the Panth originates as a protest to some percepts of the dominant religion and like the sect the Panth stresses on individual salvation and devotion.

UNIT 13 RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS :

SHAMANS, PRIESTS AND

PROPHETS

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Religious Specialists and the Sociology of Religion
 - 13.2.1 Weber on Religion
- 13.3 The Priest
 - 13.3.1 Weber's Understanding of the Priest
 - 13.3.2 Priests and Priesthood : An Overview
 - 13.3.3 Priests and Royalty
 - 13.3.4 Priestly Qualifications
- 13.4 The Hindu Priesthood : An Example
 - 13.4.1 Vedas
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 - 13.4.3 Upanishads
 - 13.4.4 Early Hinduism
 - 13.4.5 Medieval and Modern Hinduism
 - 13.4.6 Tribal Context
- 13.5 The Shaman
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 - 13.5.2 The Shaman : A General Overview
 - 13.5.3 The Functions and Role of a Shaman
 - 13.5.4 Organisation
 - 13.5.5 An Example : The Oraon Shaman
- 13.6 The Prophet
 - 13.6.1 Weber on the Prophet
 - 13.6.2 The Prophet : An Overview
 - 13.6.3 Sathya Sai Baba : An Example
- 13.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.8 Key Words
- 13.9 Further Readings
- 13.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.0 OBJECTIVES

The present unit deals with the nature of religious specialists, focussing attention on three particular types: the shaman, the priest and the prophet. We hope that once you have studied the unit, you will have gained some idea about the following

- the nature and functions of specialists
- how these developed over time and how their position today may not be as socially significant as it once was
- the role they play in mediating between the human and the divine world
- the changes that have taken place in the nature of these specialists.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit is concerned with the nature of religious specialists. It is important for us to briefly understand who they are. As such, they are persons who because of certain charismatic qualities they possess, are accorded the status of being intermediaries of mediators between the world of the human and that of the divine

or magical. This act of mediation may either be performed by a single individual or a group of individuals, where each performs a separate task. Such performances may occur on special ritual occasions, as a matter of daily routine, or during illness.

There are different kinds of specialists who derive their power from the functions they perform, the doctrine they adhere to and by the nature of their following. To name a few, we have priest found in temples, prophets such as Muhammad, cultic leaders such as Sathya Sai Baba, shamans such as those found in Nepal and Tibet, sectarian leaders like the late Swami Prabhupadji of the ISKCON, and so on.

The significance and role of these specialists varies from society to society, and it is related to an extent to the nature of the religious system in the particular society. The functions of the specialists are usually meant for achieving positive ends and benevolence, but often they may even be aimed at inflicting harm. We often find men seeking the services of the specialists even when they are not required. Even the assistance of the exorciser, medicine man and magician are sought as a normal routine. This unit will therefore deal with the development of three particular categories of specialists, the priest, the shaman and the prophet, and their functions and social significance. We will support our description wherever we can with examples.

13.2 RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Before we proceed into a detailed discussion of the nature of the three specialists, it is imperative that as students of sociology, we look at what the sociology of Religion has to say about them. "A religious specialist is one who devotes himself to a ...religious system" (Turner in *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, p. 437). In societies where such power is considered as impersonal anthropologists have described it as magic and the specialist who manipulates the power as a magician; and where power is personalised, as deities, gods, spirits or demons and the life, anthropologists talk of religion. In reality, no clear demarcation can be drawn between religion and magic. Religious systems contain both religious beliefs, practices and magical elements. The role of religious beliefs, practices and magical elements, the role of religious specialists, is thus overlapping.

Early anthropologists such as Frazer, Durkheim, Malinowski did not specifically identify religious specialist as a distinct phenomenon for theoretical discussion. They considered the specialist a part of the religious system which according to them is a distinct 'social' phenomenon.

Max Weber provided the necessary breakthrough. His comparative study of world religions, which focused on theory of religious ideas, brought focus directly on religious specialist as agent of social transformation or as conservation of tradition. Weber wrote extensively on religions, its social consequences and the nature of religious functionaries. Before we go on to detailed discussion on what Weber has to say, we will have a look at how anthropologists have distinguished different religious specialists.

Max Weber, though aware of the numerous instances of overlap distinguishes between a priest and a prophet. A priest, he writes is always associated with the functioning of regularly organised and permanent enterprise concerned with influencing the gods. In Weber's view the prophet is distinguished from the priest by personal call. The authority of the prophet is founded on revelation and personal charisma.

Box 1

Anthropologists, who, unlike Weber, are less concerned with the genesis of religion as a force of social change or reinforcement have looked at shamans

as part of the working of religious systems in simpler societies. The editors A. Lessa and E.Z. Hogt devote a whole section to this aspect in their *Reader in Comparative Religion* (1958). They find that shamans tend to predominate in food-gathering societies. Where the shaman offers personalised service to one or two individuals or a group whereas the priest, according to them, is characteristic of more structurally elaborate food-producing, or agricultural societies, where there are common ceremonials or rites for the benefit of the whole community.

Raymond Firth regards the shaman as a specialist who exercises developed techniques of control over spirits. The emphasis, here, is on control exercised over spirits. Thus he "serves as a means of communication between other human beings and the spirit world" (Firth, 1964: p. 689).

Although, we sometimes find the functions of these specialists overlapping, the priests, prophets and shamans clearly constitute a subtype of a single type of religious functionary. Let us briefly consider what Weber had to say about religion, before we proceed to consider in general the role of religious specialists in everyday life.

13.2.1 Weber on Religion

Weber believes that the behaviour of individuals in a society is motivated by religious and magical factors. He discusses in his work the plurality of gods and their potential. He also traces out the development of monotheistic religions such as Islam and Judaism, and, polytheistic religions such as Hinduism. In an attempt to classify religious experiences and specialists, he points out how men relate to supernatural forces through prayer, sacrifice and worship. They are helped along here by mediators such as priests. Often charms and spells are used when prayer does not work. In such cases they turn to the magician. One can say that religious specialists relate to the divine through rituals and religious activity while they relate to the evil or malevolent, through magical activity. There are some societies where both functions are performed by the same religious specialist, for example the Leopard Skin chief among the Nuer tribe of Sudan, Africa.

Other than the above mentioned functionaries, Weber also recognises the presence in society of the religious leader or the prophet. The prophet could be the founder of a world religion such as Islam or a cultic figure such as Sathya Sai Baba in India. Let us now examine each specialist independently.

13.3 THE PRIEST

We have here first a description of the priest as Weber understood the category and then undertake a general explanation.

13.3.1 Weber's Understanding of the Priest

According to Weber, the priest is a functionary who performs regular, permanent and organised functions that are related to the divine. He does this usually through the act of worship either on behalf of an individual or for society as a whole.

The priest belongs to a social organisation and occupies a hereditary office. He is expected to have some specialised knowledge of texts and doctrines. According to Weber, the priest would have attained significant social and religious status through both rigorous training and by virtue of being born into a particular social group.

The priesthood is based on a code of behaviour and ethics. They dedicate their life

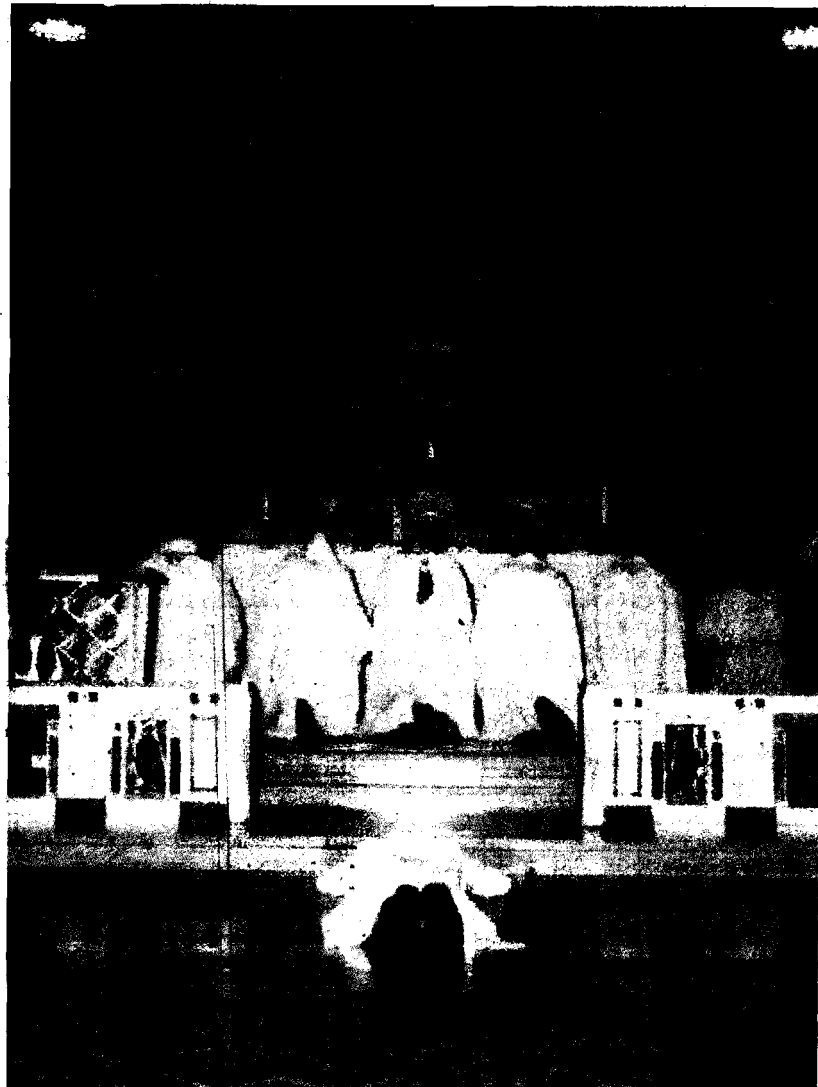
to the task of communicating with the gods and are associated with either a place of worship, a social group or a following of disciples. The development of a 'doctrine' which involves the rise of a rational system of religious concepts and ethics is also associated with them.

13.3.2 Priests and Priesthood : An Overview

Priests and associated organisations are found in both simple and modern societies. The rise of priests is associated with the need felt by primitive man to come to terms with the supernatural world.

In simpler societies we find that not just priests but also magicians are associated with the ability to communicate with the divine world. It is believed as such that priesthood is as old as religion itself.

In both primitive and advanced societies priests and magicians are functionaries who through their specialised knowledge and powers, are associated with and overcome malevolent and benevolent forces. The need for such duality was considered necessary so that the unknown supernatural powers would not be harmful to the human; instead, they would bring prosperity and goodwill. These early religious and magical practitioners who offered guidance in such matters, have been regarded as the pioneers of an organised priesthood. We find that in the early periods of religious evolution there is no priesthood and men perform rituals or invoke the Gods themselves. There are some people such as tribals of Melanesia and Australia who



Priests and related organizations (e.g. Church) are found in both simple and complex societies.

even today do the religious and magical rites themselves without the help of any intermediaries or specialists.

Often in the early ages we find that in a collective group, one person would attain a certain significance in terms of his ability to deal with the supernatural or predict certain events or even acquire an expertise in performing certain ritual acts. Such a person would soon enough be regarded as an intermediary and gain priestly functions. As an example, we find that in certain Dravidian tribes, the head of the household would be the officiating priest at any type of family event. Before a regular priesthood arose, we thus find that men, other than priests, performed specialised functions. Into this category of specialists were also included those:

- i) who underwent ecstatic experiences by going into trances and then would make predictions such as a **darvesh**;
- ii) those who looked after places that have for some reason acquired a sacred significance and thus considered holy;
- iii) those persons or 'holy men' who exercise some kind of religious authority by performing miracles or curing illnesses.

Other than the above mentioned functionaries, magician too had a role to play in the lives of the people, for both their well-being and for inflicting harm. Those individuals who were able to exercise greater authority were the ones who over time gained significant status and were able to gain respect. They gradually came to form a category of specialists who officiated for individuals and groups and were both respected and feared.

13.3.3 Priests and Royalty

We find that in most societies an interesting relationship also arose between priestly authority and the royalty. There are many examples in history of kings who were priests also, such as, among the tribes of Polynesia and Melanesia or even in India where ancestor worship made it necessary for the king or family head to perform priestly functions. We also have examples of kings who were raised to the status of divinity and were believed to imbibe in their beings, the essence or life of the tribe or nation. Thus if a king weakened or became ill, it signified misfortune for the whole social group. Thus we find in many societies, the leader would be put to death prematurely and a successor chosen immediately to prevent society from breaking up.

We also find examples in history of a close relationship between priesthood and kingship such that each was dependent on the other. We refer here to the sacerdotal role of the priest, found in many societies, of bestowing upon the king his rights as a ruler. This could be seen in the coronation of the king as found in Europe, where the Church played an important role, or in the form of the **raja abhisheka** of the Indian kings that was performed by the Brahman priest. Further it was the duty of the king in the former case to protect the religion of the State and in India, the priests were protected by the king.

13.3.4 Priestly Qualifications

Certain qualifications are laid down as being basic to priesthood. We mention here some of them without going into details.

- i) The priest's primary task is to mediate between the human and divine.
- ii) Priesthood is usually a hereditary institution.

- iii) The priests communicate with the divine through prayer, worship, rituals and so on.
- iv) Priests have to undergo initiation into the profession. A certain self training is considered necessary.
- v) The priests are expected to uphold their status through knowledge of natural phenomena and the elements and may have an eccentric appearance. They are also expected to be able to perform miracles.
- vi) A certain aura of mystery surrounds them.
- vii) They are expected to maintain certain restrictions in their personal life particularly in relation to the sexual realm, food and language.

It may finally be noted that both religious and magical practitioners are included into the category of priests. While the magician uses magic spells and tries to coerce the known world of the supernatural, the religious functionary or priest brings about the desired results by propitiating the unknown through religious rituals and observances.

13.4 THE HINDU PRIESTHOOD : AN EXAMPLE

We now consider an example to support our description of priesthood. We take up here the Hindu case by examining what the various scriptures have to say about priests, down the ages. The priest in traditional India may assist in the performance of a ritual, at home, or in a temple. In Hinduism, he is born into a priestly caste, by virtue of which he gains these functions. We trace here his development as laid down in the texts.

13.4.1 Vedas

In the Vedas we find it mentioned that the social group of **brahmana** was the priestly class. We find described in the Rig Veda the priestly activities of some of the families of the Vedic tribes. In the **Samhita**, the title of **brahmana** is given to that priestly class who worked for kings and wealthy nobles. These priests strictly adhered to their occupation and were also believed to have a knowledge of medicine. The Rig Veda also mentions subdivisions within the priestly class, on the basis of functions and rituals performed, such as the **soma** sacrifice. Two important priests found mentioned are :

- a) the **hotr** or one who recites hymns to celebrate the Gods and make offerings to them;
- b) the **prashastr** or one who makes the **hotr** recite his hymns.

The Rig Veda also mentions a third office, that of the **purohita**, who was the domestic priest of either the king or a noble. He often assisted the king in other activities as well. For example from Indian mythology we know of how both Vishwamitra and Vashishta served their kings during the war.

13.4.2 Brahmanas

In the Brahmana literature which includes the period up to 6th century B.C., the priests are seen as a separate and hereditary class that was expected to maintain its distance and purity from others. Here also we find the priests performing sacrifices and there arise subdivisions here within the priestly class on the basis of functions performed. This period shows the functions of the **purohita** having increased in significance.

It is however the **brahmin** who is given more importance here and the best offerings of a sacrifice would go to him, rather than the king and he had greater jurisdiction than the king.

13.4.3 Upanishads

By the time of the Upanishads, priestly functions had become more differentiated. The priest now other than performing sacrificial functions was expected to engage in philosophical studies and to take on disciples and pupils. The Upanishads also specify the four stages of life or the **ashramas** that a Hindu had to follow. We refer here to **brahmacharya**, **grihastha**, **vanaprastha** and **sanyasa** as the four phases in a man's life.



The priest in traditional India may assist in the performance of a ritual at home or in temple.

Activity 1

What do you think are the priest's activities? Outline some of these activities from your observation of a priest in your daily life.

The above mentioned teacher-pupil relationships in this period of history is seen to have given rise to two important religious movements as alternatives to Hinduism.

These were Buddhism and Jainism. In these two religions also the role of the priesthood and the order of monks was considered important.

13.4.4 Early Hinduism

In early Hinduism the priests are seen to have full control over the divine and the power of the king. In fact there have been many priests in history who have gained knowledge of not only rituals and worship but also of administration. A well known example was that of Chanakya. But in this period the priest was seen to have become learned in astrology, divination and magic as well. Stories about the process of such priests can be found in the **Jataka Katha**.

13.4.5 Medieval and Modern Hinduism

According to the Puranic texts, this period represents much the same features. We do however see a division of the priestly class into tightly knit endogamous and hereditary subunits. As these subunits grew, an occupational diversification was also seen to occur. The **purohita**s along with his priestly functions also came to perform astrological horoscope preparations, fortune telling and the performance of magic.

The temple priest became significant and came to look after the village temple deity. There also arose a group of priests who concerned themselves primarily with the imparting of knowledge and learning and came to be recognised as the **guru**.

Often the functions of the temple priest and the **guru** were combined along with the ability to perform magic and miracles as among the left handed **tantrics**. These individuals were both greatly feared and respected. Similar to the tantrics were the ascetics who undertook penance and sought to achieve ecstatic states and salvation.

In the more recent context we find that the sacrifices of the Vedic period have lost their significance and have been replaced by temple rituals and popular festivals such as Holi, Deewali, Makarsankranti and so on. This period is also characterized by the rise of religious movements such as the **bhakti** tradition where the priest corresponds to the wandering poet, musician and teacher who challenges Hindu orthodoxy. The **brahman**'s as a priestly class came under criticism here.

From the 19th century onward, further change towards a unification of priestly methods as well as religious teachings has occurred. We do continue to find temple priests and family priests in most parts of India where the latter are usually present on most life cycle events such as birth, marriage and death, to signify the well-being of the family.

We must keep in mind that here we are referring to 'priest' as a blanket term. In fact there are different levels of competence and authority vested in different practising priests.

13.4.6 Tribal Context

When examining the nature of priesthood in the Indian context we cannot ignore

the role of the priest in the tribal context. Here he is seen as a medicine man, a healer and a person who not only has divine powers but also powers of magic and sorcery. We have examples of temples being built by tribals, served the non-brahman priests such as among the Tiyans of Malabar. Because of their association with magic and healing, they are considered more as magicians than priests and are called shamans. We consider them in detail in the next section.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Briefly discuss who religious specialists are.
- 2) State in a few words what Weber's understanding of the priest is?
- 3) Match the following :

i) One who has ecstatic experience	a) prashastr
ii) Reciter of hymns	b) purohita
iii) One who makes happen this recitation	c) brahmin
iv) The domestic priest	d) darvesh
v) The priestly class	e) guru
vi) Priests who impart knowledge	f) hotr

13.5 THE SHAMAN

Having examined in detail the nature and role of priests and priesthood, let us now proceed to look at the shaman as a specialist. In the previous sections we have been constantly referring to the need very often felt by a society to turn towards magical aid when religious rituals fail. We have also discussed how often the same individual would combine both priestly and magical functions.

As far as the shaman as a specialist is concerned (section 13.4.6), we have narrowed down his role to the tribal context as that is where he is largely seen to operate. In this section we will try and describe the shaman and his social role.

13.5.1 Weber on the Magician

If we examine Weber's work on religious specialists we do not find any mention of the shaman. He does however talk about the magician. We briefly examine what he has to say about the magician as, it is in magical acts that the shaman has his antecedents.

Weber believes that the relationship between the human and the supernatural could be expressed not just through religious worship assisted by a priest, but also through magical chants or sorcery. Weber also points out that, it is in magic that prayer and sacrifice have their origin. Sacrifice is seen as a major method of coercing the gods into submission to a supplicant's needs. It was also seen as a method of directing the anger of the gods towards another object. It is believed that the sacrificial rituals of the Brahmins were magical in their intent and implication. However not all sacrifices have magic or sorcery. The magician is understood by Weber as dealing with evil spirits on an individual level. His efforts may have both positive and negative consequences. The magician is usually self-employed though he may be the member of a hereditary caste or an organised guild. Rather than using a specialised doctrine of knowledge, the magician may derive his influence by virtue of personal gifts and knowledge of the supernatural world. The magician can have

considerable power among his community and may be respected more out of fear than faith. He does not necessarily have a following as the priests do.

Activity 2

Locate a travelling magician and enquire from him what he feels about his work. Note down the important points of the conversation and share this information with other students in your Study Centre.

13.5.2 The Shaman : A General Overview

Earlier we have outlined some of the broader features of the magician as a specialist. As far as the shaman is concerned, he represents all of the above features and more. He is found to use his magical abilities for purposes of well-being as well as for harming, usually in the context of pre-literate society. (They or their counterparts may even be found in modern societies). For instance a shaman may engage in an act of magic or sorcery to cure an illness, exorcise a possession, inflict injury or illness on someone or influence the forces of nature to bring rains. In other words his is a multifunctional role which gives him his status and respect. The shaman is found to occupy an important position in most tribal societies. In fact shamanism is a native and tribal religion.

Once greatly feared and misunderstood, today we find him using his abilities in social and political spheres in simple societies. For long time in early anthropological literature, he had a negative image of being a deviant. In later years however his significance as playing a psychological role, was recognised. In fact it has been pointed out by the French structuralist, Claude Levi-Strauss, that the shaman provides for the sick, a language that helps them to express their condition which they normally would not be able to do.

13.5.3 The Functions and Role of a Shaman

As mentioned above, shamanism is a native religion. The word shaman is of North-East Asian origin and comes from the Tungusic word **saman** which means one who is "excited, moved or raised". We find that the shaman is usually seen as a medicine-man who employs exorcism and sorcery as his tools. He derives his powers from association with the supernatural and it is believed that he is assisted by a medium or a spirit to attain his ends. Very often, the shaman's ability to achieve results demands that his state of mind is altered and he either enters into a trance or an uncontrolled condition of excitement following which he communicates with the supernatural.

Shamans belonging to different tribes would use different means to achieve their ends. Certain factors are however found in common. They are as follows:

- a) either the office is hereditary or one's personality allows one to be chosen to the office;
- b) the shaman may have a peculiar mental state or even a physical shortcoming so that he may be considered neurotic or epileptic;
- c) the above abnormal qualities are central to his role;
- d) he may undergo training and austerities under the tutorship of an older shaman and may develop a peculiar disposition; the shaman may go into a trance or enter into an excited condition to make his predictions, or to cure the illness or get rid of a spirit.

Box 2

Among the Public initiation ceremonies of Siberian Shaman, those of Buriats are among the most interesting. The principal rite includes a climb over the birch tree. A strong birch tree is set up in the Shaman's tent, its roots in the heaven and its crown coming out of the smoke hole. The birch tree is called **Udesi burkhan** — the guardian of the door, for it opens the door to Heaven to the shaman. The birch tree always remains in his tent — serving as a distinguishing mark of shaman's residence. On the day of this sacred ceremony, the candidates climb to the top of the birch, carrying a sword in one hand. Emerging through the smoke hole he shouts for the aid of the god. After this the master shaman, the apprentice and the entire audience go in a procession which halts by a particular path, a goat is sacrificed, and the candidate stripped to the waist, has his head, eyes and ears anointed with blood, while the other shamans play their drums. The candidate then climbs it, followed by other Shamans. As they climb they all fall — or pretend to fall in ecstasy.

There, the birch or pole is compared to the tree or pillar that stands at the centre of the world and that connects the three cosmic zones — Earth, Heaven and Hell.

As far as the functions performed by a shaman are concerned, it is believed that he combines the functions of priest, prophet and magician, all in one. He is known to perform priestly functions and uses sacrifice as a central act in the process of healing and divination. He also performs rituals of sacrifice and appeasement to the gods or spirits once they have been forced to submit to the shaman's needs.

Finally, because of fear of the shaman and his powers, he acquires a charismatic personality and qualities of leadership similar to a prophet. He may wear unusual jewellery and clothing, wear his hair long and matted, paint his body with colour or ash and carry either musical instruments or bones. His eccentric appearance and qualities have often earned him the name of a neurotic and a trickster.

13.5.4 Organisation

As far as the hierarchic organisation of the shamans is concerned it is not as clearly identified as that of the priests. Within the community however, on the basis of the power and control a shaman has over spirits, he has a particular ranks. They are also classified in terms of whether they perform positive magic (or white magic) in the well-being of a person or negative magic or black magic to make someone ill. Accordingly, they are either revered or feared and have higher or lower status. A shaman does not undergo indoctrination in an institution as a priest does not have to master tests except those that are special to his functions.

Unlike priesthood, we do find women included among the shamanistic category. Female shamans are usually associated with witchcraft and with sorcery. They are called shamanin.

The shaman is regarded important enough to be buried in a special way. Often where a shaman is buried a sacred site is created, entry into which is restricted. A dead shaman's body may even become the object of a cult. The shaman is found to play a significant role amongst the people of Tibet, Nepal, the Red Indians in America and in some south Asia communities. In the Indian context we find they are found to play an important role in some tribal communities. In our next section we take an example to illustrate this point.

13.5.5 An Example : The Oraon Shaman-

As we have already mentioned, the shaman is closely associated with tribal life and medicine. We take here the example of a tribe among whom the shaman has great significance. We refer here to the Dravidian tribe of Oraons found in east India in the Chota Nagpur plateau. The shamans here and the tribe in general, were first studied by the Indian social anthropologist S.C. Roy, in the 1929s. The Oraons live in a hilly and forested region. They practise agriculture and both men and women share in farming. Their life is coloured by festivals and they have sacred groves for their village deity. Important in the life of the Oraon is the **bagat** or the shaman. His residence is identifiable by coloured flags on bamboo poles that stand outside it. These flags represent the gods and goddesses, that are worshipped by the **bhagat**. It also includes the flag of the special deity that enters the **bhagat** during his trances, and helps him to heal and cure. The position of the **bhagat** is hereditary and usually only one son or daughter is handed down the knowledge in a family. An Oraon can become a shaman, only if he has special qualities that are recognised by the person to whom he is apprenticed. The life of the **bhagat** is simple and strict in matters of food and drink and is governed by the prescribed conduct and rules of shamanic training.

The Oraon **bhagat** need not become a shaman by inheritance only. He may be chosen by divine interventions, through a dream or a possession by a god who informs the chosen person of how to go about learning the knowledge to be a shaman.

The **bhagat** usually deals with illnesses that come from demonic possession; or illness or madness that comes from psychological stress. The treatment can be in the form of a healing ritual or an exorcism, better known as **jhar phook**. These rituals are of various kinds and extent, depending on the depth of a person's illness. Thus the **bhagat** is seen to perform both rituals associated with good spirits and the bad. They are seen not only to perform both rituals associated with good spirits and the bad. They are seen not only to cure and provide remedies for illness but much of their success comes from faith healing and divination. The **bhagat** is also known to go into trances and an ecstatic condition to reach the root of his patient's malady. It may be pointed out here that the range of a shaman and his personal power vary greatly from one societal context to another.

If we look at the above example, even though discussed here briefly, we find that the **bhagat** or shaman among the Oraon is very similar in his personality and life to the shaman described in general. Having considered the nature of the shaman and his role in social life specific to simpler societies, let us now proceed to examine the nature of the prophet and prophecy as the final form of religious specialisation.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Briefly discuss what Weber's understanding of the magician is. Use about three lines for your answer.

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2) Who is a shaman? Use about four lines for your answer.

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3) Briefly describe the shaman of Oraon. Use about four lines for your answer.

13.6 THE PROPHET

Having discussed the nature of the priest and shaman as religious specialists who have different and significant functions to perform particularly in relationship to the world of the supernatural, let us now turn to the prophet. The prophet is also a religious specialist but not of the kind that the priest and magician (shaman) are. He is more recognizable as a leader of a religious movement rather than as a functionary fulfilling a role within a movement. Prophets have also been the source of new world religions such as Islam or Zoroastrianism, or **leaders of sectarian religions**. Let us first consider what Weber had to say about the prophet.

13.6.1 Weber on the Prophet

In his book on religion, Weber has devoted a whole chapter to the understanding of what a prophet is. He defines the prophet as an individual who is capable of proclaiming a religious doctrine or a divine commandment because of his charismatic qualities. The major difference between the priest and prophet is that the prophet regards his mission as a "personal call" and derives his authority from personal revelation and charisma or an exceptional quality. The core of the prophet's mission is to carry forward the commandment or doctrine he has received as revelation. Often the prophet may use magic to establish his authority. The prophet is usually successful and respected till his ability to convince and prove his uniqueness of purpose is intact.

Prophets also engage in healing and counselling. Weber points out that the prophet usually does not belong to an organisation and neither does he receive economic rewards for his ideas. He is not a professional and has a following of disciples or a **laity** because they believe in his or have faith in him. The prophet makes prophecies which become often the guiding principles of a religious sect or cult or even an entire religious movement. The prophet besides making prophecies, is a teacher of religious and philosophical wisdom.

To put it simply, the prophet may be seen as an individual who is an instrument for carrying forward the will of god and he is obeyed because of the ethical nature of his mission. He may also be a person who individually sets an example of attaining salvation as did Buddha. This latter form of exemplary prophetism has been found particularly in India.

13.6.2 The Prophet : An Overview

The prophet has been found to rise in the context of almost all world religions in some form or the other. In this section we briefly consider some features of a prophet and an example as we have already outlined in general with the help of Weber's work. We have already noted that the prophet does not belong to an

institution as such and may be on a purely personal mission; we therefore do not examine the nature of organisation here. As such prophets have varied in nature from religion to religion and society to society, depending upon the nature of their mission. This has also determined the nature of the prophecies they have made. It may be noted however that the category of the prophet is absent in India's indigenous religious traditions. We mean by this that the idea of the prophet such as Moses, Jesus or Muhammad, who bring to mankind a message or a commandment from God, are absent in India. In fact we do not even find them in the Indian tribal context as we find the shaman.

We do however have another category of prophet in India who by virtue of his ability to foresee, to predict and to use clairvoyance, transcends time and space and makes prophecies about the future. He often is seen to use magic or miracle-making to convince the followers about the truthfulness of his prophecy. We consider here the example of such a prophet to illustrate the above.

13.6.3 Sathya Sai Baba : An Example

Sathya Sai Baba is regarded as modern India's most famous miracle maker and deity saint. He is easily recognisable by his appearance and clothes. The major part of his devotees come from the high caste middle and upper-middle classes in India. He can be regarded as a deity as he receives the homage of his devotees he returns these with blessings and grants boons. But above all he is known for his ability to make miracles and predictions come true. It is believed that only the real followers and believers of Sathya Sai Baba are really able to recognise him. His devotees have been seen to regard him as an **avatar** or manifestation of God on earth.

Sai Baba receives this special status not because of any mission that he heads of religion that he leads but as a consequence of the fact of his unusual capabilities and charismatic personality. His birth in 1926 in a village in Andhra Pradesh is seen as divine because of the mysterious occurrences that took place then, such as a cobra suddenly appearing under his bed. At the age of thirteen he is believed to have suffered a seizure and then began performing miracles and later claimed to be 'Sai Baba', the saviour of his people, and a reincarnation of the earlier saint, Sai Baba of Shirdi.

In 1940 he broke away from his family and set out on a career as a holyman and accepted devotees. He by now had begun performing the act of producing ash or **vibhuti** and other items. Although he became famous for his miracles, he also came to be known for his ability to cure and heal. In 1950, an **ashram** was constructed in the village of his birth and he had come to be recognised all over India as a god man, with a large following.

The important thing to note here is that his followers were there not because of what he professed but because of their faith in him as a divine person. He is known to go into trances and seizures to cure the illness of a devotee, by taking the illness upon himself.

He has predicted that there will be one more incarnation of Sai Baba, after him, and also tells of the place he will be born in Karnataka next. He claims himself to be an incarnation of Shiva and Shakti and much of the cult symbolism revolves around Shiva, though the cult and its membership themselves are very ambiguous. He remains the central charismatic authority of this cult and a modern day prophet and **guru** who does not preach a doctrine. Those who believe in him, are his devotees, and those who do not are not his devotees.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Who is a prophet? Explain in five lines.

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2) Differentiate between a priest and a prophet in five lines.

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13.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have studied three different types of religious specialists. We have begun by examining who a religious specialist is and what kinds of functions he performs for a society.

We have then proceeded to examine the major contribution made by Max Weber to the sociology of religion as well as his specific ideas on the priest, magician and prophet.

This unit has also tried to deal with each specialist: priest shaman and prophet, separately, outlining the features and functions of each. We have tried to show how each of the specialists has significance within a given context and how each associates with the layman differently. The purpose of examining these three different kinds of roles is to show how mankind relates to the world of the divine and supernatural, differently. Finally, wherever we have been able to, we have tried to support our presentation with examples from the Indian context. Our presentation has however been limited because the field is too diverse to be incorporated into a few pages.

13.8 KEY WORDS

Brahmacharya : the first phase in a pious Hindu's life where is a bachelor engaged in learning.

Charisma : certain supernatural or divinely gifted talents or something received from divine grace.

Clairvoyance : the ability to see mentally into the future.

Cult : a system of religious worship.

Doctrine : a reference to religious belief or teaching.

Ethics : reference to the science of morals

Exorcism : to get rid of evil spirits or expel spirits from someone's body through invocation and rituals.

Grihastha : the second phase of life as a householder.

Monotheistic : a doctrine that believes in only one God.

Polytheism : a doctrine that believes in the existence of many Gods.

Sacerdotal : related to the sacred or consecrated sphere.

Sanyasa : the final stage of life when one renounces the material world.

Sorcery : the use of magical arts to achieve something.

Vanaprastha : the third phase of life when one, having completed, one's duties, proceeds to the forest to meditate.

13.9 FURTHER READINGS

Babb, Lawrence A. 1986, *Redemptive Encounters : Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition*, Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Elwin, Verrier, 1955. *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Fuller, Christopher J. 1990. *Servants of the Goddess : The Priests of a South Indian Temple*, Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Madan, T.N. 1991. (ed.) *Religion in India*, Oxford University Press : Delhi.

13.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Religious specialists are people who because of certain special qualities they possess are able to mediate between the human world and the supernatural world. The priest, the magician, the shaman are all examples of religious specialists.
- 2) According to Weber the priest is one who performs mediatory functions directed towards the world of the supernatural and divine. The priest belongs to an organisation or is related to an institution. He may even be attached to a family. He undergoes indoctrination and organisational learning. He has to abide by certain defined codes of behaviour. He is also expected to perform periodic rituals and sacrifice for the propitiation of the divine or the Gods and Goddesses.
- 3) i) (d)
ii) (f)
iii) (a)
iv) (b)
v) (c)
vi) (e)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Weber understands the magician as a specialist who uses his knowledge of the supernatural, sorcery, miracle making and exorcism to carry out rituals and acts that are both beneficial and harmful. He deals with evil spirits and tries to overcome illness through his magical powers.
- 2) The shaman is a tribal magician and leader. He is known for his powers of sorcery and exorcism and similar to those of the magician he performs both positive rituals of well-being, and negative rituals of ill-being.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The prophet is a person who by virtue of his charismatic personality and qualities is capable of being a leader and gaining a following. The prophet leads a mission not for economic reasons but as he sees it as his personal calling or as a divine mission. The prophet may either lead a mission or he may be the founder of a world religion. To put it simply, the prophet is seen as a messenger or instrument of God's will.
- 2) The difference between the priest and prophet is that while the priest is a religious specialist who is attached to an organisation and performs rituals on behalf of others, the prophet is an independent person. He performs no rituals on behalf of people as such and is not a member of an organisation where there are others like him although, he may lead one. Secondly while the priest inherits his authority by birth in a family or through indoctrination and specialised knowledge, the prophet's authority comes from his personal charisma.

UNIT 14 RELIGION : SOCIAL STABILITY AND CHANGE

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Religion and the Social Order
 - 14.2.1 Religion and Social Order
 - 14.2.2 Social Stability and Social Change
 - 14.2.3 Determining Factors
- 14.3 Sects, Cults and Denominations
 - 14.3.1 Characteristics of Sects, Cults and Denominations
 - 14.3.2 Sects Change the Social Order
- 14.4 Religion and Social Change
 - 14.4.1 Religion and the Economic Order
 - 14.4.2 Religion and the Political Order
 - 14.4.3 Religion and the Cultural Order
- 14.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.6 Key Words
- 14.7 Further Readings
- 14.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to

- explain the relationship between religion and the social order
- assess the impact of religion on society, keeping in mind sects, cults and denominations
- appreciate the fact that religion can preserve the existing social order, as well as change it drawing instances from the various facets of social order viz. political, economic and cultural
- comprehend the factors and contexts which determine impact of religion on society: stabilisation or change.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Are you finding this intellectual voyage through religion, guided by the sociologists, interesting? We are sure most of you will. Religion is such a complex reality, that even as you explore yet another mystery unfolds. Through this course, we are only introducing you into this voyage, and it is out of your own interests you have to sociologically explore religion using wherever necessary, the concepts and theories which are provided to you.

So far you have read and understood thirteen units on religion spread over three blocks. Block three deals with various aspects of religion like religious organisations, religious specialists, fundamentalism, secularisation and so on. One of the very interesting properties of religion is that it can justify, explain and conserve the social order as well as it can demystify, de-legitimise and change the social order.

This important property of religion will be explained to you, in this unit. In 14.2, we shall recapitulate the basic ideas like religion, social order, stability and change with which you are already familiar with. In 14.3, we shall demonstrate to you that sects

and cults arise due to the impact of religion on society. The main task here will be to give you instances where sects have changed the social order as well as established a new social order. Assuming that social order has various facets, for example economic order, cultural order, political order, in the section 14.4 we shall explain that religion can preserve, stabilize or change each one of these facets of social order, drawing various instances.

14.2 RELIGION AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

Religion, social order, stability and change are four conceptual tools required to grasp this unit. In this sub section we shall learn the nitty gritty of these conceptual tools. Though you are already familiar with them, go through sub sections 14.2.1, 14.2.2 and 14.2.3 in order to understand better the nature and complexity of interaction between religion and the social order.

Religion is a system in itself and it is also a sub-system of the larger society. It is constantly in interaction with other sub-systems of the society like family, education, state and economy. As you know there are specific manifestations of this interaction between religion and the social order. Sects and cults are specific and explicit manifestations of this interaction. Religion in the course of its interaction with social order can stabilize the social order — justifying and legitimising it through explanations. On the other hand religion can also change the existing social order. Religion can be status-quo or revolutionary. The nature of the interaction and its fall out depends on a number of factors, which we shall outline in sub-section 14.2.3.

14.2.1 Interaction between Religion and Social Order

What is social order? More discerning learners amongst you will recall that ‘social order’ is a concept within the functionalist understanding of society. The origin of this idea, can be traced back to the medieval ages, when people were searching for ‘order’ amidst chaos generated by devastating feudal wars, and catastrophic natural calamities and endemic plagues. In our times, this idea has been popularised by the thinkers who advocate a functionalist understanding of society, drawing at the same time a comparison between the dynamics of human body and society, in short, organismic analogy.

‘Social Order’ as a concept may imply one or many of the following meanings: (i) Arrangement of institutions in the society; (ii) Arrangement of roles and statuses in the society; (iii) A smooth, well-coordinated functioning of this ‘structure’. In other words, ‘structure’ and ‘function’ are the twin dimensions of any social order. Individual and society held together in a harmonious relationship, is the crux of a social order. A most significant but questionable assumption behind the idea of social order is that, social order is a ‘self-regulating’, ‘self-balancing’ order in equilibrium almost like the natural Order.

An important issue which arises from the functionalist interpretation of social order is like this : the social order also contain inequalities of power, wealth and life opportunities and a struggle between various groups to gain access to these resources. Are these inequalities to stay and accepted as ‘natural’ or ‘given’ or ‘consensus-determined’? Shouldn’t we change this conflict-ridden social order? These are questions of perennial debate among sociologists. There is a specific group of sociologists who tend to conceptualize social order as a conflict between groups which aspire for resources.

What does religion say about the social order? Does religion accept the social order of the day as it exists with its inequalities of power, wealth and life opportunities? Does religion say that social order is natural and given and hence beyond change?

Does religion say that an unjust order is the manifestation of divine will and creation? Does religion say that human beings have to accept the social order, because it is the result of individual commissions and omissions (sin, karma etc.) and hence they cannot change it?

Before deliberating on these important questions, let us recapitulate some of the salient features of religion.

- i) Religion has a cognitive function: It provides us the categories of understanding, in other words a framework of intelligence (ideas of time, space, class, person, etc.) (Durkheim, E. 1965 (1912):9).
- ii) Religion has an intellectual function: It explains the meaning and purpose of human life. It gives and supports values and norms governing the society. To be more specific, religion plays a significant role in goal-setting and value-orientation in a society. Apart from this religion explains the natural processes like birth, death, misery and evil.
- iii) Religion is a social institution because community of believers constitute the basis of any religion. Religion is an organisation because it consists of a hierarchy of deities, priests, prophets and believers.
- iv) Religion is an ensemble of rituals and beliefs centering around a notion of the sacred.

14.2.2 Social Stability and Social Change

In the previous section, 14.2.1, the twin ideas of religion and social order were explained in detail for you. That illustration along with the questions posed, should have helped you in grasping why and how does religion interact with social order. Thus after comprehending the nature and complexity of the interactive relationship between religion and social order, let us now proceed to analyse the impact/result of the relationship.

When religion and social order interact, two broad effects may result: (i) Religion can change the social order or religion can stabilise the social order: (ii) Social change can lead to changes in religion itself at various levels or existing social order can defend and justify the religion which at times is oppressive and atrocious. Stabilisation and change are not the only likely fall-out of interaction between religion and social order. Sometimes at certain specific places, even a continuity may result. In other words some of the features of the bygone era can be retained, changing few others. New emergent situations may necessitate the adaptation of some of the principles of the past.

Religion stabilises the existing social order by its explanations of human misery and social inequalities. It can stabilise the society by socialising individuals within a specific moral framework. A particular religion explains doctrines which explain inequalities as natural and God-given. Some religions revolve around the concept of personal salvation so much that, they explain human misery in terms of 'sin' or the 'fallen state of humankind'.

Activity 1

Recall your childhood experiences, and reminiscence how your father/mother/grandparents taught you 'good'/'bad' through stories, particularly religious myths.

of the old scriptures, rituals or dogmas in the light of sweeping changes in the society at large, provide valuable inputs. Religion itself may re-emphasize hitherto marginalised or forgotten principles, in a changed context. This worldly misery (persecution, oppression, slavery, etc.) of the community of believers, may force religion to downplay its otherworldliness, in a specific socio-political, socio-economic context. Most often religious sentiments and symbols are invoked, new meanings are attributed to rituals and beliefs, and in the process religion becomes a vehicle of collective mobilization, for a group of believers who would like to be 'liberated'. This group of believers may form a sect and break away from the parent religion itself as protest. Religion also interprets what is an ideal family, best education etc. and this may bring change or stability in these institutions.

As interesting view which emerges from the above discussion is that religion is not necessarily a backward-looking or conservative force as assumed by many people. Rather religion could be a progressive, modern and revolutionary force as well, contingent upon certain factors, a few of which are explained below.

14.2.3 Determining Factors

Whether religion stabilizes the existing social order or changes it, depends upon a host of factors. Some of them are:

- New evidences/researches which cast the message of the scriptures/holy books/ founder of the religion in a new light.
- Social origins (social class, ethnicity etc.) of the clergy, clerics, priests and the community of believers.
- Medium through which stabilisation or change is disseminated.
- Reinterpretation of the Holy Books/Scriptures/Tests in the light of scholarly debates or movements.
- Political status of the religions community-ruled by a colonial regime or themselves.
- Nexus of the religious hierarchy with other sections of the society. In other words, position of power within and outside the religion.
- Emergence of prophets, impact of other cultures, political subordination, economic exploitation of the believers.
- Just as changes in religion may initiate changes in the social order, changes in the society in various realms like education, family, science, industry, stratification may compel religion to explain the social order in a new light.

14.3 SECTS, CULTS AND DENOMINATIONS

Sects, cults and denominations, largely speaking are manifestations of dissent within the parent religion. For example, within the universal church you find numerous protestant sects, denominations, and cults. At a certain point of history, owing to changes in the society and when religion becomes a mere stabilization agent of society, there arise groups of dissent which interrogate the dogmas, rituals and practices of the parent religion.

14.3.1 Characteristics of Sects, Cults and Denominations

The origin of sects can be attributed to the dissent among certain sections of clergy and the community of believers. They may feel that the parent religion (for example,

the church) has failed to articulate adequately the teachings of the founder or the prophet and has just become part of the social order. Urge for change, reconstruction and reinterpretation are at the root of sects.

Through an example, it will be demonstrated before you how a sect attempted to change the social order. But before coming to that let us quickly recapitulate the finer variations between these three levels of religious organisations, viz. sects, cults and denominations. At this point, take care to read Unit 12 (Block 3). It may help you further to understand what is a sect and what is not. Church and the sect have different kind of relationship to the world. Churches accept the social order and lend credibility to its stats, whereas sects are marked by a motivation to dissociate from the existing social order, the status quo. Sects are in a sense non-conformist bodies. **Sect is marked by voluntary membership, whereas membership to the Church is natural, i.e. by birth.** Sects are more autonomous than the church.

The fully developed Church utilises the state and the ruling classes and weaves these elements into its own life; it then becomes an integral part of the existing social order. Thus church stabilizes the social order. Sects generally are connected with lower classes, or at least with those elements who are opposed to state and society; they work upward from below, argues Earnest Troeltsch in his famous work *"The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches"*.

Sect is an idealistic community, and is small in size comparatively. Members seek direct personal fellowship. However, sects after a certain stage may themselves be institutionalised and become denominations. Put differently, denominations are sects in an advanced stage of development and adjustment to each other and secular world. Cult is essentially centered around an individual living or dead. The emphasis on personal fellowship is minimal. Followers of the cult, which is a loosely knit structured form of religious expression seek personal ecstatic experience, salvation and comfort.

14.3.2 Sects Change the Social Order

Let us now learn about a Hindu sect which attempted to change the social order. Veera Saiva movement is a twelfth century Hindu sect, which staunchly advocated protest against the Brahminical ethos of those times. It is this strong element of protest, which makes Veera Saiva movement, a sect per se, though scholars are, hesitant to use the term 'sect' outside the western context.

During the 12th century, Brahminical Hinduism dominated the social order. Rigid caste and ritual systems were the order of the day. Social intercourse between various caste groups were highly restricted and regulated, through an elaborate system of rules which inhibited inter-dining and inter-marriage. Non-Brahmins were subjected to bondage, humiliation and de-humanizing existence.

The Veera Saiva Movement was headed by Basaveshwara, who was the Chief Minister and Treasurer to Bijjala II, the Kalachuri King. The Veera Saiva movement fought a relentless struggle against the oppressive Brahminical Hindu order. It challenged the norms and values advocated and enforced by the Brahmins. The adherents of Veera Saiva movement, held Siva as the supreme God. All those who submit themselves before Siva, are equal irrespective of sex, caste and class, preached Basaveshwara. The Veerasaivites regarded untouchability as an evil and hence restrained from observing caste pollution. They rejected the doctrine of rebirth and believed in jivan-Mukthi. Work (Kayaka) was sanctified. Veerasaivites followed Bhakti Marg in their quest for ultimate reality. The Veerasaiva movement, owing to its ideology of protest against the then prevailing Brahminical Hindu order, attracted many followers, most of them from lower castes. By about 1162 A.D. the movement had gathered momentum and Basaveshwara Chenna Basava Alatha

Box 1

The leaders of the movement created an organisational framework, to sustain, uphold and preach the Veerasaiva doctrines. Maths were established and a priestly order of Jangamas was created. King Bijjala and Basaveshwara came into conflict, and this led to the subsequent emergence of radicals and moderates among the Veerasaivas. Basaveshwara was a charismatic leader, and after his death the Veerasaiva movement had to rely on an extensive order of Mathas and priests. When the Mathas took the leadership after Basaveshwara and priests (Jangamas) replaced the lay leadership, the movement began to consolidate, evolve a wide set of rules and regulations. This Matha-priest institutions were responsible for preservation and propagation of the tenets of Veerasaivism, its canonical scriptures and literature.

After the movement, began to institutionalise itself through an order of mathas, a hierarchy of priests, and sect of rules and regulations, it began to lose its sectarian character, particularly the ideology of protest. Veerasaivism slowly institutionalised itself into an order parallel to that of the Brahmins. Though the Veerasaiva movement aided the emergence of Lingayats (one who wear Lingas on their body as a political group and also propagated education among non-Brahmins, the fact is that it stands reduced to another caste in modern day Karnataka (India).

So far, in subsection 14.3.1, a Hindu sectarian movement which emerged as a protest against the dominant Brahminical Hindu order was discussed. True, the Veerasaiva movement brought a sea change in the social order of twelfth century Karnataka. But eventually it had to succumb to institutionalisation and established a parallel order. Sects emerge as a protest, but in the course of time they routinise and accommodate the social order.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Discuss the nature of relationship between religion and the social order, in about five lines.

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- ii) Cite an example to illustrate that sect can change the social order, in about five lines.

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- iii) Fill in the blanks:

- a) Religion can change the social order or stabilise it; also there is a possibility of

- b) A particular way in which religion stabilizes the social order, is through its explanation of and
- c) A sect is essentially a movement.
- d) Interpretation of Scriptures/Holybooks may from time to time contingent upon many social factors.

14.4 RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Let us assume that economic order, political order and cultural order are three different facets of the social order. In this sub section 14.4, you will learn specifically how religion can change or stabilize the economic order, political order and the cultural order. As you are aware, the economic order primarily refers to the arrangement of individuals and institutions in a relationship of the production, distribution and consumption of goods. Political order refers to the exercise of power and authority. The cultural order largely includes the configuration of symbols and their meanings. To begin with, let us understand how religious ideas can mould the economic system — changing or stabilizing it as a result.

14.4.1 Religion and the Economic Order

By now, you would have thoroughly understood Unit 10, and you can anticipate many of those arguments in this subsection. Broadly speaking, we can draw insights from Max Weber (1864-1920) to demonstrate that religious ideas can change the economic order. On the other hand, if we carefully understand Karl Marx (1864-1883), it is possible to argue that religion can stabilize an exploitative, miserable economic order. That is to say that the role of religion in society, of which it is an important subsystem, is capable of great harmony and integration; but it can also be a major factor in creating conflict as in fundamentalism.

1) Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism : Max Weber on Religion

In the eyes of Max Weber, religious ideas can act as powerful force in determining the course of the economic order. Through his '*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*' (1958, 1905), Max Weber proposed the thesis that various Protestant sects that emerged during the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, aided through their doctrines, the emergence of modern rational capitalism. Max Weber's thesis was part of a larger intellectual debate among scholars, regarding the role of ideal and material factors in historical development.

The doctrines of the Protestant sects, in particular Calvinism, created new attitudes toward work, money and pleasure. These new doctrines marked a significant departure from what has been hitherto preached by the Catholic Church. These doctrines were accepted by the emerging classes in Europe, after the break-down of feudal order, which combined hard work with asceticism. In other words, believers of these Protestant doctrines worked hard but restrained themselves from material pleasures and luxury. This resulted in the accumulation of wealth (capital), which spurred the growth of rational industrial capitalism.

The doctrines of 'calling' and 'Predestination' are the twin ideas, which left a tremendous impact on the believers. According to the doctrine of Predestination, preached by Calvin, God has already chosen some human beings and angels into everlasting life, for his own glory and in his own interests. Those who are not selected are predestined to everlasting death. The most significant aspect of this doctrine is that human beings cannot know the will of God. 'Am I one of the elect?' 'Am I one among the God's predestined invisible church?' 'Am I one among those

chosen by God for Heaven?' may be questions which haunt the believers. But there is no answer for them. On the contrary, believers have to trust in God that they are one amongst the 'chosen' or the 'elect'. To attain this trust, intense wordly activity was recommended as the most suitable means.

A Calvinist has to prove his faith through wordly activity. He has to understand himself as a tool of divine will, and has to indulge in wordly activity for the greater glory of God. The concept of 'calling' elevated wordly activity to a highest form of moral activity which can be attained by any individual. 'Time is money' and 'Credit is money', are the twin cliches which capture the spirit of those times aptly. 'Time is money' implies that waste of time is sinful and to the same time earning money is a sign of God's grace. For a puritan, who earned money but abstained from luxury and pleasure, generating wealth was an end in itself. Prosperity was an end in itself and it was sign of God's grace. It is clear that doctrine of Calvin created a situation where abstemious values and norms meant that there was a great saving of wealth which was put back into the work. This resulted in a tremendous economic boost to the society concerned and made Calvinism a set of beliefs which were very positive towards economic growth.

Thus certain doctrines of Protestant sects changed the attitude of believers towards work, money and pleasure which in turn led to the accumulation of capital, necessary for the emergence of rational industrial capitalism. Whereas Max Weber viewed religious ethic of the Protestant sects as having aided the spirit of capitalism, Karl Marx argues that religion is an ideology of the ruling elite.

2) Religion is an illusion : Marx on Religion

Marx developed his understanding of religion mainly from Prussia. In Prussia, the state defended the Protestant Christian religion. Protestant Christian religion, in that context, acted as an ideology for the new class which arose at the break-up of feudalism in Europe. Since Protestantism helped the growth of capitalism, the State of Prussia supported it.

Marx also argued that religion is an illusion which **veils the real exploitative conditions in society**. At the same time, religion is a mode of protest, albeit a misdirected protest, adopted by those who are oppressed and exploited. To add further, religion is a form of alienation, characteristic of the capitalist society. Religion is a direct outcome of the exploitative conditions in society, and hence religion can be discarded only by changing the exploitative social condition (i.e. capitalism) which gives rise to the need for religion.

Thus for Karl Marx, religion is an illusion, a form of alienation and misdirected protest. Religion stabilizes, the social order, by veiling the exploitation and misery of the capitalist economic order.

14.4.2 Religion and the Political Order

Religion can change the political order as well as preserve it. Assuming that political order includes the mode of exercise of power and authority, various categories like the State, Nation and Sovereignty creep into our analysis. Every religion has a political idea, a sense of community; a mode of power and authority; a particular understanding of sovereignty. In other words, 'Kingdom of God' and 'Darul Islam' are political ideas. Every religion has a specific conception of politics, whose interpretation may change from time to time, no matter whether this conception is actualised in reality or not. In this sense, **there cannot be a strict separation of religion from politics** for religion at times has to be this wordly as well. (See Unit 11 — Religion and Politics/State for a discussion on this).

As you are aware, in the Hindu caste system, Kshatriya is the ruler and his dharma is to protect and conserve the social order. The Brahmin has to uphold the system of knowledge, and values. At a theoretical level, one finds a clear separation of spirituality and power, and power being subordinated to spirituality. But at the level of practice, this is a questionable postulate. In fact, the tension between spirituality and power, State and the religion, can be presented as a universal dilemma. During the medieval ages in Europe (8th to 15th century), many kings (and by implication, their kingdoms) clearly remained subordinated to the authority of the Pope (who is the spiritual head of the Roman Catholic Church). The situation changed in Europe, after the Reformation, and rulers became the head of their respective national churches. For example, Queen of England is the head of the Protestant Anglican Church of England.

The many fundamentalist and revivalist movements which are arising all over the world are also defining their own idea of a political state. The fundamentalist and revivalist are reinterpreters of religion. They go back to, what they consider to be pure, original code of religious behaviour, which involves a total world-view. With the intention of restoring these authentic values the fundamentalists ignore all other values.

Islam, for example, is particularly clear about the conduct of the Muslim community. The universe of a Muslim is circumscribed by his or her religion, where politics and religion are inseparable. The resurgence of Islam in recent decades witnesses this linkage.

In our next unit on fundamentalism, we have discussed the various socio-political and historical reasons which has given rise to Islamic resurgence.

Most often, it is the oppressed communities which use religion as a tool to change the political order. The oppression of Jews, and the consequent diaspora does not prevent them from considering themselves as a nation — Israel. This incipient nationalism of Jews, has its basis in the Bible. Israel has a specific identity, which can be traced to the Bible. And in India, many scholars opine that, Gandhi effectively used Hindu symbols of self-sufficient, autonomous ideal-village communities as Ram Rajya. Numerous tribal uprisings and revolts against the colonial rule, has an explicit religious tinge. For instance, Birsa Munda who led a movement against the exploitation of Mundas by outsiders, began by saying that he has obtained a 'revelation' from God. He claimed himself to be a God (Dharti Aba, means 'father of the world') and tried to perform miracles.

Box 2

Here is an example where religion involves itself with politics to bring about social justice.

Christianity has long addressed the suffering of the oppressed people of the world. Through a belief in a better life to come for the faithful. However a number of religious leaders in Latin America, in a radical move, are emphasising on social justice. This movement in Christianity is called liberation theology. Liberation theology developed in the late 1960s within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. In simple terms, liberation theology believes that the church has responsibility to help people liberate themselves from poverty.

The movement is based on three general principles which are:

- 1) Human suffering exists in the world on a scale that is barely imaginable by

secure and the rich. Liberation theology is based, first of all, on the recognition of this reality of human suffering.

- 2) Human suffering on such a mass scale is inconsistent with Christian moral principles that there be equality.
- 3) Liberation theology asserts that as an expression of faith and conscience, Christians must act to relieve this suffering which entails political action and practical strategies.

Thus a growing number of liberation theologians have allied themselves with the poor in a political struggle against the ruling class in whose hands the wealth is concentrated.

Liberation theology has been strongly resisted by the rich ruling class as well as the Roman Catholic Church. Many liberation theologians have been killed in the widespread violence that engulfed Latin America. The Roman Catholic Church has strongly opposed the mixing of religion and politics. The Roman Catholic authority believes that liberation theology diverts the attention from other worldly concerns of Christianity to get involved in political controversy. Nonetheless, the liberation theology movement continues to grow in Latin America with the firm belief that both Christian faith and a sense of human justice demand efforts to change the plight of world's poor. (Taken from J.J. Macionis, *Sociology*, Prentice Hall : New Jersey, 1987).

Religion can stabilize the power structure and at the same time, it can be used to change the power structure also. So far this has been elaborated vividly. However, understanding certain limitations of the relationship between religion and political order is imperative. For instance, in the case of religions spread over the world, there could be differences between the various local/national religious communities on specific political issues. In other words, you should desist from understanding religions as a monolith, since contingent upon various local factors, religions may differ in their relationship to the power structure.

The Universal Roman Catholic Church stabilizes the power structure everywhere almost, by weaving a network of relationships with other secular spheres. But in Latin American countries, the Catholic Church is radical enough to join hands with the oppressed sections of the society to wage a war against the exploitative local power structures. This radicalism has been the offshoot of a particular modern interpretation of Christian doctrines, known as the liberation theology. In a somewhat similar vein, upon observing closely you will find that Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia supports the process of modernization, whereas Islam in Iran is conservative and backward looking upon comparison.

14.4.3 Religion and the Cultural Order

Assuming that cultural order is an intermesh of symbols which are potent with meaning, it emerges that religion might change the meaning of symbols, and thus the cultural order. As you are aware, religion is something eminently social, in the eyes of Durkheim (1965 (1912)). Religious representations are collective representations, and they express collective realities. Totem, which is an object of worship and veneration is an emblem. The totem symbolizes the tribe. In the case of the Arundas of Australia, whom Durkheim selected for analysis, the 'Churinga' is the symbol of a clan. Rituals arise from the 'Collective effervescence' generated by the society. Moreover, religion supplies the categories, classifications required to understand the world. Rituals maintain the solidarity of the group. From the discussions of Durkheim, it broadly emerges that religion is strongly related to the social structure.

Now the interpretation is that, whenever there is change in social structure, there could be a corresponding change in religion and vice-versa. To be more specific, religious symbols could be acquiring new meanings when there is a change in the social structure. Also it is possible that, when religion undergoes rapid change, the non-religious symbols like kinship can acquire a new meaning. For instance, when a simple society is under the onslaught of a colonial power which incidentally is also of a different religion, it happens that the whole simple society re-order its myths, symbols, rituals, beliefs and world view. Let us understand this example: During the year 1810, in Mexico, there arose a revolt of local people against Spanish Overlordship. During this revolt, a particular religious symbol, Our Lady of Gudalupe, acquired meaning from pre-Columbian religious sources, especially from the Aztec mother of the Gods Tonantzin as well as from the Mother of God in Catholic Christian theology and folk practice.

Religious symbols evoke powerful and deep sentiments and everlasting moods. Even then, due to social change, one dominant symbol may acquire different meanings in various socio-historical, socio-political, social-structural contexts. The Eastern Orthodox empty cross stresses on the doctrine of Christ risen, the Catholic Crucifix (with its corpus) emphasizes Christ's humanity and sacrifice, while the Protestant empty Cross implicitly denies the continuing sacrificial character of the Eucharist. Religious symbols are most often manipulated, to facilitate mobilization of a collectivity, around a cause. For instance, when there is an upsurge militant Hinduism, the elephant-headed, auspicious God of the Hindu Pantheon Lord Ganesh is represented as holding trishuls, spears and swords. When there is social change, we find a corresponding change in the representation of religious symbols, and the interpretation of their meaning. Moreover, protest groups may appropriate the symbols and impute new meanings to them. During the Veerasaiva movement, which came to contest the subordination of non-Brahmins to Brahmins in the Hindu social order, 'Linga' becomes a symbol of protest. Every Veerasaivite was supposed to wear the Linga on his body, in order to claim purity equivalent to that of a Brahmin.

The term cultural order, includes our mental classifications (e.g. 'good' and the 'bad'/'evil'), our understanding of time, space and personality. It becomes evident that, when there is a change in religion, one's idea of 'good' and 'evil', time, space and personality may undergo corresponding alteration. And the reverse is also true. When there is a change in our understanding of good and evil, time, space, and personality due to various forces including media, education etc., there is every likelihood that our attitude towards religion also might change.

Activity 2

Collect newspaper clippings on Buddhism in Japan and Sri Lanka; Islam in Algeria and Malaysia. Draw comparisons, to understand the impact of religion on social order, especially politics.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) How does religion stabilize the economic order, i.e. capitalism, according to Karl Marx? Use five lines for your answer.

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ii) Do religious symbols change their meaning owing to social change? Illustrate your answer with an example. Use five lines for your answer.

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iii) Match the following :

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|------------------------|---|
| A. Karl Marx | a. Cognitive function of religion |
| B. Max Weber | b. Religion stabilizes the economic order |
| C. Durkheim | c. Religious ideas can change the economic order |
| D. Liberation Theology | d. Manipulation of religious symbols for political ends |
| E. Militant Hinduism | e. Religion can change the power structure |

14.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, the relationship between religion and the social order was explained. Religion can change the social order or stabilize the social order. This is possible because of the cognitive and intellectual functions of religion. Many of our concepts, which we use to understand the everyday world around us flow from religion. Apart from stability, and change, continuity is yet another possibility. By continuity, adaptation of old principle to new situation is implied. Factors which influence the outcome of the interaction between religion and social order were listed in 14.2.3.

In section 14.3, it was pointed out that, sect which is a protest movement emerging from the parent religion, can change the social order. In this sense, a sect emerges out of an interaction between religion and social order. A sect essentially represents a protest against the dogmas, rituals of the parent religion and hence an urge for change. The twelfth century Veerasaiva movement, which emerged as a sectarian movement within Hinduism, challenged the Brahminical Hindu order and advocated an egalitarian social order.

Section 14.4, establishes that religion can change or stabilize the economic, political and cultural order. Protestant ethic of 16th and 17th centuries gave an impetus for spurt in modern rational industrial capitalism; religion, being a misdirected protest, stabilizes the social order by veiling the misery and exploitation. By veiling the exploitation, religion prevents conflict between the exploiters and the exploited. This is an argument from Marx. Religion can change the power structure or justify the existing mode of exercise of power. As far as cultural order is concerned, religious symbols may undergo a change in meaning in tune with social change. Religion may resist when there is an onslaught on people's understanding of time, space, good, evil and person.

14.6 KEY WORDS

Social Order : (i) Arrangement of institutions in the society, (ii) Arrangement of roles and statuses, (iii) A smooth, self-regulated, balanced, well-coordinated functioning of this 'structure'.

Cultural Order : A mesh of meaningful symbols.

Economic Order : A set of dynamic, co-ordinated institutions involved in production, distribution and consumption of goods.

Cognitive Functions : Religion's capacity to generate classifications, and concepts which human beings use in everyday understanding of the world.

Intellectualist Function : The propensity of religion to explain natural events like rain, famine, birth, death, menstruation etc.

14.7 FURTHER READINGS

Robertson, Roland 1970. *The Sociological Interpretation of Religion*, Oxford : Basil Blackwell.

Singer, Milton 1957. *Religion, Society and the Individual*, New York : Macmillan.

14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- i) Religion can change the social order or stabilize it. This is because religion explains the natural processes like birth, death, menstruation, climate, rain and also supplies the concepts and categories to understand the world. Religion can justify misery, exploitation and oppression or it can be used to mobilize people against them.
- ii) Veerasaivism is a fine example, to illustrate that religion can change the social order. this 12th century movement, arose in protest against the Brahminical Hindu social order. This movement preached equality, fought against untouchability, and disseminated a positive attitude towards work.
- iii)
 - a) continuity
 - b) misery and inequalities
 - c) protest
 - d) change

Check Your Progress 2

- i) According to Karl Marx, religion is a protest against exploitation and misery characteristic of the capitalist economic order, but it is a misdirected protest. Religion is a form of alienation, which also veils the misery and exploitation of the capitalist economic order. By veiling the exploitation and misdirecting protest, religion prevents conflict between the exploiter and the exploited. In this sense, religion stabilizes the social order.
- ii) Yes, meaning of religious symbols undergo change in tune with the social change. Especially this is the case, in political mobilization. For instance, when a militant interpretation of Hinduism comes to vogue, the auspicious Lord Ganesh of the Hindu Pantheon is given Spears, Trishuls and Swords in his hands.
- iii)
 - A) (b)
 - B) (c)
 - C) (a)
 - D) (e)
 - E) (d)

UNIT 15 FUNDAMENTALISM : SOME CASE STUDIES

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
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15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to

- understand how fundamentalist ideas emanate and for what reasons
- analyse similar situations where fundamentalism is said to exist
- distinguish between fundamentalism in Iran and America.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have studied 'Religion : Social Stability and Change'. In this unit we want you to familiarize yourself with the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism by presenting two case studies. Our unit is divided into two main sections, of which one section is devoted to the rise of fundamentalism in Iran. We begin our discussion on this, by first giving you a background picture of the politico-economic condition of Iran, prior to the establishment of an Islamic state. This we hope will make you understand the reasons or the conditions in which Islamic resurgence has taken place. This will also give you an idea of the nature of fundamentalism. The second section in our unit deals with rightist religious movements in America which call to attention the fundamental or essential ideas of nation and its people. The nature of fundamentalism in America is quite different — there is no religious state in — America, yet the rightist religious ideals seemed to permeate the American political system and life.

By presenting these two case studies we want you to understand some of the social conditions which seemed to usher in fundamentalistic upsurges.

15.2 WHAT IS FUNDAMENTALISM

The very mention of the word 'fundamentalism' conjures up an image which came to characterise an especially militant brand of anti-modernism, anti-liberalism and anti-secularism.

Fundamentalism or revivalism is an effort by religious interpreters who like to go back to, what they believe to be, pure and original values and behaviour.

The forces of social change are important for the emergence of fundamentalism. Whenever there are drastic changes in society and change of pace which disturbs community life, very often there is a loss of identity and rootlessness among people. In such situations people clutch any support for solace. Fundamentalism promises certitude and restitution of an earlier better age. The psychological appeal of this is difficult for people to resist.

To achieve and reconstitute this earlier, better age the fundamentalist evolve a comprehensive and absolutist, rigid belief system and practice. This belief and practice which promises to bring happiness is capable of motivating intense commitment among its followers. So much so, non-believers are denied their rights. That is why fundamentalism very often takes on a rather aggressive, militant form where killing and terrorism are justified, since the end—usually the establishment of homeland (Israel, Khalistan are examples) justifies the means.

Box 1

George Marsden in a comprehensive study entitled **Fundamentalism and American Culture : The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism : 1870-1925**, explored the earliest use of the term fundamentalism.

He found that the term fundamentalist and fundamentalism came from the name for a series of books published which sought to bring out the fundamentals of Christian faith. These works constituted an attack upon science, especially evolutionism, liberal philosophy and liberal theology even. These they felt were destroying the 'Popular American Culture' which they described as the 'faith once delivered to the Saints'. The effort of these fundamentalists was to bring up the American Culture.

The **fundamentals**, in short, were a series of 12 paperback books published between 1910-1915 which were financed by a wealthy believer. They were edited by popular evangelists and teachers whose intentions were to mark down those basic 'truth' which constituted the foundations of faith. Some three million copies were distributed. While this distribution failed to bring serious public response, the books coined the term fundamentalist/fundamentalism for the analysis of various religious revival movements. (Frykenberg, 1988 : 21-22).

15.3 FUNDAMENTALISM IN IRAN

This section deals with fundamentalism in Iran. As you are probably aware, in 1979, the king or Shah of Iran was deposed and made to flee the land. In his place, an Islamic leadership, headed by Ayotollah Khomeini assumed the reigns of power.

The event stunned the world. One of the strongest monarchies which had extensive foreign backing had been overthrown by a group of clerics. Many anticipated total chaos and did not expect Islamic rule to last more than a few days. But it lasted. What were the factors that brought religion to the political centre-stage? Was Islamic fundamentalism in Iran a running away from modernity? Was it a return to medieval days? Could it become a creative force?

These are some of the issues which we will tackle. We will see how the recent history of Iran has been one of foreign domination and ruthless local leadership. We will see how development occurred in a very distorted form. And we will now see how religion has played a crucial role in social process.

15.3.1- The Monarchy in Iran

The history of Iran's Monarchy dates back 2,500 years. It came to an end with the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty on 17th February, 1979.

We will speak of three dynasties because of their relevance to the political context.

- i) The Acheminds dynasty ruled pre-Islamic Iran. Two of its rulers, Cyrus (553-521 B.C.) and Darius (521-496 B.C.) had dreamed of extending their empire from North India to Greece. The dream was shattered when Alexander destroyed the Persian empire in 321 B.C. The Pahlavi kings were deeply inspired by the glories of pre-Islamic Persian civilization.
- ii) The Safavid dynasty (550-1779) ruled medieval Iran. Islam had come into prominence. The Safavids made Shiism the state religion and purged the leadership of Sunnis who were identified with the Ottoman Empire. The Shia-Sunni tensions were exploited by both, Safavids and Ottomans to enhance their political power, creating hatred between the two peoples.

To control the Islamic religious establishment, the Safavids claimed descent from Prophet Muhammad's family, and tried to take over both, religious as well as political leadership. The Pahlavis were to continue the Safavid play of keeping Islam as the state religion, yet curtailing its power.

- iii) The Qajar dynasty (1795-1924) comprised incompetent leaders, who murdered their political rivals at will. They were heavily dependent upon foreign powers who gave them loans at exorbitant interest rates and consolidated their own interests in Iran.
- iv) The Pahlavi dynasty had no aristocratic roots. Its founder, Reza Khan, an army colonel, deposed the government in 1923 and then, the Qajar Shah, and established himself as the new monarch of Iran in 1925.

Inspired by the Acheminds, he named his dynasty 'Pahlavi', an ancient Persian name. In line with the Safavids, he retained Islam as the state religion, and tried at the same time to check its powers. Following the Qajars, the Pahlavis made Iran more dependent on foreign powers than it had ever been before.

15.3.2 The Impact of the West

The discovery of oil in Iran, as in the rest of West Asia attracted the economic interests of foreign powers. Russia and England were the main powers that struggled for economic and political supremacy in Iran. It was during World War I that the British Navy switched from using coal to oil and the British began to look for strategies to exploit the Iranian resource.

Even though Iran's oil production increased at a considerable pace, Iranis themselves could not benefit from it. Despite mass unemployment, oil workers were not hired from Iran but indentured labour was imported from India by Britain. British staff were appointed in all key posts in the oil industry, and all their requirement (clothing, food, fruit, cement etc.) was imported from Britain rather than purchased from Iranian merchants. This led to considerable resentment towards foreigners in Iran.

The British, to protect their interests, backed Colonel Reza Khan and helped install him as monarch. After World War II, the Americans gained a foothold in Iran. Their need for oil was even greater than that of Britain. Together, England, America, the oil companies and the Pahlavis cooperated and struck up an agreement which on paper, gave ownership of the oil industry to Iran, but in practice, gave full control

of the industry to foreign powers. Production, pricing and marketing were all in foreign hands. Iran, as a whole, suffered, both politically and economically. A consequence of the interference of foreign powers was that feelings of nationalism developed in all segments of society. Iranians had experienced nothing but exploitation and loss of autonomy at the hands of foreign powers.

Interaction with Western countries also ushered in ideas of secularisation or separation of religion from politics, leading to the establishment of various institutes of learning, like the Institute of Arts and Science (Dar-al-Fanun) in 1851. English and French classics were translated into Persian and its ideals were preached by leading intellectuals.

Pahlavi rule made strenuous attempts at westernisation and modernisation of the country. Western dress, the use of French and English, Western education were stressed. Reza Khan attempted to delink the political system from religious influence by means of educational and legal reforms. The 'maktab' (mosque school) and 'madrassa' (religious school) were brought under the centralised control of the state. This was a drastic break down from Islamic tradition. The 'Shariat' or religious laws were replaced by a new code of laws based on the French Civil Code.

During Muhammad Raza's reign, an American firm was employed to review the existing educational system.

The net result of the Pahlavi rule, however, was the creation of two diametrically opposed classes; the educated, secularized elite, on the one hand, and the mass of impoverished faithful Muslims, who had more faith in the village mullah than in the western-educated young men.

Its indigenous genius, traditions and life-style had been side-lined. Muhammad Shah Pahlavi, in particular, tried to force the process of modernisation from the top downwards. These policies were elite-oriented. He had succeeded in alienating the majority of the population, who were ripe for an alternative system which was closer to their heritage and values. The Islamic revival provided this alternative.

15.3.3 The Resurgence of Islam in Iran

According to Bernard Lewis, if we are to understand anything at all about what happened and what is happening in the Muslim world, we must grasp two basic points. The first is the universality of religion as a factor in the lives of the Muslim peoples, and the second is the centrality of their religion.

Lewis points out that unlike Judaism and Christianity which eventually became separate from the state, Islam, from the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, was synonymous with the state. The history, experience and sacred writings of Islam bring out this point. Muhammad was not just a Prophet; he was a soldier and a statesman, and his followers were sustained by the belief that they could win God's approval by establishing his divine law all over the world.

For the Muslim's religion was not only universal but also central, in the sense that it formed the basis and focus of identity and loyalty. In Iran, as we have seen, the monarchy tried to subvert Islam because of its importance in the lives of its people, and because the clergy would always resist any measure which they felt would violate the divine laws.

It is against this background that we can comprehend the overthrow of Muhammad Reza Shah in 1979. As we have noted, the Shah had succeeded in completely alienating the masses. During his reign, the mosque had remained the only refuge

of political dissent, and the religious network was the only organisation of the people could turn to. The closeness of the 'mullahs' to the common people had made them well aware of the anger and frustration building up against the Shah. It was at this critical juncture that leadership was provided by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1900-1989). Khomeini had over the years spoken out against the policies and activities of the Shah. Here is an extract from a speech in 1964:

“How do you expect to modernize Iran when you imprison and kill the intelligents? You want to turn Iranians into docile and passive instruments in the service of the state and your foreign masters.”

15.3.4 A Return to Islamic Roots

Strongly embedded in Islam is the notion of social justice (adalah). The vast disparities of wealth that existed in Shah's Iran were totally contradictory to the Islamic maxim of communal sharing of basic resources.

When we take into account the corrupt political leadership and distorted economic development that characterised, Iran, we can understand why Islam came to be viewed as an alternative that could bring about socio-economic justice.

To dismiss Islamic fundamentalism as an escape from modernism would be too simplistic. On the contrary, some Muslims see Islam as a means of bringing meaningful socio-political change based on social justice. On the other hand, some Muslims also invoke Islam to block changes. The challenge for Iran and other Muslim nations lies in achieving a balance; to return to those fundamental religious values conducive to the welfare of society rather than those that obstruct it.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Fill in the blanks

- a) Cyrus was a famous ruler of the dynasty.
- b) was overthrown in the year 1979.
- c) Strongly embedded in Islam is the notion of 'adalah' or

ii) Answer briefly

- a) Describe the impact of the discovery of Oil in Iran. Use five lines for your answer.

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- b) How did the western idea of secularisation affect Iranian society? Use five lines for your answer.

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In the earlier section, we studied the upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism in a society which had been polarised by elitist socio-economic policies, and exploited for its oil-wealth by a lot of foreign powers. The Islamic revolution received mass support in day-to-day life and religion. We saw how the notions of universality and centrality of Islam made the establishment of an Islamic state possible. We noted the identity of religion and government throughout Islamic history.

In this section we will study the intimate relationship between the American political life and religious values and the underlying fundamentalistic ideals which exist in the American democracy. To have a better understanding of this we will first describe the background of American history. Then we will go on to the 'religious right' movement which shows how the fundamentalistic religious values have, in many ways, permeated the general life and the political life of America.

15.4.1 The Historical Background

Christianity has had an ambiguous relationship with the State. In its early years, its followers were persecuted. Even after it established itself as the majority religion of Europe, its identity with governance was never absolute. In fact, the separation of the Church and State is a characteristic feature of European history.

The emergence of Protestantism in the 16th century challenged the Christian orthodoxy. The Protestant sects which sprang up asked questions about the enormous store of wealth the Church had accumulated. It signalled a return to the Holy Book, the Bible, and undermined the role of the clergy. Most Protestant sects advocated a one-to-one relationship between God and the follower without the help of intermediaries. Large numbers of Protestants left the shores of Britain and settled down in the American colonies, where they could peacefully practise their faith. In the course of time, America liberated itself from British rule, and the United States of America was born.

The U.S.A., over the past two centuries, has become a melting-pot of religions and cultures. People from all over the world, in search of a better livelihood or victims of religious and/or ethnic persecution have made the U.S.A. their home.

You are well aware that the U.S.A. became a "super-power" after World War II. It is immensely rich in natural resources, technology and trained manpower. Its citizens enjoy a high standard of living. Religion in the U.S.A. has by and large been conducted or practised at the private level. Being a land of so many peoples and cultures, religious pluralism has been a part of the American ethos.

Box 2

An interesting feature of religious life in America has been the high degree of religious mobility, or access to wide range of sects and denominations. It is not unusual to find members of the same family being affiliated to different Churches or denominations. For example, mother may be Baptist, father may be Pentecostal, the son could be a Buddhist and the daughter may renounce religion altogether.

It must be noted that there have been certain communities like the Amish and the Mormons to whom religion has formed the basis of community life. They have zealously guarded their values and life-styles and have avoided and resisted outside influences which could undermine their way of life.

1970's, a right-wing, conservative religious movement emerged in the U.S.A. Its spokesmen were certain Protestant evangelists or preachers who broadcast their message on television and radio. They succeeded in capturing the imagination of millions of Americans, who donated large sums of money to their cause. Soon, these evangelists owned and controlled television channels, publishing houses, schools and centres of higher learning. Their control and use of the mass media earned their brand of evangelism the title "television evangelism". We will now study the content of this brand of evangelism.

15.4.2 The "New Religious Right" Movement

In his study of the recent conservative Protestant fundamentalists movement in America, Walter Capps (1990) highlights its main features.

- i) The New Religious Right gained national attention by speaking of the relation between individual piety and national patriotism. It compared the tenets of the Bible to the ideals of a democratic society. It visualised America as a "Christian nation" and tried to combine religious values and political commitment. This is what cast it as a conservative version of American civil religion.
- ii) Because of its conviction that religion and patriotism go hand in hand, it rejected liberal or progressive ideas which tended to keep religion in the private sphere, away from public life. The conservative religious leaders felt that liberalism was weak, ineffective and had sapped the nation of its vitality without religious conviction. American society could not hope to be revitalised.
- iii) It emphasised patriarchal values. The movement gained significance at the very time that the patriarchal ordering of American society was being challenged. Attitudes toward the roles of men and women were changing as were family patterns. Single-parent families, couples living together without marriage, homosexual unions, were very much a part of the social scenario. Most of the teaching of the movement dealt with the sanctity of traditional family values. Abortion, feminism, homosexuality, pornography, were all seen to undermine national values and mobility.
- iv) One of the slogans of the movement was to "bring America back again". In this connection, Clifford Geertz's definition of the social functions of religion becomes significant. Geertz speaks of the many and complex ways in which religious motivations and aspirations work to create cohesion and synthesis within a society. The New Religious Right deliberately and consciously speaks of a happier, bygone era when social cohesiveness is believed to have existed, an era when shared religious and patriotic ideals were one and the same.

The sermons of the New Religious Right frequently take the form of denouncing or condemning all those forces which upset or destroyed the unity and cohesiveness of American society. Such anxiety, they preach, can only be brought back when religion once more becomes a vital force in public life.

- v) The New Religious Right opposes some aspects of modernity. The new, conservative religious movement is aware that the secularising tendency in American society was pushing religion into the private sphere. According to these conservatives, the sacred values of American citizens were being undermined by the forces of modernity. American society has become a "permissive" society, it has deviated from what God intended it to be.
- vi) Earlier manifestations of American religious conservatism and extreme right wing groups tended to be marginal. They preferred to adopt an anti-intellectual and a political stance. They felt themselves to be outside of the national mainstream and

preferred to stay that way. In sharp contrast, the New Religious Right has tried to become part of the national mainstream. It wanted to be taken with intellectual seriousness. Jerry Falwell, one of its most influential preachers, established a college called Liberty University, which he boasts, ranks alongside the best colleges in America.

- vii) In addition, the New Religious Right is openly and calculatedly politically minded. It had the political patronage of the Ronald Reagan administration, and it was grooming a candidate for a future presidential election. Its political ambitions were rooted in the belief that religion was needed to revitalise society, that religiosity and patriotism were one and that America must be purged of permissiveness and take up its place as God's special country.
- viii) As has been mentioned earlier, the New Religious Right owes its widespread reach and influence to the mass media of communication. It is significant that its important leaders like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Fim and Tamacy Bakker are skilled television communicators first. As President Ronald Reagan who was described as "the great communicator" utilised television to communicate his most important messages, the New Religious Right used television as the primary medium through which it transmitted its ideological messages. It has moved into the nation's living rooms, where its emphasis on family values found an echo in the hearts of viewers.

The advocates of the New Religious Right have adopted a specific religious worldview which they communicate through images and stories from the Bible. The Bible is considered to be the source of absolute truth. This tendency promotes intolerance of other World views. Threatening conspiracies against the dictates of the Bible and the American way of life are identified and condemned. The ingredients of the world are arranged as polar opposites: something is either good or evil, represents light or darkness, embodies truth or error. There is no middle ground.

The United States is identified as God's chosen land, and American God's chosen people. This way of reading the Bible becomes a basis for contemporary political commentary. Distinctive attitudes towards national and international events are culled from the Bible. The movement thus positioned itself close to the centre of national political life.

- ix) The movement undermines the heterogeneity of American culture and stresses homogeneity. As earlier discussed, American culture has been fed by many and diverse ethnic and religious streams. Heterogeneity encourages a multiplicity of beliefs and ethical standards. The conservative movement, though, argues for absolutes. It cites the Protestant Christian way of life as the only one compatible with American democracy. Instead of celebrating the variety of religious experiences that are available to humans, the movement preaches correct teaching, correct values, and a distinctly Protestant life-style. It sees outside influences as threatening to the exclusive American way of life.

These, briefly, are the salient features of the new brand of conservative Protestant fundamentalism that spread all over America in the late 1970s and 1980s.

You have already studied Robert Bellah's ideas regarding "civil religion". In his article "Civil Religion in America", Bellah claimed that "there actually exists alongside, differentiated from the Churches, an elaborate and well-institutionalised civil religion in America". He referred to it as "the religion of the American way of life". He dismissed fundamentalism as irrelevant in the context of what he described. But, according to Capps, the religion of the New Religious Right has attempted to attain the status of a civil religion, by identifying its values with those of American life and democracy.

At the start of this section, we described how secularisation had permeated almost every aspect of American society. The growth of the movement paradoxically occurred in an era identified as “the secular age”.

This exemplifies the fact that secularisation cannot do away with the religious underpinnings of life. Reichley in his book *“Religion in American Public Life”* (1985) maintained that religious values are indispensable for the vitality of American democracy and the American way of life.

Check Your Progress 2

i) What do we mean by religious mobility in the U.S.A.? Use five lines for your answer.

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ii) How did the New Religious Right equate piety with patriotism? Use five lines for your answer.

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iii) What did the New Religious Right mean by the slogan “bring America back again”? Use five lines for your answer.

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15.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed fundamentalism. The word fundamentalism in literal terms means the belief in the original or essential truth of the religion, as it emerged and as it seems to exist in Iran and America. Iran is often cited as an example of Islamic resurgence against western modernism. America on the other hand is difficult to label as being any way close to the fundamentalistic state.

In this unit we have tried to show the background in which Islamic fundamentalism arose. The case of Iran shows that going back to the roots, in this case religious roots, is often out of a sense of alienation and rootlessness. Modernity brought in not only economic depravity in Iranian society but a social, psychological and moral depravity, so the call for fundamentalist state had an appeal for the mass.

The rightist religious movement in America is also hinged on a similar sense of rootlessness. This feeling of insecurity is very often exploited by the advocates of fundamentalistic ideals, whether it be in Iran or America.

15.6 KEY WORDS

Clergy : Holders of appointed office of the religious order. They are learned and knowledgeable.

Cohesion : A sense of unity which brings people together.

Conservative : An attitude which is averse to change and innovation.

Liberal : Broad-minded, not bound by traditions.

Monarchy : A government where there is a single hereditary head of the state and who has absolute power.

Nationalism : A belief and propagation of ideas where there is striving for unity of a nation or of national interest.

Orthodoxy : Belief in established doctrines or opinions.

Protestantism : The new religion which emerged in 1529 as a protest against the Roman Catholicism. It believed in the immediate link between God and man without the aid of Popes and Saints.

Secularisation : A process in which the religion is separated from political and civil life.

Universality : A state where all the people without exception are affected.

15.7 FURTHER READINGS

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Curtis, Michael (1981) *Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado.

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15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i) Fill in the blanks.

a) Cyrus was a famous ruler of the **Acheminds** dynasty.

b) **Muhammad Reza Shañ** was overthrown in the year 1979.

c) Strongly embedded in Islam is the notion of 'adalah' or **Social Justice**.

ii) a) The discovery of oil in Iran attracted the interest of foreign powers. Russia and England were the main powers that struggled for economic and political supremacy in Iran. Even though Iran's oil production increased considerably

Iranians themselves could not benefit from it. Despite unemployment oil workers were not hired from Iran but imported from outside. All the key posts were in the hands of British. Later, Americans also moved into the picture. Together, England, America, the oil companies and Pahlavis Co-operated and struck up an agreement which, on paper, gave ownership of the oil industry to Iran, but in practice, gave full control of the industry to foreign powers. Production, pricing and marketing were all in foreign hands. Iran, as a whole, suffered both politically and economically.

- b) Interaction with western countries also ushered in ideas of secularisation — separation of religion from politics, leading to the establishment of various institutes of learning like the institute of Arts and Science (Basal-Fanun) in 1851. The ideas of Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesque, Bentham etc. were preached by leading intellectuals. The Pahlavi ruler Reza Khan attempted to delink the political system from religious influence by means of educational and legal reforms. The mosque school and religious school — the ‘maktab’ and ‘madrassa’ were brought under the centralised control of the state. The Shariat or religious laws were replaced by a new code of laws based on the French civil code. This was a drastic break from Islamic tradition.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) An interesting feature of religious life in America has been the high degree of religious mobility, or access to wide range of sects and denominations. It is not unusual to find members of the same family being affiliated to different churches or denominations.
- ii) The relationship between individual piety and national patriotism was brought about by comparing the tenets of the Bible to the ideal of a democratic society. It symbolised America as a “Christian Nation” and tried to combine religious values and political commitment.
- iii) The New Religious Right deliberately and consciously speaks of a happier, bygone era when social cohesiveness is believed to have existed; an era when shared religious and patriotic ideals were one and the same. The sermons of the New Religious Right frequently take the form of denouncing or condemning all those factors which upset or destroyed the unity and cohesiveness of American society. One slogan the movement adopted to drive this point was to “bring America back again”.

UNIT 16 SECULARISM AND SECULARISATION

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Secularisation and Secularism
 - 16.2.1 The Term Secularisation
 - 16.2.2 The Sociological Connotation of Secularisation
 - 16.2.3 Secularisation within Religion
 - 16.2.4 Secularism as a Value
- 16.3 The Secularisation Process
 - 16.3.1 The Struggle between the Sacred and the Secular
 - 16.3.2 The Church and the State
- 16.4 The Social Context of Secularisation Process
 - 16.4.1 Renaissance
 - 16.4.2 Growth of Science
 - 16.4.3 Expansion of Trade and Commerce
 - 16.4.4 Reformation
- 16.5 Secularisation in Contemporary World
- 16.6 Secularism in India
 - 16.6.1 India and Secularism
 - 16.6.2 The Meaning of Secularism in India
 - 16.6.3 Secular Concept and Ideology
- 16.7 Secularism in India
- 16.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.0 Key Words
- 16.10 Further Readings
- 16.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

16.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to

- understand the meanings of the terms secularisation and secularism
- discuss the social and historical background in which secularisation emerged as a social phenomena
- analyse the peculiar nature of secularism which is adopted in India
- understand the problems and difficulties in the practice of secularism in India

16.1 INTRODUCTION

In our previous unit we have studied fundamentalism with two examples of it. Islamic resurgence in Iran and the Religious Right Movement of America are two divergent examples. But both of them show that inspite of inroads made by secularisation and the adoption of the secular state, religion has continued to play an important role in the society.

In this unit, we would like to understand the social process of secularisation and the term secularism which emerged from this process.

In our first section we will introduce you to the meaning of the term secularisation and secularism. To be able to understand how these terms came to be we would like to take you to the historical and social background of these processes. We will

also show the nature of secularisation in contemporary society in our next section. Finally we will be discussing the nature of secularism in India. For you to understand the peculiarities and the difficulties thereof, we would appraise you with various historical as well as contemporary dynamics in the practice of secularism.

16.2 SECULARISATION AND SECULARISM

You must have come across the word secularism and secularisation several times. We are sure you must have wondered what exactly they mean.

The terms secularisation and secularism have no definite definitions. They have different meanings depending on various situations and perspectives. We will try and have a look at some of these meanings. First, we will try and understand what secularisation is all about and then we will go on to the term secularism, which is an outcome of the process of secularisation.

16.2.1 The Term Secularisation

The word secular is derived from the Latin word 'secular', which means the 'present age or generation'. The word secular came to be associated with the social process of secularisation.

Secularisation came into use in Europe, to describe the transfer of territories previously under the control of the church to the dominion of secular authority or the state. The distinction that was already prevalent in Christian conception between the sacred and secular (sacred as all that is supernatural, and secular as all that is mundane) was brought into the fore to assert the superiority of the sacred.

The term, however, was applied in a different way when the concept of secularisation acquired a more general, sociological connotation.

16.2.2 The Sociological Connotation of Secularization

Social thinkers have used the word secularisation to indicate a process whereby the religious institutions and religious conceptions and understanding have lost control in worldly matters — economy, polity, justice, health, family, and so on. Instead, there emerged empirical and rational procedures and conceptions about the world in general.

Describing the process of secularisation, Bryan R. Wilson writes that in secularisation process "the various social institutions gradually become distinct from one another and increasingly free of the matrix of religious assumptions that had earlier informed...inspired and dominated their operation. Prior to this change, social action over a very wide field of human activity and organisation (including work, social and interpersonal relationships, juridical procedures, socialisation, healing) is regulated in accordance with supernaturalist pre-conceptions. The process of structure differentiation in which social institutions (the economy, the polity, morality, justice, education, health, and family) become recognised as distinctive concerns operating with considerable autonomy. It is a process in which conceptions of the supernatural lose their sovereignty over human affairs, a pattern broadly identified as secularism. Conceptions of the supernatural are gradually displaced from all social institutions except those specifically devoted to this — these are increasingly circumscribed religious institutions" (Wilson 1987 : 159).

The definition of secularisation is greatly bound by the definition of religion. As long as religion is defined in, not so abstract terms and is defined substantively as beliefs, attitudes, activities, institutions and structures pertaining to the supernatural, it is

possible to assess the extent of decline of religious influence. But if we were to define religion in functional terms, as some sociologists have done, as any set of beliefs, ideas and activities that perform indispensable functions to the society it is very difficult to employ the term secularisation, because when we use the term secularisation we are discussing the process that leads to the decline of supernaturally oriented activities and beliefs in all aspects of life. And a distinct separation of various institutions in the society.

We can see the separation of the supernatural belief from secular activities by the way we approach and understand disease for instance. We don't always have a supernatural explanation to understand disease and illness. We have scientific and empirical explanations instead.

These changes have, in fact, affected even religion itself.

16.2.3 Secularisation within Religion

One aspect of secularisation is that religions modify their doctrines and practices in response to the changing needs of their members and in response to changes in society.

For example, in 1976, the Episcopal Church in the United States of America officially allowed women to become priests. And, in England it was only recently that the Church allowed women to become priests, causing much controversy. We can see how the Church responded to the changing situation and the position of women in society.

Secularisation also influences the content of religious belief and in doing so it leads, many times, to the development of a sect. We have seen in our discussion in unit 10 and 14 how Protestantism grew against the orthodoxy of Roman Catholicism and brought down religion to 'this world'.

Secularisation in religion is usually accompanied by increase in attention to public issues. Secular and profane activities have become as important as the sacred. Thus we find religious institutions getting involved with running of modern hospitals and secular educational institutions or engaging in philanthropic activities. Religion in industrial societies often reflects the pragmatism of our age, and in doing so, is increasingly moving away from the supernatural.

So far we have discussed what the term secularisation meant in its various situations and aspects. We still have not talked about the term secularism.

16.2.4 Secularism as a Value

Secularism was an ideological goal of the new political philosophy and movement after the French Revolution. Still later in 1851 George Jacob Holyoake coined the term secularism. He declared it as the only rational basis of political and social organisation. Holyoake questioning the religious basis of civil society, recommended secularism as state ideology which promotes human welfare by material means and makes the service of others its duty.

Secularism as a progressive ideology was a necessary qualification for a liberal, democratic state of the post French Revolution. These connotations are applied even to a modern democratic state now. A modern state by its definition and liberal and democratic policy makes no distinction between groups, classes etc. within society, irrespective of religious affiliation. The political philosophy on the part of the state required that the state shall not impose any religion on people and did not prohibit practice of religion by a section of the people.

Thus, with secularism as an ideological goal, the proponents of this ideology consciously denounce religious orthodoxy as the basis for social organisation and advocate civil values.

The development of secularism as an ideology was partly an outcome of the process of secularisation in Europe. And in many modern states it has been adopted as a state policy, without really going through a historical process which was in evidence in Europe at the time of the emergence of the phenomenon of secularism.

Let us go back into history and see how the process of secularism developed.

16.3 THE SECULARISATION PROCESS

In this section we will discuss the process of secularisation which essentially came about as a result of the struggle for supremacy between the church and the state. The social background to this struggle in a way shaped this secularisation process too.

16.3.1 The Struggle between the Sacred and the Secular

Secularisation has occurred throughout history. Though uneven, it was discernible from the very early times. In primitive societies it was often seen that supernaturalist apprehensions and explanations were intermingled with empirical knowledge and rational techniques. Magical means were mixed with pragmatic procedures. Slowly, the process which Max Weber phrased as the 'disenchantment of the world' removed the natural phenomena of their magico-religious meaning as man acquired more matter-of-fact and empirical and rationalistic orientations.

In fact, some sociologists see the seeds of secularisation in the very development of monotheistic religions, which rationalised and systematised the concepts of the supernatural. These monotheistic religions like Judaism and Christianity steadily extinguished random magico-religious beliefs and introduced a more universalistic conception of an increasingly transcendental and universal deity. In this process, these monotheistic religions heralded a process of systematisation or rationalisation which is an element of secularisation.

To unravel the complex factors and agencies contributing to the process of secularisation is difficult. In Western history (European history), the dissociation of religion and politics — seen in the separation of the Church and the state implies secularisation. Let us see then, how this separation came about.

16.3.2 The Church and the State

In Europe, from the very early times, the Roman Catholic Church exercised immense power over all aspects of life.

The conversion of Emperor Constantine (306-37 AD) and socially influential classes, gave the Church an immense recognition and opportunity to enter the secular world. Emperor Constantine had established Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire.

Box 1

Constantine ascribed all his successes in war to Christian God. He is said to have had a dream in which God instructed him to paint the first two letters for Christ in Greek on the shields of his soldiers. Constantine did so and consequently won the battle. It is said that he converted to Christianity

after this and made Christianity the state religion. His troops then had the Christian monogram painted on their shield.

There was also the idea that the Church was not only meant for the salvation of souls for eternity, but also had a mission for this world — to establish a kingdom of God on earth. The clergy were not only involved in other-worldly aspects of life, but were also involved in the secular life.

Later, the theology of St. Augustine and the establishment of the Benedictine order, which recommended ‘useful work’ sought to establish the Church in its relation with the secular world. As Weber noted, labour became an essential component of the Christian way of life.

The organisation of the Church became increasingly formalised and systematised through the development of canon law and administrative agencies. This development became particularly crucial in the background of a centralised, segmented nature of emerging feudal society. In the face of these tendencies, the Church maintained a fundamental unity.

The organisational unity combined with its involvement with secular aspects of life enabled the Church to have immense influence over the social and political life. In a highly stratified society like medieval Europe where the society was divided into aristocratic haves and the poor, the Church played little role in condemning this highly stratified order. In fact, the Church was so interwoven with the feudal system that it became a property holder. The clergy became lords of the land with political jurisdiction.

These circumstances gave rise to the question of where and with whom did the authority lie? With the Church or the secular state?

The kings and commoners who were equally tired of the oppressive nature of the church struggled to get rid of the control of the Church and religion from political affairs, as well as affairs of everyday world.

The forces that set themselves in opposition to the Church and its power came to be known as secular. While the struggle against the Church and the process which eventually led to the decline of religious authoritarianism replaced it with a rational and scientific outlook. This has been termed secularisation.

The secularisation of society is not just an outcome of this struggle between the Church and the state, but is related to all other facets of social change.

In our next section, let us look into the social context in which secularisation took place.

Check Your Progress 1

i) What is the literal meaning of the term secular? Use three lines for your answer.

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.....
.....

ii) Write five lines on the political philosophy after the French Revolution.

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.....
iii) Who was the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity? Use four lines for your answer.

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16.4 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SECULARISATION PROCESS

In this section, we will be discussing the various facets of social change. At the time of secularisation in Europe, the society was waking up from the medieval slumber to whole new areas of change. There was growing rational-empirical inquiry. There was Reformation in the Church and Renaissance in the arts and learning.

16.4.1 Renaissance

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, many people in Europe who could read and write began to take less notice of what their rulers and priests told them and to work out new ideas for themselves. They also became interested in the arts, and learning of the ancient Greeks and Romans. This new way of thinking and rediscovery of earlier knowledge, led to an exciting period in history known as the Renaissance, a French word meaning rebirth.

Rational enquiry was the essence of this movement and this was evident in art, architecture, music, literature etc. Renaissance period emphasised on classics as contributing to thought and learning. Renaissance was a time when people became curious about the world they lived in. Rich men built libraries and universities and with the invention of the printing machine, books became more easily available not only to priests and scholars but also ordinary people.

By the end of the 16th century, Renaissance which started in Italy, with its awakening in learning and art spread to other parts of Europe. This was also the period which saw the growth of science.

16.4.2 Growth of Science

As we mentioned earlier, the medieval European society was characterised by the overriding influence of the church. Even learning was mostly of the religious variety. The Renaissance period saw the beginning of rational enquiry. It marked an area of description and criticism in the area of learning.

This development of detachment in observation and experimentation introduced new assumptions about the nature of the world. The rational and systematic, empirical knowledge questioned the supernatural conceptions of the world and gave an awareness to man's capacity to harness nature.

This was the period which saw the Copernican Revolution. It was generally believed that the Earth was stationary and the Sun and other heavenly bodies moved around

it. Copernicus, with the help of detailed explanation demonstrated that the earth moved around a fixed sun. This finding of Copernicus shattered the very foundations on which the old world rested. The divine origins to heaven, earth and life were now being questioned.

This period also saw the growth of various disciplines of science. William Harvey discovered the circulation of blood. This led to the rethinking about the human body. In Physics, Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, and subsequently Issac Newton shattered the earlier metaphysical thoughts of the universe. In short, the growth of science and the application of science reduced man's dependence on religion and the divine interpretation of the universe.

16.4.3 Expansion of Trade and Commerce

The 15th century AD also signalled a shift from the subsistent and stagnant economy to a dynamic and worldwide system. This expansion in trade was due to some extent, because of the initiative taken by the European states to develop and consolidate their economic and political power. The monarchy of Portugal, Spain, Holland, and England sponsored overseas discoveries, trade and conquest

Box 2

Trade with the Orient so far was carried on land and Italian cities had a monopoly in this. In a bid to destroy this monopoly and to seek new ways of reaching the East, the Portuguese and other pioneers in navigation took to sea voyage. You must have heard of the historic voyage of Vasco da Gama, who landed on the Indian west coast in 1498. Christopher Columbus made a similar voyage in the hope of finding a sea route to India and instead reached the shores of North America.

Britain, Holland followed Spain and Portugal and soon India, South East Asia, Africa and West Indies and South America came under the economic enterprise of these countries.

European markets were flooded with new commodities, spices, textiles, tobacco, cocoa, quinine, ivory, gold, silver, and above all human slaves from Africa. One of the most important results of this expansion of trade and commerce was the growth of middle class. This class, which included merchants, bankers, shipowners, became an influential and politically powerful group.

Besides these radical changes which were taking place, there emerged a break in thought and ecclesiastical organisation, which is called 'the reformation'.

16.4.4 Reformation

In the 16th century, there was a movement within Christianity to purge the medieval abuses and to restore the doctrine and the practices that the reformers believed confirmed with the Bible. This led to a breach between the Roman Catholic Church, and the reformers whose belief and practices came to be called as Protestantism.

One of the principle initiators of this movement, Martin Luther King, questioned the practices of the Roman Catholic Church and called for a debate. The Papacy took this as a gesture of rebellion and proceeded to take steps against Luther as a heretic. Martin Luther refused to repent unless proven by Bible or clear reason. He believed that slvation was a free gift to persons through the forgiveness of sins by God's grace alone and received by them through faith in Christ. Luther was protected by kings and princes partly out of religious conviction. But mainly because they were interested to seize the Church property and to assert the imperial independence.

The obvious result of Reformation was the division of Christendom into Catholic and Protestant denominations or sects. These strengthened the growth of modern national states. Reformation introduced radical changes in thought and organisation of the Church and, thus began the trend of secularisation. The Protestant conception of the divine made God personal. God thus receded to the personal realm. Wordly personal activity was encouraged as a sign of faith in God. (See unit 10, Religion and Economic Order, for a discussion on this).

As we already mentioned, there was a complex web of factors which contributed to the emergence of secularisation process. In our above discussion, we have given a few trends or happenings in a context in which secularisation occurred.

Now that we have discovered the history behind the concept and phenomenon of secularisation, let us see what it means in the contemporary world.

16.5 SECULARISATION IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

It is true that religion has ceased to have a kind of hold that it had in the medieval society. We no longer define our world in mystical religious terms. It seems that religious institutions ceased to be central in society. But this secularisation has not occurred uniformly all over the world. We must remember that the events we described and discussed are specific to Europe and those changes had some effect on other countries. At the same time this process of secularisation does preclude the endurance of certain religiosity and emergence of new expressions of religion. The patterns of religiosity vary, and despite indicators of secularisation, spiritual survivals and new religious initiatives do occur.

Numerous new religious movements have emerged in recent decades and these may seem to be even responses to general secularisation: since they provide meaning, purpose, association, and support for a particular section of the people. Secularisation, as we said, is conspicuously a long-term historical occurrence in Western society.

Activity 1

To what extent is secularisation and secularism prevalent in India? Read newspapers and magazines, talk with other students and knowledgeable individuals before putting down your answer in your notebook.

Other religious systems did organise and systematise mystical and pagan beliefs, but they did so in different ways. Hinduism and Buddhism unlike Christianity, according to Bryan Wilson have tolerated more primitive supernaturalism than eradicating them. Besides, the long-term historical process of secularisation and the extension of rational principles to all areas of social life were less intense in non-Western countries like in Asia or the Middle East. Industrialisation and technological application to some extent rationalises and routinises framework of social life. Yet, so many religious and magical practices persist alongside, leading to paradox of magical practice alongside sophisticated industrial techniques.

The course of industrialisation has followed different paths and occurs in different forms than one which is available in the West. In our next section we will discuss the Indian experience of secularisation and secularism.

Check Your Progress 2

- i)questioned the practices of Roman Catholic Church.

ii) Match the following :

A	B
Vasco-de-Gama	revolutionised physics
William Harvey	sea-route to India
Copernicus	protestantism
Martin Luther	blood circulation

16.6 SECULARISM IN INDIA

In this section we will discuss how secularism is viewed in India and its practice. We are aware by now, that the historical process of secularisation has not occurred in India quite the way it did in Europe. But Indian situation generated its own conditions which made our national leaders feel a need for a secular ideology. Let us see how! But first let us try and understand what secularism means in India.

16.6.1 India and Secularism

India, as we all know is a home of many religions and is a multi-religious society. Religion plays an important role in the lives of Indians. Passions and hatred are whipped in the name of religion. Religious conflict and communal violence has become a part of our social scenario owing to the multi-religiosity of Indian society.

This situation puts into focus the fact that when a society has many religions the task of governance is that much more difficult.

Our leaders have responded to the situation by strengthening the values of secularism. The secular ideas are enshrined in our Constitution as well.

16.6.2 The Meaning of Secularism in India

In our preceding discussions, we have seen how secularisation in the West was a result of the secularisation process whereby the pervasive influence of religion in everyday life has lost its influence.

In India, however, secularisation and secular has been used in the context of nature of the state. It has been conceived in this way keeping in view multi-religiosity of the society and the religious conflicts thereof. In India, the term secularism implies that the state will not identify with any one religion but is tolerant of all religious practices. As Nehru declared in 1950, "the Government of a country like India with many religions that have secured great and devoted following for generations, can never function satisfactorily in the modern age except on a secular basis".

The secular idea was adopted during the freedom struggle to unite the various communities against the colonial power. The maturing of secular concept is closely linked up with the development of nationalism during the long course of the freedom struggle. Later, the secular concepts was incorporated in the constitution. And, for Nehru, the imperative of secularism was not only for detachment of religion in public life but progressive and modern outlook. It also meant that all the citizens enjoyed equal rights and statuses.

"Secularism, nationalism, and democracy are therefore, mutually reinforcing ideals that were sought to be emphasised by the post-colonial state in India" (Bhattacharya, 190 : 178). K.M. Panikkar in explaining the content of the secular state in India stresses on this point :

“It (the secular state) eliminates from the body politics all ideas of division between individuals on the basis of its policy what Aristotle terms “distribution justice” that all communities must share as they must share the duties and responsibilities of being a citizen”.

One of the consequences of such a state policy is that holding of public office and government service should not be dependent on religious affiliation.

Yet at the same time the citizens enjoy the right to freedom of religion and worship, as a fundamental right. Although the Indian constitution speaks against any principle of religious discrimination, it cannot prevent the state to legislate in favour of any oppressed community which includes the minority community. Thus minorities enjoy a right to cultural and educational rights.

The secular ideal enshrined in our constitution has a peculiar mix of ethnic identities and common citizenship. It tries to ensure pluralities within a democratic nation-state.

This inbuilt contradiction in our polity makes it very difficult for the secular ideal to be practiced in reality. Let us go back into history and see how the secular ideal has been adopted and the problems which besetted this concept.

Activity 2

Do you think religious parties in political arena should be banned? Give reasons for your answer. You can discuss this with others in your study centre and your councillor.

16.6.3 Secular Concept and Ideology

Prior to the British intervention in Indian politics there existed no conflict between religion and politics. In fact, as Dumont observed : ‘Religion here is constitutive of society. Politics and Economics are neither autonomous domain nor are they contradictory of religion, they are simply encompassed by religion’. Recalling Dumont, T N Madan feels that “religion and secular cannot be separated, in other words, religion cannot be in any meaningful sense privatised” (Madan, 1981 : 12).

However, the coming of the British made some change. The British state maintained an attitude of neutrality. Further, the British introduced the concept of equality before law, irrespective of caste and creed. Alongwith this break in tradition, modern education became an important factor of change.

An important element in the political awakening in India was the growing liberalism which came with modern education. The Indian middle-class was the major beneficiary of British education and one of the first to initiate a nationalist struggle against the British.

The nationalist feeling was carried down to the masses by the extraordinary growth of the vernacular cultures. This vernacular growth at the same time was not allowed to be chauvinistic because the nation as a goal was kept in mind. “Much of the power of the Indian nationalism came from its use of forces, idioms and symbolism of religion, especially Hinduism” (Kaviraj, 190 : 195).

The secular ideology of the national leaders by keeping religion at a distance was challenged by the likes of B.G. Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Lajpat Rai. The Congress faced a dilemma whether to allow the mobilisation of the masses using religious symbols etc. or not, for it could alienate the Muslim community.

By 1920 the leadership of the Congress passed into the hands of Mahatma Gandhi. He openly declared the necessity of religion in politics. Although deeply rooted in Hindu popular ethos, Gandhi believed in pluralism and equal respect for all religions. In spite of Gandhi's efforts to unite Hindus and Muslims, the excessive usage of Hindu symbols alienated the Muslims. There grew extremist tendencies both among Hindus and Muslims. Nationalism became polarised with the setting up of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha and the militant socio-religious organisation called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Instead of nationalism based on territories, these communities now struggled for nation on the basis of religious identity. Sudipta Kaviraj writes : "precisely because of long familiarity with other communities identities and the relative newness of identity of nation" there was a need for creating a feeling of nationalism through various means (in this case through religion, mainly) to face the British Colonialism.

India was partitioned in 1947 into India and Pakistan amidst communal riots. In 1948 there was the tragic assassination of Gandhi. This gruesome tragedy impressed upon the Indian leaders the need for a secular ideology to keep politics and religion separate.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Write a few lines on the meaning of secularism in India.

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ii) openly declared the necessity of religion in politics.

16.7 SECULARISM IN INDIA

After Independence, Nehru took upon himself the task of modernising the country through the spread and application of science and technology for the removal of ignorance, ill health and poverty. Nehru was not against religion but he was aware of how harmful religion could be to India. Hence he lost no time in enshrining the secular ideal in the Constitution. Religion was not debarred from public life but was distanced from the State. Undoubtedly, constitutionally and legally we are a secular nation. But the question we must ask ourselves is — is this secularism constitutive and an integral part of our country? We find that secular nationalism is a concept that we adopted from the West in the face of British Colonialism. The dire necessity of that time was to fight the British on a united front. Secular ideal was adopted to unite the various pluralities in the nation. Modern education and the English language helped propagate this ideal and through the vernacular it was carried to the masses. And a semblance of nationalism was forged and the British were ousted.

Pointed out to this kind of nationalism, Sudipta Kaviraj feels that "as long as the national movement faced the British, this urgency in political discourse in constantly spelling, naming, repeating the making of the nation was evident. After independence was achieved, this ... urgency was allowed to lapse" (Kaviraj, 1990 : 198). He further adds that our leaders who inherited this nation failed to see a situation where later generations may not take this nation for granted.

The State with its elitist leaders failed to form a dialogue with various vernacular cultures (which was the case during the freedom struggle) to achieve this ideal of secularism. It remained aloof from the masses. However, it needs to be pointed out that the masses are steeped in religion with its myths legends and folklore. As such secularism would take time to fully influence social process in India, where there is a plurality of religions.

Apart from this neglect, we are faced with contradictions present in a liberal democratic systems like ours, where there is a great deal of uneven economic development. With this arose a feeling of injustice and deprivation which finds expression in various ways. Mobilising one's own community on religious and ethnic lines is very often the practice. The State/political parties on the other hand address communities to gain support. This only reinforces the primordial identities of community and religion. And they know that the only way to bring about pressure on the authorities is to mobilise on criteria like language, ethnicity and religion. So, as we can see in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic country, secularism even with best intentions is difficult to achieve.

16.8 LET US SUM UP

Unit 16 had the basic objective of understanding the origin and the process of secularisation. The term secularism emerged out of this process of secularisation. Secularism as a state ideology has been adopted by, practically all modern states.

India, too, has adopted secularism as its state ideology. This was done keeping in view the pluralistic nature of Indian society and the consequent conflict which are there among communities. The section on secularism in India, has attempted to analyse the nature and practice of secularism. We have discussed the historical background which saw the emergence of the concept of secularism in Indian polity. In our final section, we have discussed the dynamics involved in the practice of secularism. Secularism as an ideology is indeed, difficult to practice, in a country like India where religion is deeply embedded in our society. And our democratic polity makes concessions to this religious need of the communities.

16.9 KEY WORDS

Empirical : Knowledge which is based on observation and experimentation.

Orthodoxy : A doctrine which is accepted and considered true, especially in religion it is what is authoritatively prescribed.

Rational : Thinking based on senses and not on faith. Rejecting what cannot be tested.

Salvation : Saving the soul from sins and getting admission to heaven as a consequence of this.

16.10 FURTHER READINGS

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Check Your Progress 1

- i) The term secular is derived from the Latin word 'secular' which means the present age or generation. The word secular came to be associated with social process of secularisation later.
- ii) The new political philosophy which came about after the French Revolution questioned the religious basis of political and social organisation. It recommended rational basis for political and social organisation. Secularism was adopted as a political goal. Holyoake hoped and believed that secularism as a state ideology promotes human welfare by material means and makes the service of others its duty.
- iii) Emperor Constantine (307-37 A.D.) was the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity. He declared Christianity as a state religion.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Martin Luther
- ii)

A	B
Vasco-da-Gama	sea-route to India
William Harvey	blood circulation
Copernicus	revolutionized physics
Martin Luther	protestantism

Check Your Progress 3

- i) India did not witness the secularisation process as did Europe. As a reason secularisation did not occur naturally in India, secularism as a political goal was adopted. Specially since India is a pluralistic country with variety of religions, languages and ethnic background.

In India, the term secularism implies that the state will not identify with any one religion but is tolerant of all religious practices.

- ii) Mahatma Gandhi.

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UNIT 17 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN INDIA: AS FACT AND VALUE

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Religious Pluralism in India
- 17.3 Religious Pluralism as Fact
 - 17.3.1 Geographical Spread
 - 17.3.2 Religion and Sect
 - 17.3.3 Caste and Religion
 - 17.3.4 Language and Religious Pluralism
- 17.4 Religious Pluralism as Value
 - 17.4.1 Religion and Social Identity
 - 17.4.2 Religious Pluralism and Shared Values
 - 17.4.3 Religious Beliefs and Rituals
- 17.5. Let Us Sum Up
- 17.6 Key Words
- 17.7 Further Reading
- 17.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

17.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- understand what religious pluralism means
- explain religious pluralism in India as a fact with special reference to its geographical spread; relationship between religion and sect, caste and religion and language and religious pluralism
- discuss religious pluralism as value with reference to social identity of religious groups, religious pluralism and persistence of shared values among people of various religion and finally, religious beliefs and rituals.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Block, Block 3 **Religion and Related Aspects** you have learnt about such aspects of religion as the religious organisations, religious specialists, religion and its relationship with social stability and change in societies. You also learnt about religious fundamentalism through case studies and the concept of secularism and about the processes of secularisation. All these aspects you learnt at the global level.

In this unit you will learn what one means by religious pluralism in Indian society. How it exists in factual terms and how far each religious faith bears some commonalities with many other religions that exist in our society? You will learn that religious pluralism in India is not only a matter of fact, but it also permeates through beliefs, values and social character of individual religions in India. However, religious pluralism as fact and as value are so closely interlinked that in reality it is difficult to separate the two. It is for the purpose of maintaining the clarity of the unit, as well as, explaining the two dimensions of religious pluralism in India that we first explain to you the factual side of religious pluralism and then the value dimension.

In this unit Section 17.2 explains the meaning of religious pluralism. Section 17.3 provides a detailed description of religious pluralism as fact. Section 17.4 outlines the

various aspects of religious pluralism as value and finally, Section 17.5 gives the summary of the unit.

17.2 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN INDIA

Indian society is composed of diverse cultures, and peoples, languages and religions. To examine the nature of diversity of the religious faiths in our country we must look at the historical antecedents of various religious groups found in our society.

Diversity of religious faiths has existed over a very long period of time as India has been a country of not only very ancient history but also a place where communities from outside continually kept on coming and settling down. Together with diverse cultural groups in various religions in India pursuing their faiths, these immigrant communities also brought their own religious faiths, customs and cultures. This resulted in bringing together people following different religions and gradually laid the basis of religious pluralism in India. Religious pluralism means diversity among people based on their varied kinds of religious beliefs. Pluralism of religion has thus two connotations:

- i) it refers to the fact that India has been a land of not one but many religions since ancient times; and
- ii) that each religion contains, besides its primary features which define its essence many cultural, social and ritualistic elements which cut across boundaries of different religions faiths. These cultural and social similarities are a product of interaction and accommodation established over a long period of time by regional, linguistic, ritual and social proximity of various religious groups. Religious pluralism in India is, thus not only a fact but it also permeates through beliefs, values and social character of individual religions in India.

You will study religious pluralism in India in the context of:

- a) distribution of religions in India on the basis of numerical, regional and linguistic categories.
- b) differentiation within a particular religion on the basis of sects or denominations;
- c) social differentiation within a religion on the basis of caste or caste-like divisions and
- d) shared cultural values by different religions on the basis of historical links, ecological and economic demands, linguistic and cultural commonalities and processes of migration.

17.3 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AS FACT

Since ancient times India has been a land of diverse cultural groups professing many faiths. It was also a land where continual migration of people of varying ethnicity and religion from outside took place. It led to occasional conflicts of short durations during the process of accommodation and integration. But finally a veritable adjustment of people professing different religious faiths did take place. This contributed to the existence of religious pluralism as a fact in India.

Over a period of time people of various religious faiths settled down in India. Due to commonalities of shared geography, common of inter-dependent economic relationship and shared neighbourhood in the rural and urban settlements they developed many common or shared elements of culture traits and belief systems

despite professing different religions. People changed their membership from one religion to another due to conversions sometimes forced sometimes voluntary. However, in most cases they did not shed off all cultural and social practices or even beliefs or values they had held earlier. Yet their identify as a separate religious group was recognised. This reinforced religious pluralism in India.

India is the home of a majority of the religions of the world, such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and so on. The state in India has functioned under the benign guidance and control of religion, and religions or even various religions have received patronage and protection from the state during large parts of Indian history.

Religious pluralism is thus, keynote of Indian culture and religious tolerance is the very foundation of Indian secularism. Religious secularism is based on the belief that all religions are equally good and that they all lead to the same goal of realisation of God. According to S.R. Bhatt (192: 261-271) religious pluralism leading to secularism stands for a complex interpretative process in which there is transcendence of religion and yet there is a unification of multiple religions. It forms a bridge between religions in a multi-religious society which enables each to cross over the barriers of their diversity. This is the main feature of what is called religious pluralism. In this section you will learn about the facts of diversity of religions in India. The census records give us an account of various religions, their numerical, demographic and social features. The most exhaustive and sociologically comprehensive census in India was conducted in 1931 when India was not divided into two countries, India and Pakistan. Kingsley Davis has analysed the demographic and social features of religions in the un-divided India in his book **The Population of India and Pakistan** (1951). Among the religions which are listed in the 1931 census are: Hindu, Muslim, Tribal, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Jewish religions. According to 1981 census the major religions as listed above had the following population: 82.64 percent (550 million) Hindus: 11.35 percent (76 million) Muslims: 2.43 percent (16 million) Christians: 1.6 percent (13 million) Sikhs: 0.71 percent (5 million) Buddhists: 0.48 percent (72,000) Parsis or Zoroastrians and 18,000 Jews, Tribal communities listed outside Hinduism or Christianity were listed as "others" and constituted 0.42 percent of the total population.

You would thus observe that factually India comprises the world's most important religions comprising its people. Moreover, it has on its land a diversity of religious communities settled over very periods of time. For instance, Islam came to India as far back as 650 A.D. and spread to the Western parts of India. It began to take hold in India after 1000 A.D. and expanded considerably under the successive Muslim dynasties. Similarly, Christianity came to India many centuries prior to the coming of the British or the Portuguese. An off-shot of the Mesopotamian Christian church existed in India's South-Western part even as early as the 3rd century, and was later on spread by the Portuguese during the 16th century. The Parsis or Zoroastrians migrated to India after Persia was conquered by the followers of Islam. They settled down in Gujarat and came to be known in India as "Parsis".

Box 17.01

Zoroastrianism—Zoroastrianism; the religion of the Parsis, is one of the most ancient religions in the world. It takes its name from Zarasthustra (Zoroaster) who probably lived around the beginning of the first millennium B.C. It has a history of about three thousand years. It is the most important religion of ancient, pre-Islamic Iran. Its origins can be located in the eastern Iranian, tribal, and basically pastoral society. Zoroastrianism is also known as Mazdaism, a word which is derived from the name of this religions' Supreme God, Mazda (or "wise"), or Ahura Mazda. The Parsis in India came to Diu Coast around 766 A.D. But these Zoroastrians abandoned this

place and took refuge in Gujarat. In India the population of the Parsis has varied between 80,000 and 82,000 as evident from the population census between 1881-1981. At present the Parsi community in India is settled mainly in Maharashtra and specially in Bombay, Gujarat and Deccan. (For more details on their social organisation you may read unit 19 of Block 4, course ESO-02 Society in India).

Jews are yet another religious community which has had a very exclusive character. They have been living in India for centuries and have maintained their native traditions. They are a very small group in India. The 1981 census reports the presence of only 18,000 Jews in India.

Box 17.2

Jews in India

“Judaism”, the religion of the Jews has a long history. In India we find two kinds of Jews (i) the Cochin Jews, and (ii) the Bene Israel Jews. Both these kinds are further divided into “Black” Jews and the “White” Jews. Legend, as believed by the Jews in India, has it that their earliest ancestors arrived in India after the destruction of the second Temple of Jerusalem during the time of King Solomon.

The Jews of Cochin trace their origins in India from about 1000 C.E. The Jewish traveller Binyamin of Tudela in his accounts reports the presence of a thousand Black Jews on the Malabar Coast in 1170 who according to him were “good men, observed the Law, possessed the Torah of Moses, the Prophets, and had some knowledge of the Talmud and the halakhah”.

From Moses Pereria de Paivos (Amsterdam 1687) account we come to learn that there was a synagogue (religious place of the Jews) with a total membership of 465 households of White Jews who had come to Cochin from such places as Cranganore, Castile, Algiers, Jerusalem, and so on. The Black Jews appear to have arrived in India earlier than the Whites and since they intermingled with Indian women, they acquired the dark complexion. Both these Jews, Black and White who came later, did not intermix, strict endogamy was followed by both of them. The influence of caste system can be seen in these communities. They prayed in different synagogues. Black Jews did not count in the minyan (quaran of ten adult men) of the White Jews, and vice versa. The segregation between them was such that the Kohima or the priest of the Black Jews did not serve the White Jews. David G. Mandelbaum (1939), an anthropologist, studies the Jews of Cochin in 1937, and he states that the lives of the Black Jews were “even more synagogue centred” than those of the White Jews. In 1948 there were 2,500 Black and 100 White Cochin Jews in India. However, since then all the Black Jews have emigrated to Israel, while most of the White Jews remained, since they could not take their assets out of the country.

The Bene Israel Jews are the largest Jewish group in India. They explain their name to stand for “Children of Israel”, referring to the ten tribes of Israel that seceded from Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Their legends speak of a shipwreck off the Konkan coast in which only seven Hebrew couples survived. They were cast ashore and settled in the village of Nawgaon, about 26 miles south of present day Bombay. They were isolated from the co-religionists for such a long time that they forgot their Hebrew language and adopted the language (Marathi), customs, dress and even names of their Hindu neighbours.

However, they did not give up observing circumcision, dietary laws, the Sabbath, and some festivals. They also did not forget their holy shema prayers. They earned their livelihood by producing oil. Their neighbours, therefore, called them Shanwar

telis or "Sabbath-keeping Oilmen". Since oil pressing was a lower caste occupation, the higher castes considered contact with the Bene Israels defiling. Bene Israels did not come into contact with other Jewish groups till as late as the 18th century. It was only later that Ezekiel David Rahabi, (1694-1771) working in the Dutch East India Company became interested in the Bene Israels and taught them Hebrew and prayers. By mid-eighteenth century the Bene Israel began migrating to Bombay, attracted by the employment opportunities offered by the big city. Their first synagogue in Bombay was built in 1796. By 1833 about 2,000 of the Bene Israels lived in Bombay which was one-third of their total population.

They were divided into Gora (White) and Kala (Black) subcastes. The Gora were believed to be the pure descendants of the original seven couples, while the Kala were supposed to be the off springs of the union between Bene Israel men and the native women. The Gora were considered to be superior by the Kala and they both remained aloof from each other. They did not intermarry or eat together.

Later another group of Baghdad Jews discriminated against the Gora Bene Israels in the same way as they discriminated against the Kala. This caste-like practice of remaining exclusive from each other underwent a change with India's independence in 1947 when caste system was officially abolished. However, intermarriage between the Gora and Kala and between them and the Baghdad Jews was rare (Patai, Raphael 1987: 164-172).

The Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews represent religions which have their main sources of origin outside India. Among these the Muslims and the Christians have had the support of political rulers during the reign of the Muslim kings and the British rule respectively. These two religions swelled their number due to conversion of large number of people in India, particularly the lower caste of Hindus and the tribals. The Parsis and the Jews have remained closed to membership from outside due to their very exclusive nature.

17.3.1 Geographical Spread

Yet another important feature of religious pluralism can be seen in the geographical spread of religions in India. The Hindus, who constitute the majority religion, are spread all over, but have large concentration in the central and southern states of India with high density pocket in a few northern states and far eastern Assam.

The Muslims, the second largest religious group have relatively greater concentration in South-western states such as Kerala, Karnataka, the northern and eastern states in U.P., Bihar, Assam and pockets of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. They are also spread throughout the country like the Hindus. We have given you in the illustration the maps of India and Pakistan (1931 census) showing the spread of Hindus and Muslims.

The Christians have density concentration in the southern states of Kerala, parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and the north-eastern states of Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya. They are also spread across Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and some parts of other northern states in small pockets. One important feature of geographical settlement of Christians is that they may be found in larger numbers in states with higher tribal population due to the impact of conversion.

Sikhs, yet another important religious group has its territorial localisation in the northern state of Punjab, with pockets of settlement in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Being a mobile and highly entrepreneurial community, Sikhs can be found spread over most parts of India. (We have given you in the illustration the map of India and Pakistan 1931 census) showing the geographical distribution of the Christians and the Sikhs.

Geographically, Buddhism in India, though once highly influential in the entire north, seems to be now localised to Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and in Darjeeling in West Bengal. They are also found in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh where some scheduled caste Hindus have converted to Buddhism. The Jains, are primarily settled in urban areas of the northern states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. Being an urban and trading religious group they may be found in all parts of the country.

An important feature of the geographical spread of religions in India is that despite evidence of localisation of a particular religion in some parts of the country, each religious group is spread out throughout the country. This has necessitated a large measure of inter-religious interaction, borrowings of ways and styles of life, sharing common languages and cultural practices across religious affiliations. This has led to a diversification of cultural sub-groups belonging to each religion. The Andhra Muslims and Kashmir Muslims in several respects are different cultural communities. There are very few exceptions to this attribute. These pertain to only minority religions such as the Parsis, Jews and few others, which are highly restricted in their distribution.

Activity 1

Select a small area of inhabitants in your city, town or village where you live. Find out from the people in this area such facts as:

- i) which religion they belong to;
- ii) whether they originally belonged to this place or have come from some other place; and
- iii) If they have come from some other place, then how many years back they came..

Write a note of about two pages and compare, if possible, your note with those of other students at your study centre.

17.3.2 Religion and Sect

An important element of pluralism among religions in India is their sub-division into sects. Max Weber has given a technical measuring to a sect and distinguishes it from church, especially in the context of Christianity. He says that membership of Church (the main religion) is compulsory. It is governed by collective norms or rules and is run by religious functionaries. But the membership to a sect is voluntary. It is individualistic and lends freedom to the followers of the sects from the compulsory obedience to the functionaries of the Church.

Weber has used the term sect in a relatively definitive sense which may not apply to all religions. Sects are however, common to all religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism. Sub-divisions and Sects in a more general sense refer to internal diversities of interpretation of sacred principles, ritual practices and religious practices in a religion. Sects may also evoke historical cleavages within a religion either due to new interpretation of the religious canons or due to factionalisation of the religious leadership. Sects, however, operate within the boundary of the specific religion to which they belong. Yet, the process of differentiation makes it possible that inter-religious proximities of customs, rituals and practices of religion and proximity or religious beliefs across religions is made possible due to this process.

As an example, we may notice that Sufism in Islam, established deeper relationships

with Sikhism, Bhakti movement in Hinduism and with Christian forms of mysticism. Similarly, Lingayat sect in Hinduism established closer relationship with Christian beliefs. Thus, inter-religious borrowings and influences could be observed in most religions across the sects.

There are few religions in India which are not differentiated on the basis of sects. Hinduism always included a diverse range of belief systems from Vedic Hinduism of the past, through **Purans** and **Dharma-Shastras**. Hinduism absorbed numerous religious beliefs and ritual practices. It evolved through this process into many sects and traditions of beliefs and sacred rites. The main sects in Hinduism are, based however, on the **Vaishnavism** (worship of Vishnu) and **Shaivism** (worship of Siva). There are many variations in each of the above two sects. The former promotes strict vegetarianism and puritanism in social and cultural practices. Commitment to Ahimsa or non-violence of this sect is very similar to beliefs of non-violence in Buddhism and Jainism. Shaivism is, however, less puritanical in respect of these values. It permits meat-eating and even drinking; specially among those who are followers of the **tantric** branches of Shaivism.

Many religious movement emerged in India over a period of time based on the beliefs and practices of these sects. The **Bhakti-movement** particularly drew most from Vaishnavism. Similarly, the Lingayat movement in Karnataka drew its inspiration from Shaivism. These sects in Hinduism promoted diversity and innovativeness among the Hindus, and also led to the establishment of many linkages with other religions. Hinduism being a religion without Church, (established unified religious organisation and systems of belief and rituals) its social and cultural character has been more prominent through history in comparison to its ritualistic norms and practices. It has not without reason been described "as a way of life". M.N. Srinivas and A.M. Shah write: "Hinduism lacking a centralised church is so inextricably entangled with Hindu society that it is very difficult to say where one ends and the other begins" (Srinivas and Shah: 1968: 358). Religious pluralism is therefore intrinsic to Hinduism through multiplicity of sects are also through its normative character.

Islam and Christianity too are differentiated into many sects. In Islam the division on the basis of Shia and Sunni denominations is a well recognised one. Religious denomination is a sect which becomes generally accepted by the people and loses much of its vigour. (For further details refer back to unit 12 of Block 3 of this course on Society and Religion). There are several other sects which not only introduce divisions on the basis of differences of interpretation of the sacred traditions but also differences on account of social and cultural interpretations of ritual practices and precepts. Sufism is a very prominent example of this in Islam which allows for a broad banding of more innovative and individualistic viewpoints of Islam which otherwise has a strong communitarian character. Even among Sufis one would find many sub-divisions. Sects and sub-sects are a common feature in most religions because interpretive boundaries of belief and ritual systems in most religions have been always flexible and subject to historical forces.

In Christianity the major sects belong to Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The latter emerged through reformation movement in Christianity led by Luther and Calvin. Max Weber has written extensively on this problem. These two branches of Christianity are divided in India into several sects. Roman-Catholic religion has the sects of the Romo-Syrians, Jacobites and Reformed, among others. The Protestants are divided into the sects of Anglican Combination, Baptists, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodists, Congregationalist and Salvationist.

Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism which are sometimes described as differentiation from

the Hindu religion itself, are each internally divided into sects. The Buddhists have **Hinayan** and **Mahayan** sect-divisions; the Jains have **Shwetambara**, and **Digambara** sub-divisions (You will learn more about these religions, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism in the next block, **Religious Pluralism-II**). Sikhs too are divided into different sectarian groups based on normative re-interpretation of the principles of Sikhism and its ritual forms.

The differentiation of religions into sects has a deeper impact on the pluralistic nature of religion. It marks a departure from the rigidity and orthodoxy of specific religions and endows them with the capacity to innovate and respond to social and historical changes in society. Sects, therefore, perform along with intensification of religiosity a function of pluralistic interaction with other religions in specific terms, and with society in general. Max Weber rightly highlighted the developmental contributions that sects make towards the resilience of religion in social life. In India the sects in different religions clearly exemplify the contributions they have made first in the sharpening of the definition of the religious boundaries and secondly, in establishing linkages with other religions, their ideas, belief systems and practices.

Check Your Proress 1

i) What do you understand by religious pluralism? Discuss in about 8 lines.

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ii) Distinguish between religion and sect giving an example. Use about 10 lines.

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iii) Fill in the blanks:

a) The Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews represent religions which have their main soruce of origin India.

b) An important feature of geographical settlement of Christians in India is

that they may be found in large numbers in states with higher
population due to the impact of

- c) The process of differentiation within the main religion makes it possible for different religions to share their customs, rituals and religious practices, as well as, their beliefs and values in Islam is a good example of such a religious inter-mixture.

17.3.3 Caste and Religion

You cannot fully understand the nature of religion in India without analysing the pervasive role of the caste institution among various religious groups. Caste is based on the Hindu religious view of birth-rebirth and Karma (see Box 17.03 for further details). In Hinduism caste groups are placed into a hierarchical order of pure and impure ritual status within the four Varna wherein the Brahman are at the top, followed by the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra and the out-caste. In actual life, caste exists in society as *Jatis*. There are thousands of *Jatis* among the Hindus each contributing to vertical differentiation and horizontal solidarity among the castes. Therefore, Hindu religion does not constitute a community in a solidary sense. It remained a tolerant adaptive and liberal religion in India. It recognises and is tolerant of differences.

Box 17.03

Karma Theory—The doctrine of karma, and related to this doctrine, the cycle of birth and rebirth or Samsara is one of the essential tenets of Hinduism. It has deep influence on Hindu thought and way of life. It is based on the idea of transmigration of souls. It is believed that every action or deed has a consequence which is not merely of a physical nature, but it also has a mental and moral character. A persons birth in this life is determined by his or her deeds in the past life. The only escape from the cycle of birth and rebirth is through achieving the state of nirvana or true knowledge.

The other major religions in India such as Islam, Christianity and Sikhism are based essentially on communication principle, at least in ideal terms. By communitarian we mean that these religions give importance to the community of its followers. None of these religions recognise inequalities or hierarchy based on caste discrimination. However, in real life none of these religions are free from the existence of caste of caste-like groups which are hierarchically arranged in terms of social status and prestige. These groups are also endogamous and observe social restrictions in marital and social relationships outside their caste-group. The Muslims have caste-like divisions in India in all parts of the country. The main castes among them as listed in the census of 1931 for the northern state of United Provinces are: Shaikh, Pathan, Saiyid, Rajpur (Muslim) and Mughal among the upper category, and Julaha, Manihar, Dhunia, Teli, Faquir, Nai (Hajjam), Darzi, Dhobi, Qassab among the lower caste hierarchy. The upper Muslim castes belonged to ruling or landlord families or they were in the profession of learning. The lower castes had occupations families or they were in the profession of learning. The lower castes had occupations carrying lesser social prestige in the society. Each of these castes was endogamous and also observed social and cultural distance from each other based on hierarchy. Contemporary studies have re-confirmed these observations. There has been some social mobility among the Muslim castes based on changes in occupation, but the caste-like social inequality even today continues to exist.

Christianity in India has not been able to get itself free from the caste system. Even after conversion most caste disabilities of the former (pre-conversion) time continue

to persist. Depending upon the caste from which members converted they continue to have the social status in the Christian community commensurate with their earlier caste status. Similar caste recognitions exist for Muslim converts also. As Christianity has expanded through conversion in India it has incorporated more and more caste-like groups obeying the rules of hierarchy and endogamy within each caste. The exception in this regard are possibly the tribal communities from the north-east which never had the caste institution in their social organisation. Caste prejudices are reported to be all pervasive among most Indian Christian communities. Similar caste distinctions can be found among the Sikhs also. The conversion to Buddhism, a religion which rejects caste system and social discrimination as its basis, has not been able to eradicate the existence of caste disabilities of the members. As in Islam and Christianity, in Sikhism too, the caste system prevails.

We have discussed in some detail the presence of caste in most religions in India, even among those which tend to reject its validity in their religious percepts, to illustrate that such social divisions within each religion reinforces the processes of religious pluralism. Caste being based on the principle of social segmentation, strengthens the forces of differentiation within a religious group. And since most castes are linked with hereditary occupations, they tend to share commonalities of custom, folkways, and beliefs with members of the same occupational caste in other religions. This led to inter-religious interactions, institutional, social and cultural linkages. Many occupational rituals and customs are shared by members of the caste groups commonly found in various religions despite the religious differences. This is particularly so in respect of the caste with agricultural occupation, and artisans. In terms of inter-religious contacts or commonalities of values and beliefs caste differentiation in each religions in India demonstrates pluralism and has in large measure also contributed to tolerance and brotherliness across the religious divide.

17.3.4 Language and Religious Pluralism

India is a land of diverse cultural patterns which have existed within the framework of religious, linguistic, geographical and local traditions. The census of 1931 revealed thirteen languages of outstanding numerical significance each having more than 9 million speakers. About 90% of the population was covered by these major languages. Today the number of numerically significant languages as recognised by the Constitution has increased. Language gives people new identities. There are several hundred languages and thousands of dialects belonging to various linguistic families. India thus presents a formidable mosaic of linguistic distribution each with individual cultural overtones. Religious differentiation exists within the setting of this linguistic divisions. As a result of this most major religions in India; Hinduism, Islam and Christianity have their members coming from different linguistic communities. Just



Children with Santa Claus.

as caste divides and also unites in some respects, the members coming from different religions belonging to the linguistic communities in India perform the same function. This is because people for a linguistic community share many common values, cultural style and way of life. Language not only gives identity to people but also serves as the potent vehicle of cultural expression.

Linguistic variations within the followers of the same religions made it possible for most people in India to take a broader and more liberal view of the relationship between religion and social and cultural life. There was continual sharing of folkways, styles of life, dietary preferences etc. across religions. This reinforced religious tolerance leading to peaceful co-existence.

Check Your Progress 2

i) In what ways are religion and caste interlinked. Explain in about 10 lines.

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ii) What role does language play in religious pluralism? Discuss in about 8 lines.

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iii) Tick the correct answer. True (T) False (F)

- a) Caste is not exactly based on the Hindu religious view of birth-rebirth and Karma.
- b) Hinduism is a pluralistic religion in essence.
- c) Christianity has expanded through conversion in India and has therefore, incorporated more and more caste-life groups, with some exceptions in the tribal communities of the north-east.
- d) Language not only gives identity to people but it also determines their religious faith.

17.4 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AS VALUE

You have learnt so far some of the factual indicators of religious pluralism in India such as its location in the demographic distribution of major religions in India, its geographical dispersal. You have also learnt about some of the social and ideological factors which brings about differentiation within a religion on the basis of sects, the role of caste in religion and the place that linguistic diversity has in reinforcing religious pluralism.

Now we are going to learn about religious pluralism in our country from the perspective of values. The question is: how far do the different religions in India share elements of commonality in terms of values? What is the place of tolerance of other faiths in the value systems that are enshrined in the canons of the diverse religions? To what extent does religion encompass the entirety of the social and cultural matrix within which members of a particular religion operate in society?

We may be able to respond to these questions taking into view the nature of individual religions. Among the Indian religions Islam, Christianity, Sikhism have a strong communitarian emphasis. Islam and Christianity also has organised church to consolidate and monitor the life styles of their followers. Islamic concept of **Umma** (religious community) and the Christian concept of brotherhood (community of followers) are meant to reinforce religious solidarity among the believers.

17.4.1 Religion and Social Identity

Over a period of time due to changes in social and political contexts in which religion has functioned in society, the sense of identity and exclusiveness has increased in most religions. One consequence of this process of change has been the emphasis on purification through which effort is made to shed customs, rituals and beliefs from religious practices of the group which do not harmonise with the essential attributes of a religion. Emphasis on the exclusive nature and identity of religions has been in evidence in India in several religions. Islam which expanded due to conversion of people of diverse faiths used to be more syncretic i.e. a synthesis of many ideas from different religions and non-exclusive in respect of beliefs and rituals in most parts of the country.

Even today many Muslim communities maintain some values, beliefs and practices which are survivals from their pre-Islamic cultural past. The same is true about the Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists. Even amongst the Jews in India we find influence of another religion. For example, amongst the Bene Israel Jews there has been a strong impact of Hinduism on their own religious values and beliefs, some even contradictory to their beliefs. One of the most distinct features of the religious life of the Bene Israel is their perspective of Hindu religion. It is said that the Jewish community in India re the only Jews in modern times who live in a polytheistic environment where people believe in number of gods and goddesses. Polytheism was the most disliked sentiment of the Jews ever since the Biblical times and they viewed this practice as a vice and sin.

However, amongst the Bene Israel, no such ancient abhorrence for an antiheathen attitude can be seen. The Hindu environment, over the long period of contact resulted in the Bene Israel having a very positive and appreciative attitude towards Hinduism.

One of the reasons for such an attitude was the absence of hostility, persecution and oppression of their religion. They were given a niche in the Hindu society to live in peace, just as other communities lived. They were given freedom to follow their own ways of life. In such an environment, which was historically a unique experience

for the Jews who have been persecuted everywhere else, the Hindu religion on which such a social relationship could survive, appeared to them as having redeeming features not in conflict with their own religious beliefs.

They could ignore the polytheistic character of Hinduism and in fact, they, till recently, believed that eating of beef was prohibited in the Bible. They also considered remarriage of widows impermissible. Both these views are the result of the impact of Hindu values on their own (Patai, Raphael 1987: 164-172). You have already learnt how caste institution which has its origin in Hinduism subsists in most other religious communities in India.

17.4.2 Religious Pluralism and Shared Values

The persistence of the values of religious pluralism in India can be observed at many levels. First, in the fact that most religions share in common a set of values which can be characterised as universal. Tolerance of all faiths, love for fellow beings, non-violence and righteous conduct are common to all faiths. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Sikhism share the values of non-violence and humanism in common. Islam places great emphasis on just and human values. Religions, therefore, share certain universal values in common irrespective of their internal differences. This enriches pluralism.

Secondly, due to historical reasons most religions in India which have expanded through conversion of the local population such as Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, etc. retain in their values and beliefs many elements which come from their past and thus belong to other religions. There are many tribal religions and ritual practices which persist in Hinduism. It is believed that some of its deities, such as Siva, Hanuman (Monkey god) and Krishna are incorporation into Hinduism of deities of tribal origin.

Myths and legends abound about tribal deities being installed as paramount Hindu god-heads. For instance lord **Jagannath** of Puri temple is said to have a tribal origin. Many other attributes of the religion of the tribes, such as the belief in spirits (**animism, totemism** i.e., identifying an animal or part of the animal to which a tribe attributes its origin or which is treated as a saviour in crisis and symbolically represented at rituals) can be traced in many non-tribal religions, such as, in Hinduism, Buddhism and many sects of Christianity. You will learn more about religions of the tribes in the next unit. Jainism too has in its rituals and beliefs elements which can be traced to the other religions. Sikhism has drawn heavily from Hinduism, Islam and Sufism. The exclusive and syncretic or non-exclusive levels of value orientations in religion are a feature to be found in all major religions of India.

Activity 2

Do you know of any inter-religions marriage taking place in real life, film or fiction? What was the socio-cultural impact of such a marriage?

Write down your views and observations in a note of about two pages. Compare, if possible, your note with those of other students at your study centre.

Thirdly, religion in its day-to-day expression maintains closer relationships with existential (life-related) problems of human beings. Births, deaths, diseases, survival and physical sustenance are existential issues which no religion can treat as marginal. In a way, religion is a form of response to existential dilemmas of human kind. For this reason each religion contains in its repertoire, along with the abstract principles of dogmas, a set of norms which are designed to deal with material life. Space, time, nature etc. are defined by each religion from the perspective of the sacred.

This element in religion perforce introduces ethical principles and values in each religion which deal with existential issues such as work, occupation, space, time nature etc., since the material conditions under which religion responds to these elements of human existence have a common character. For this reason despite exclusiveness of each religion from the other ones, each religion shares normative features with other religions in common. For instance, different occupational groups despite differences of religion, cherish beliefs and values having sacred or religious character (taboos, calendric preferences, belief in sacred space or occupational rituals) in common on account of their work-situation. Peasant groups exemplify this in large measure.

17.4.3 Religious Beliefs and Rituals

Finally, religious comprised both systems of belief and rituals. The systems of belief and rituals which characterises all religions comprises of myths and ceremonies, rites and customs. Ritual has been described in anthropology as any formal actions following a set pattern which express through symbol a public or shared meaning. They are typically the practical aspects of a religious system and they express sacred values. All religions have sacred festivals, celebrations and get-togethers related to various myths, legends or normative perscriptions of the religion. Many of these festivals are occasion for members of all religious groups to participate.



Deepawali lamp lights.

Among the Hindus, the **Ram Lila** is an occasion when people of different religions participate in the celebration. Similarly, **Mohurram** among the Muslims offers an occasion for members of other religious groups to participate. This enhances the strength and quality of religious pluralism at the level of values and beliefs. It encourages inter-religious participation and mutuality among the people. Rituals are therefore, a very concrete manifestation of the pluralistic values in religion.

The next unit on religions of the tribes will explain to you yet another aspect of religious pluralism in India.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Name the religions which are strongly communitarian in about two lines.

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- ii) Describe one of the consequences of increase in the sense of identity and exclusiveness which has occurred in most religions. Use about eight lines.

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iii) Mention at least two of the universal values shared by most of the religions in a plural society like India. Use about two lines.

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iv) What has been the relationship between religions of the tribes and non-tribal religions? Explain in about eight lines.

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v) Discuss one of the reasons due to which, inspite of the exclusive nature of each religion in a plural society, they share common normative features. Use about eight lines.

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17.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt about the meaning and nature of religious pluralism. You have studied how religious pluralism is a fact in Indian life. The demography of religious group and its territorial localisation supports this viewpoint. There are additional elements in most religions. For example, the existence of sects, castes or caste-like divisions which reinforce pluralism in religion, both as fact and as value. Finally, you have studied how values of pluralism have not only existed in all religions in India but have persisted through a long period of time.

17.6 KEY WORDS

- Canons** : Laws or rules related with the body of the religious organisation.
- Communitarian** : Inclined towards giving more significance to living in a community, sharing collective religious practices, performing rituals and so on.
- Denomination** : When a sect gets generally accepted by the people and relaxes its religious vigour, it is called a denomination.
- Functionaries** : Those who hold an office. In our case, those people who hold religious office, such as, a priest or clergyman.
- Normative** : That which is related to the moral structure of the society; the rules and regulations of social behaviour guided by the norms and values in a society.
- Pluralism** : It refers to the philosophy which recognises more than one principle of being. In our context, pluralism in the sense of religion means a society in which people of different religious faiths live, preserving their own distinct customs.
- Repertoire** : A collection of, or a storehouse of items. In our case, values, beliefs and rituals present in a religion.
- Sect** : It is a religious group which stands for those who dissent from an established church and are united as a communion of religious brotherhood with a well-defined creed. Membership to this group is voluntary rather than compulsory.
- Syncretic** : That which is a synthesis of or has a blending of ideas, values, customs and religious practices from different religions and in this sense non-exclusive.

17.7 FURTHER READING

Davis, Kingsley, 1951. *Population of India and Pakistan*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey.

Madan T.N. (ed), 1991. *Religion in India*. Oxford University Press: Delhi.

Barth A., 1990. *Religion of India*. Low Price Publication: Delhi.

Srinivas, M.N. & Shah A.M., 1968. "Hinduism" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, VI. 5, pp. The Macmillan Company & The Free Press: New York.

17.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Religious pluralism means a society in which people of various religions come

together during a long period of time, bringing their own customs, faiths and cultures. Due to the close interaction amongst them some common values emerge. They begin to share many of their customs, values and beliefs due to this long period of association.

- ii) Religion is the main body from which the different branches emerge as protest groups known as sects. Sects and sub-sects are formed due to the internal differentiation that occurs in the main body of a religion. For example, in Christianity the membership to the church (the main religion) is compulsory. It is governed by collective norms and run by the religious functionaries. But a sect is voluntary, individualistic and it gives freedom to the followers of the sect from the compulsory obedience to the functionaries of the church.
- iii) a) Outside,
b) Tribal, conversions,
c) Sufism.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Caste system is based on the Hindu religious view of birth-rebirth and Karma theory. In Hinduism castes are placed in a hierarchical order based on the concept of pure and impure. According to this hierarchy the Brahmin are at the top, next are the Kshatriya, then Vaisya and finally the Sudra. This hierarchy also indicated occupational hierarchy as well, in Hinduism. Due to the long association of other religions, such as Islam and Christianity with Hinduism, many of the customs of the Hindus came to be adopted by them. Especially, the converts to these religions from the Hindu fold carried over their caste distinctions and customs to their new religions.
- ii) Most of the major religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and, even Sikhism, to a certain extent have their members distributed throughout India in different linguistic communities. Language is something which binds a people together through common customs, living conditions and so on. It is a vehicle of cultural expression which leads to integration of people of different religions. In this sense it plays an important role in maintaining the pluralistic character of Indian society and religion.
- iii) a) F
b) T
c) T
d) F

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Strongly communitarian religions are, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity.
- ii) One of the consequences of an increase in the sense of identity and exclusiveness in most religions is that these religions have begun to place more emphasis on purification of their customs, rituals and beliefs. They have tried to give up those customs, ritual practices and beliefs which did not go with the essential qualities of their own religion.
- iii) Belief in humanism and non-violence are two universal values shared by most

religions in a plural society.

- iv) Due to the close interaction between people of tribal origins and non-tribal religions living in an area, many of the customs, values and religious practices get imbibed by people of the tribal from non-tribal religions and vice-versa. For example, Hinduism has adopted many of their deities from religions of the tribes. Some of these deities are like Siva, Hanuman and Krishna.
- v) In many of the regions in India, people of different religions share similar normative features since they belong to the same occupational group. The existential conditions of living together in the same economic and political environment necessitates a somewhat similar normative structure for these occupational groups which crosses the boundaries of religious exclusiveness.

UNIT 18 TRIBAL RELIGION: TWO CASE STUDIES

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Tribal Religion in a State of Simplicity
 - 18.2.1 Ritual Way of Life
 - 18.2.2 Ritual Elements
 - 18.2.3 Spirits and Souls
 - 18.2.4 Religion without Explanation
- 18.3 Tribal Religion Seeking Theological Complexity
 - 18.3.1 Encounter with Christianity
 - 18.3.2 Old Belief and New Interpretation
 - 18.3.3 Writing a Tribal Theology
 - 18.3.4 The Changing Worldview
- 18.4 Cross-Cultural Comparison
- 18.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.6 Key Words
- 18.7 Further Reading
- 18.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

18.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you will be able to

- identify the basic constituents of tribal ritual complex
- understand the tribal concept of human being as a ritual being
- describe theological orientation of a tribal religion without explanation
- discuss the tribal method of meeting the challenges of Christianity
- evaluate the process of transformation from oral to textual modes of cultural transmission
- show the consequences of conflicting cosmologies on the life of the converts
- explain the features of continuity in the changing tribal religion.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit (number 17) you studied the various aspects of religious pluralism in India. You learnt about the geographical distribution of religious communities throughout India, their demographic aspects and then you learnt about the social and cultural-historical foundations of the value systems of different religions. Tribes in India constitute about 7% of the total population of India (1981 Censs). In this unit we are going to explain the nature and development of tribal religions in India with the help of two case studies; Birhors of Bihar and Khasis of Meghalaya. In this unit, we will examine two cases of tribal religion to highlight further its specific features.

As you know, tribal religion is based on oral traditions. The tribes express their beliefs in everyday language. Their rituals are aimed at solving day to day problems of life. Objects of worship are things of Nature such as trees, rivers, mountain, sun, moon and earth. Offerings are usually in the form of food and drink, domesticated birds and animals. Rituals are mostly performed collectively and transmitted orally. By the term ritual; which has been interchangeably used with the terms rite ceremony

or custom; one implies any non-instinctive behaviour which is repetitive, symbolic and meaningful. It stands for any formal actions following a set pattern which express through symbol a public or shared meaning. These symbols express sacred values which are demarcated from profane or mundane day to day activities of everyday life. The sacred is that which is superior to the ordinary, utilitarian life activities which falls in the purview of the profane. Tribal World view is grounded in the natural events and life-experiences. Their cosmology is socially effective i.e. existential, but uninterpretative. It lacks interpretability, precisely because the tribes themselves have no metaphysical anxiety i.e. the anxiety to know about the reason for their existence or how and why the cosmology exists, and so on. But, coming in contact with the complex forms of religion, they are now adopting explanatory apparatus.

This unit will apprise you of both the situation, that is: (i) tribal religion in a state of simplicity, and (ii) tribal religion seeking theological complexity. Section 18.2 describes tribal religions in their original state. For this let us take an example of the Birhors of Bihar. In order to explain the tribal religion seeking theological complexity we have given you the example of the Khasis of Meghalaya in the section 18.3. Section 18.4 gives the Cross-cultural comparison of these two tribes and finally, section 18.5 provides the summary of the unit.

18.2 TRIBAL RELIGION IN A STATE OF SIMPLICITY

The Birhors (Roy 1925, 198) are a nomadic hunting and gathering tribe. They are numerically a small population located chiefly in the Chotanagpur plateau (south Bihar) and sporadically found in Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. They move about in small groups snaring monkeys, tracking hare, deer or other games, and collecting rope-fibres, honey and bees wax. During the rainy season they camp in tiny leaf huts called **Kumba**, and make wooden vessels and plait ropes, weaving them into hunting nets. Their habitat, called **tanda**, is located in open spaces on the wooded hill tops and slopes, or the edges of the jungles. By the sides of most Birhor settlements is a 'sacred grove' called the **Jayar** or **Jilu-Jayar**, marked by one or more trees and a few blocks of stones. This is the seat of the **Sendra-bongas**, the spirits presiding over the hunt.

Birhor literally means the "Jungle (**bir**) fold (**hor**)". There are two main divisions: (i) **Uthalus** or **Bhulies**, the wanderers, and (ii) **Jaghis** or **Thantias**, the settlers. The **Uthalus** move about from jungle to jungle in small groups with their families and scanty belongings. Their deities represented by lumps of clay, pieces of stones and wooden pegs are carried in baskets by one or two young bachelors who walk at the head of the party. The **jaghis** settle down for a comparatively long period on the outskirts of the jungle, but rarely stop at one place for any considerable length of time.

18.2.1 Ritual Way of Life

Every Birhor **tanda** has a headman called the **Naya**, who is primarily the priest of the group, supernaturally selected. On the death of a **Naya**, his successor is chosen of the spirits in the following manner: A **Mati**, spirit-doctor, who is called on this occasion, swings his head from side to side and reaches a state of ecstasy. He asks the spirits.

"Whom will you have for your **Naya**?"

In answer the spirits, through the mouth of the **Mati**, declares,

"We want the man who is of such and such

appearance, and has so many children, we shall obey him”.

The new **Naya** selected in this way, first takes a bath in some spring or stream and then takes to the **jilu-Jayar** where the hunting nets have been placed in a heap. There he offers rice to the spirits. Following the brief ritual, the men of the **tanda** go out for a hunt to test the correctness of the selection. If the hunt proves successful the people rejoice; if fails, the **Naya** is called upon for an explanation. The **Mati** again gets possessed and finds out what spirit has caused failure. On his declaring the name of the spirit and the sacrifices it requires, the **Naya** proceeds to propitiate the unfriendly spirit. He thus, puts himself right with man and spirit.

The duty of the **Naya** is to offer the sacrifice. He appoints a man as the **Kotwar** or **Diguar** to the hunt, to attend at the sacrifices and to make all necessary arrangements for them. The position of the **Mati** is different from both the **Naya** and the **Kotwar**. He is neither elected nor appointed. He is the person believed to have the power of second sight. Usually, a person who feels a call to the vocation of a **Mati** goes to another **Mati** for training. He observes certain strict rules as to diet and worship. After having completed the training he is recognised as a **Mati**. The function of the **Mati** is to find out the unfriendly spirits causing sickness and other misfortunes of the community, and the required sacrifices to propitiate them. When there is a new birth in the **tanda**, certain hills which may not stand pollution have to be avoided by the hunting party of the **tanda** until the purificatory ceremony has been performed on the seventh day of the birth. It is the business of the **Mati** to discover and declare the hills which could resent such contact.

As a nomadic hunter and food gatherer, the Birhor social organisation and religious beliefs are essentially concerned with success or luck in securing food. Any case of ill-luck that befalls the community either in respect of food, health or other concerns of life is attributed to the infringement of some taboo by some member of the community and the consequent wrath of some spirit. To illustrate the point, let us look into the rituals and beliefs associated with the monkey-hunt, called **qari-sendra**, which is the Birhor's characteristic mode of food quest.

On the morning of the appointed day of monkey-hunt, the **Naya** bathes in a stream or spring, fills a pot with water and brings it home. He changes his loin-cloth, and in the company of one or two elders proceeds with a handful of **aura** rice and the water-pot to the **Jily-Jayar** which his wife has already cleaned with mud or cowdung. The **Kotwar** has placed there all the nets of the intending hunters. Before this heap of nets, the **Naya** stands on his left leg with his right heel resting on his left knee (**Fig. 1**), and with his face to the east and with arms extended forward, pours a little of water three times on the ground, invokes all the spirits by name for success in hunting:



A Tribal ceremony

“Here I am making a libation in your names.
May blood of game flow like this”.

He then sits down before the nets and puts three vermilion marks on the ground. On these he sprinkles a little **arua** rice, and address the spirits:

“Today I am offering this rice to you all.
May we have speedy success.
May game be caught in our nets
as soon as we enter the jungle”.

All the assembled persons, then return home, leaving the nets there. After breakfast each intending hunter tyakes up from the **Jule-jayar** his own hunting net, clubs and bamboo poles for fixing nets, and subsequently proceeds to the selected jungle.

Precautions are taken, while leaving the **tanda**, that none of the pary may chance to see any empty vessel being carried along, or a person easing himself. Such sights are regarded as bad auguris. When the party arrive at the selected jungle, all sit down together on the ground for a short while. The **Kotwar** touches each net with an ebony twig and hands it over to the **Naya** to perform a ritual called **bana-sana** which is believed to have neutralised the harmful effects of the evil eye that may have been directed against the party. With a low murmuring voice, he says

“Today I am making **bana-sana** in the names of
those (women) who cast their eyes at us
while sending us away.
May we have success in the hunt
as soon as we go (enter the jungle).
May oil of the bhelwa, or making-nut, drop
into the eyes and anus of those who
cast evil eyes on us”.

The parties are, then, told to set off in different directions for monkey-capturing. After bagging the game, the party leaves the forest. When they arrive at some stream, they light a fire and scorch the monkeys in it. The roasted meat is distributed among the members of the party. But before that, the **Naya** offers it to all the spirits jointly and promises them similar offerings in future if they always bring them such game. When the hunting party return home, the wife of each hunter first washes the feet of her husband, and then all the women proceed to the house of the **Naya** and there each women washes his feet and anoints them with oil. If the party returns home unsuccessful, the **Naya** asks the **Kotwar** to bring him the hunting nets of each family in the **tanda**. He takes out a bit of thread from each of the nets and buries the bundle of thread in the ground. Sitting down by its side, he goes on muttering incantations, and exclaims,

“Here is the bundle which these spirits have secreted.
That is why no game could be had.
Now that I have taken out this impediment
to chase, it will henceforth be all right”.

Then addressing the spirits, he says,

“I shall sacrifice fowls to you.
Don't offer obstructions any more.
From today may game be caught
in plenty in our nets.

Saying this, he sacrifices a fowl by cutting its neck with a knife.

Activity 1

You just read the section on “Ritual Way of Life” of the Birhor tribals. Are there equivalent rituals which you perform in your family and community. Describe in detail at least one such ritual in about two pages. Compare, if possible, your answer with those of other students of your study centre.

You have seen how the Birhor a whole life—biological, economic, social and political—is pervaded by his religion. Birhor religion consists of beliefs in the sacred presence of the spirits with whom tribesmen interact in everyday language and through numerous rites, sacrifices, charms and spells in everyday life.

The rituals performed during the monkey-hunt, such as that of pouring of water three times by the Birhor priest before the nets of the intending hunters invoking all the spirits by name for success in hunting, refers to what the anthropologists call sympathetic magic. In other words, like produces like. In a broad sense, this is the initial thinking of human beings regarding the regularity of cause and effect. If the spirit is the cause, the desired effect, such as success in hunting, will follow in the continuation of the act.

18.2.2 Ritual Elements

The structure of Birhor rituals is formed by various components or elements which are inextricably related with one another. Briefly, these are as follows:

a) Purpose

Protection from evil; luck in health; progeny and food; ensure success in the hunt; for the good of the family; to avert any mischief of the spirit; causing death and sickness to an enemy; protection of the **tanda**; training of a spirit-doctor; stopping storms and lightning; rain-making; recovering a lost dog; driving away bugs and mosquitoes; attracting a beloved person; to control plant-life; purification from birth and death pollution; for the good of the departed soul; and performances connected with the lifecycle and with calendrical festivals.

b) Performer

The **Naya** priest, the **Kotwar** or **Diguar** ritual assistant; the **Mati** diviner; the headman of the clan; and woman.

c) Preparation

Bathing; smearing oil on head or limbs; fasting; not eating salt; cleaning the ritual space with mud, cowdung and water; and purification by fire, by sharing, etc.

d) Performance and process

- 1) Ritual time: Jan–Feb, July, Sept.–Oct.–Nov.; Friday, Monday; junctures of time such as morning, noon, evening.
- 2) Ritual space: upland, hill, forest, field; family hut, spirit-hut; square; east-facing.
- 3) Ritual objects: rock or stone, bamboo or wooden peg, lump of clay; leaf-cup, flowers, twigs of trees, spirit-box containing a little vermilion in a small container and some **aura** rice kept in a bamboo-tube; spirit-net; husking pestle; arrow heads, iron tridants or chains, totemic objects such as rice-husk, pellet-bow, **bonga sauri** (a kind of wild grass), etc.

- 4) Offerings: **arua rice**, rice with blood, salt, turmeric, chillies, vermilion; water, honey, rice-beer, liquor, blood of sacrificial fowl, goat, pig or bullock, deer-hair or skin roasted flesh of monkey) etc.
- 5) Sacrifice: **Kutam** process in which the pigs are sacrificed by striking them at the neck with the but-end of an axe, and **jabai** process (with two and half strokes of a weapon) in the manner of the Muhammadans; the head of the fowl cut off with the knife, the fowl sacrificed by twisting the head, that is, sacrifice by **ningchha** method.
- 6) Colour: White fowl, speckled (spotted red and white) fowl, white goat, red goat, black goat.
- 7) Ritual drawing: a figure drawn on the ground with rice-flour for **takchanrhi** marriage ceremony (Fig. 2), a mystic diagram (Fig. 3) drawn on the ground with black coal dust, red earth and white rice-flour for **bana-sana** ceremony in which the black stand for the Baghour spirit, red for Naga-Era Bindi-Era, and the white for Banu-bonga.
- 8) Methods of spirit finding: The **khari-hora** process in which the **Mati** sits down holding with one hand an axe placed upright on the ground with its butt-end downward, and begins by sprinkling around him rice-grains placed before him on a leaf and goes on muttering invocations to different spirits, interrogating them in a sing-song tone; the **dub-hora** process of spirit-finding consists in the **Mati** taking some rice on a winnowing basket and briskly rubbing them with his hands on the basket while muttering his invocations until he is possessed by the **bhut** responsible for the trouble.
- 9) Sound: For rain-making ceremony people go up the nearest hill and push-down stones of all sizes which produce a rumbling noise which at the same time is intensified by beating a drum so as to produce a low, heavy, continued sound in imitation of the sound of falling rain on the roofs of their huts. Invoke clan-god or Yam spirit in imitation of the crowing of a cock by uttering the queer cry of **Kok-ro-cho**; relatives of the deceased rending the air with loud cries of lamentation.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Who are the Birhors? Use about 8 lines for your answer.

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ii) What are the ritual elements? Describe any one of them in about 8 lines.

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18.2.3 Spirits and Souls

To the Birhor everything above, below, or around, him is animated either by spirit or supernatural elements. Every living being is animated by a soul or souls. The spirits reside in a large number of things. Most of them are dormant, but still the number of active spirits and energies is considerable. The most important of these are spirits of their original native hills, forests and streams. Besides, there are the ever-increasing spirits of dead human beings, all seeking food and nourishment. The Birhors recognise a distinction between spirits who may have to be propitiated with prayers and sacrifices and impersonal powers of energies which may be controlled, averted or repelled by spells, threats and other such methods. All these may be grouped as follows:

a) General spirits

- 1) **Singbonga** or the supreme spirit, symbolised by the Sun, generally an unconcerned spectator or witness who does not ordinarily cause any harm to man and may occasionally protect him from evil.
- 2) **Burhi mai** or the mother spirit, **Kali mai**, **Devi mai**, and other represented by a piece of wood daubed red with vermilion, brings luck in health, progeny and food.

Chandi and other spirits of the chase. A piece of rock or stone under some tree is fixed upon as the seat of the hunting spirit **Chandi** and his associates. **Bandarbir** and **Hulmanbir** bring success in catching monkeys.

Some of these spirits, for example **Chandi**, **Kalimai**, **Devi**, **Hulman**, **Mahadeo**, etc. belong to the Hindu pantheon.

- 4) **Mahali chaati**, a female spirit, the presiding deity of smaller game like the wild cat and lizard, grants success in hunting those animals which are caught in the rainy months.

b) Clan spirits

- 1) **Ora-banga** or **buru-bonga**, the spirits of the different hills reputed to have formed the original homes of the different Birhor clans, the masters (dispensers) of sickness, credited with certain powers over Nature such as that of causing and stopping rain and storm.
- 2) **Larankia bhut**, the fighting spirit with whose help in ancient times, the forefathers of the clan are reputed to have fought against other clans, invoked on fighting expeditions.
- 3) **Manita** or acquired spirits such as **Mai** or **Mehamaya**, **Mahadeo** and several others provided with seats either in a small leaf-hut called **bonga-ora** or the family as distinguished from the common (**jama**) **thaan** of the **tanda**. A **vow** or **manita** is made when the epidemic spreads and the promised sacrifices are offered by the **Naya** when it abates.

c) **Family spirit**

- 1) **Haprom** or ancestor-spirits, the spirits of such deceased persons of a Birhor family as have been conducted to the **ading** or inner-tabernacle of the hut by the **Umbul-ader** ceremony. Although they generally exercise a guardian care over their descendents, ancestor-spirits are not consulted in times of distress nor credited with the power of giving oracles to them.
- 2) Family **manita bhuts** or the acquired spirits of a family, comprise such spirits as owing to repeated mishaps having been caused by them to the family.

d) **Group-spirits or Sangi bhut**

Jaher Buri, Mai, Kali Mai, Devi, Darha Mahadeo and several other dieties are included among the **Sangi bhuts**. These are spirits sacrificed to by an entire **tanda** or food group once a year in the month of January-February as also when an epidemic visits the **tanda** or its surrounding country.

e) **Individual tutelary or Sakti bhuts**

It is only the **mati** who takes to himself some particular deity such as Mahadeo, Mai, Devi and Durga as the **Sakti bhut**. The Sangi bhuts are characterised as **Arhaia bhuts**. They will kill people or do them other harm.

f) **Minor spirits or Ningchha bhuts**

In this class are human spirits who are excluded from the category of **Haproms** such as the **bhuts** or spirits of men whose wives died during their menstrual periods. **Kichin** or spirits of women dying during menses, **Baram-bhut** or spirits of bachelors who kept maidens in concubinage, **Mua** or spirits of persons dying of snake-bite, **Churin** or spirits of women dying during pregnancy, and elemental spirits like the **Satbahini**, the seven sisters and **Bindi-Era**. These are wandering spirits, having no fixed habitation.

g) **Manita bhut of women**

Ordinarily, men alone are entitled to offer sacrifices to the spirits and have personal relations, so to say, with them. In some cases women may also offer sacrifices to certain spirits. This happens especially when she eats the meat of the head of an animal, or fowl, sacrificed to a spirit. As the spirit is thereby drawn on her and begins to cause trouble to herself and her family, she adopts the spirit as a **manita** to be periodically propitiated with appropriate sacrifices.

h) **Souls or umbul**

When death occurs the **umbul** or shade of the deceased joins the spirit-world. A man has two souls—a male one and a female one. These remain united in death as in life, and when they finally lose their present body by death, are reincarnated together in a new body. When a person dreams, the male soul goes out of the body and visits different persons and places, while the female soul remains in-charge of the body, just as his wife is left in-charge of the hut when a Birhor goes out to hunt. So long as the male soul does not come back, the body is said to be sleeping; but when it is unusually long in returning the female soul too goes out in search of her mate leaving the body dead. Some **Matis** are credited with the power of calling back the truant souls and thus restoring life through the aid of their family spirits. When a Birhor dies in the jungle during a storm, the chances are that his death may be only temporary, hence some Bihors postpone for three or four days after death the cremation or burial of a man dying through exposure in a storm.

18.2.4 Religion without Explanation

The Birhor religion, as we have seen, has its basis in a haunting sense of the presence of spirit-powers all around the world. The most important problem of life is to deal with these powers to ensure individual and collective well-being. The solution that Birhor society has found is to seek conciliation and communion with the more definite and potent personal spirits and to deal with the more indefinite and impersonal forces by way of control, expulsion or avoidance through appropriate rites, ceremonies, spells and taboos. But the tribal faith does not account for the ultimate cause of the natural phenomena and happenings in life.

The Birhor supreme-spirit, Singh-Bonga, is creator of the world, but he does not take any active part in the direction of the universe and in the affairs of human beings. The other spirits, friendly and unfriendly, are the potential source of good luck and bad luck. But no spirit is conceptualised as God in the Christian sense of creator and ruler of the universe and the one who pronounces reward and punishment on human beings.

The Birhor spirits are conditioned by the same appetite and desires as those of the human. They are anxious for animal food and a regular supply of it. Yet the spirit powers are treated as a class apart. This of course indicates the tribal sense of sacredness, but gives no phenomenological explanation of the sacred or profane. In other words, there is no theology or body of religious philosophy behind the tribal religions.

Box 18.1

Phenomenology The term “phenomenology” is derived from the Greek word “phainein” which means “to show”. It is from this word that phainemenon that is “that which appears”, has been derived. It is in this sense that phenomenology can be literally understood as the study of phenomena or appearances. It could therefore, include a large arena of traditional philosophy and science. The famous twentieth century German philosopher, Edmund Husserl was closely associated with this school of thought.

You will learn more about phenomenology and its relationship with sociology in your post-graduate courses.

The Birhor belief in the multiplicity of supernatural powers remains unexplained. In the more complex forms of religion, the power behind the universe is conceptualised as one, though with many manifestations.

Among the Bihors, as we have already seen, a man in a state of self-induced trance can enter into direct communion with the spirit-world. The *Mati* comes to know the wishes and demands of a particular spirit and brings about a mutual understanding between man and the spirit. The Naya performs rituals to put his tribesmen on a working relationship with the spirits. The common human being enters into the spirit world when he or she is asleep. And all Bihors become one with the spirit by eating the sacrificial meal. Yet, they do not become the author of the Advaitin theory of non-duality i.e., the belief that there is one God as believed by the Hindu philosopher Shankara.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Describe any one of the general spirits using about six lines.

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ii) Of the spirits recognised by the Birhors what are the deities that belong to the Hindu pantheon? List them in about two lines.

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iii) What is the nature of the spirit world worshipped and propitiated by the Birhors? Discuss using about six lines.

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iv) Birhor religion is a religion without metaphysics. Discuss in about ten lines.

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18.3 TRIBAL RELIGION SEEKING THEOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY

In the previous section you learnt about the simple tribal religion of the Birhors which lacked metaphysical explanation. But due to the contact of complex religions such as Christianity and Hinduism some of these tribal religions have acquired an explanatory apparatus. One such religion is the religion of the Khasis of Meghalaya.

The Khasis are a matrilineal tribe inhabiting the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. In the past, as shifting *jhum* agriculturists they had to move from one place to another in about twenty to thirty-year cycle. Swine husbandry as part of the shifting agricultural system, was another source of their livelihood. At one time, each village has had a small patch of forest preserved in a virgin state. The Khasi deities representing

various elements of nature reside in these sacred groves. Cutting live wood from these forests was considered a taboo. It was believed that the spirit would wring the neck of the offender. One, however, is allowed to remove the dead wood.

Each grove had a presiding spirit, **U. Basa** or **U. Ryngkew**, for instance, reign the Mawphlang sacred grove locally called **Law Lyngdoh**. Such groves also exist in Upper Shillong, the capital town of Meghalaya, and Mawsmi in Cherapunji, a place which was known for the world's highest rainfall. The Khasi religion and culture used to revolve round the **jhum** operations. Ritual dance and music, pig sacrifice and other religious rites and ceremonies follow their **jhum** calendar.

This traditional setting has changed considerably in course of time. With the increase in population and relative decrease in the carrying capacity of land, the Khasis have changed their **jhum** way of life. On the introduction of the new method of cultivation the community rights in land has changed. The post-independence development schemes have drifted them to new occupations. And yet, the forest farming continues to some extent. Paddy, potato, betel nut, betel-leaf and banana remain their main products of cultivation. In the traditional Khasi society, the secular and religious leadership combined in the person, namely Syiem who in association with **Myntries**, **Lyngskhors**, **Basans** and **Lyngdohs** held the Khasi durbar at the regional level. The larger body called **Durbar Bima**, or state assembly, reigned supreme in all judicial matters and was known as **Ka Durbar Blei**, the Assembly of God. This system was adversely affected by the establishment of the British Raj. And now, most of the functions of the traditional political organisation are performed by the District Council and the State Government.

18.3.1 Encounter with Christianity

Following the British Raj, Christian Missionaries made in roads to the Khasi Hills. In 1813, Krishna Chandra Pal, an evangelist, succeeded in converting two Khasis to the Christian fold (Sahay 1986). And today nearly half of the Khasi population has embraced Christianity. At the beginning, conversion was vehemently opposed by several English educated Khasis; prominent among them were Jeebon Roy, Sibacharon Roy, Harmurai Diengdoh and Rash Mohan Roy. The challenges of Christianity were met in the following manner:

a) Reorganisation of traditional Khasis

A formal organisation of the indigenous religion, called Seng Khasi, was formed in 1899 with a view to safeguarding the Khasi tradition. The four cardinal principles underlying the objectives of the organisation are:

- 1) Adherence to the tenets of kinship as specified by the ancestors.
- 2) Righteousness through service; love and truth and a desire to improve both mind and body.
- 3) Respect for one's own fellowmen and cultivation of humility.
- 4) To work for one's country with faith in God.

b) Creation of literature

Publication of literature on Khasi religious rites and customs became the most important activity. In the preface of his booklet **Ka Niam jong ki Khasi**, Jeebon Roy wrote in 1897, "The people will completely forget (their religion), with the coming of the Christian Mission, the Roman Catholic Mission, the Unitarian Mission, the Brahma Mission; the poor religion of the Khasis without any written record will pass into oblivion and we will one day forget it completely".

Since then leading intellectuals of the Seng Khasi organisation are involved in the creation of Khasi religious literature.

c) **Preservation of cultural heritage**

The Seng Khasi plays an important role in revitalising the traditional symbols and aesthetic manifestations through ritual idiom. It organises calendrical festivals like **Shad Suk Mynsiem** and the **Nongkrem** dance which involve mass participation and effective realisation of the Khasi's cultural heritage.

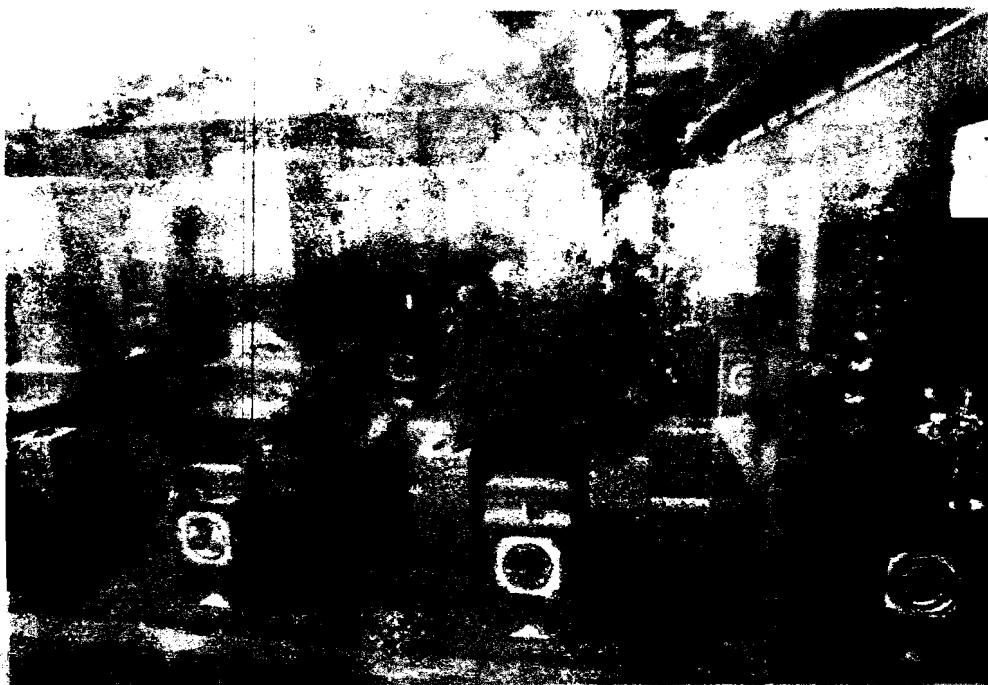
Activity 2

You have just read the section on "Encounter with Christianity". Keeping this in mind try and find out if there has been the impact of any other religion on the religious values, beliefs and customs of your own. For this you may take help from other members of your family, friends and colleagues.

Write a short note of about two pages. Compare your note, if possible, with those of other students at your study centre.

18.3.2 Old Belief and New Interpretation

Against the virulent attack of the Christian Missionaries and in response to anthropologists misinterpretation of Khasi religion and society, the promoters of the Seng Khasi gave new interpretation to their old beliefs and customs. Rymbai (1980), the most venerable inspirer of the Seng Khasi movement today, has made the following assertions:



A funeral memorial.

Box 18.2

The Khasi-Pnars believe that God is omnipotent and omnipresent. Accordingly, they hold it a sacrilege to symbolise God or to picture Him in any shape or form. The early Western Christian Missionaries who contemptuously characterised the Khasi-Pnars as worshippers of idols, of stocks and stones, spoke of what they did not know, and of what they superciliously disdained to learn (May God forgive them). They were also equally and mightily wrong when they lightly labelled them as animists because they do not worship spirits said to be inhabiting mountains, rivers or trees. Neither do the Khasi-Pnars practise ancestor-worship, another misconception of the Western Missionaries about their reverence for their ancestors who, they believe, watch them from high place.

The Khasi-Pnars have no temples, churches or synagogues. God, the creator of all, fills heaven and earth. Every bit of ground is therefore sacred, and no particular part or portion can be held as holier than the other. They also have no saints or martyrs or any system or established priesthood, for their creed is that each man must save himself by his own actions: living justly, observing and obeying the word of God transmitted to him through the advice of his parents. The Khasi-Pnars are monotheistic, but they invoke God by various names according to the need of the moment, as God has all the attributes of goodness and all the power to do good.

The Khasi-Pnars have no fixed days of congregational worship like the Sunday of the Christians, the Friday of the Mohammedans, or the Sabbath of the Jews. If to be religious means to be seen in religious gatherings in churches or temples on fixed days of the week, or preaching publicly about God, or praying in public to Him, or sitting in sack clothes and ashes, or going on pilgrimage, a Khasi-Pnar may be considered as the least religious of human beings, or as one having no religion at all, because you do not find them doing so. But they are, in fact, intensely religious people as they must *Kamai ia ka hok*, which they can fulfil only by means of honest work, truthfulness in thoughts and word, and justness in all their transactions. Thus religion permeates the life of a Khasi-Pnar in all its aspects because he or she must work to live and honest work is worship.

In the Seng Khasi's self-defence we thus find:

- i) denial of the most common characterisation of tribal religion as animistic;
- ii) denial of the tribal practice of ancestor-worship; denial of the polytheistic (i.e. worship of many gods) character of tribal religion;
- iii) assertion of the tribal religion that there can be no space bereft of God and no Sphere of human life on which religion does not have a crucial bearing; and
- iv) ascertain of the tribal religion that work is worship is the fundamental truth of life.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) How does a tribe meet the challenges of a proselytising religion? Take the example of the Khasis of Meghalaya. Use about eight lines.

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ii) In self-interpretation what makes a tribal truly religious. Use about ten lines.

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iii) Fill in the blanks:

- a) The Khasi religion and culture used to revolve round the operations. This was a method ofthey followed earlier.
- b) In the traditional Khasi society, the secular and religious leadership combined in one person, namely who in association with **Myntries, Lyngskhors, Basans and Lyndohs** held the Khasi durbar at the level.
- c) A formal organisation of the indigenous religion, calledwas formed in 1899 with a view to safe-guarding the Khasi tradition.

18.3.3 Writing a Tribal Theology

As indicated, the Khasis felt the need to write tribal theology mainly to meet the Christian challenges to their indigenous faith and form of culture. Most of the scholars who have written the Khasi theology were past-Christians. In the situation, it is not unexpected that whatever has been written by them will have a strong bearing on the Christian theology. Let us take a few examples of the basic concepts that constitute a theology of any tradition. In doing so, we can do no better than referring to Mawrie (1981) whose expositions of the tenets of the Khasi culture and religion are considered authentic. he interprets Khasi concept of man, God and religion as follows:

a) **Man**

The Khasi concept of human being is similar to that of the Jews. A Khasi believes that God made her/him, which means that He made her or him a full-fledged human being to inhabit this world.

The Khasi thinks that a human being is a special creature of God. He or she is incomparably higher than any other creature.

A Human beings' capacity to grow morally and spiritually is quite special to him or her—and this is God's particular gift to human beings: the element of the divine in them.

Another divine gift to human being, a Khasi believes, is the unique gift of **Ka Rngiew**: **Ka Rngiew** is a human beings' capacity to bring rational considerations to bear upon his or her understanding of his or her own situation.

The Khasi believes that this world is full of the powers of darkness and evil and that the sole function of these powers is to dislodge a human being from his/her place given to him or her by God. Human beings cannot fight these powers on their own. Their strength lies in the presence of God in them and therefore, God, must always remain in the resolve of their hearts.

b) God

The Khasis, like the Jews, never seek to formulate arguments to prove that God exists. They take it for granted that God exists and that there is only one God who is omnipresent, omnipotent and eternal.

God may reveal himself to human beings in any or all the following ways:

- a) through His power,
- b) through His righteousness, and
- c) through His spoken word.

To a Khasi the name God is above the rules of gender. He is the alpha and omega. Therefore, whatever we call U Blei (masculine) or Ka Blei (feminine) it makes the same sense. To a Khasi, God is the supreme planner and creator.

A Khasi addressed God with diverse names but all these names are only to express the qualities and attributes relating to different functions of God in His particular relation to human beings.

c) Religion

For a Khasi **Ka Niam** (religion) necessarily complements **Ka Rukom** (rite); hence the phrase **Ka Niam Ka Rukom**. **Ka Rukom** indicates the ceremonial aspects of religious observances, which must be according to the norms laid down in **Ka Niam**.

The Khasi religion illustrates the relationship between human beings and God through parables and mysterious words. According to the Khasi, religion is the relationship between them and God, and this relationship is governed by two factors, namely, **Ka Nia** and **Ka Jutang** (reason and covenant). The principle reason for human beings is that he/she is a creature of God. The covenant on the other hand is that as long as he/she is alive in this world, he/she should abide by and execute the command (hukkum) of God by earning righteousness—and on God's part the covenant is that God shall take care of her/him.

The Khasi's religion is an integral part of their clan and group life. The clan keeps religion in the care of the God-head, the Ancestress, the Ancestor and the Ancestral Uncle. These four comprise the family cause.

When any family falls into affliction, or distress, or financial deterioration, or is inflicted with sickness, or events causing grief, or agony to the family, the family believes that there is a curse behind such happenings. A Khasi does not believe that things take place without a cause.

They ask for the clue or sign from grains of rice, or cowrie or other materials and should those not yield any result, they use the egg-breaking or cock-sacrificing ritual. When they have discovered the cause, they then, perform sacrifices for

atonement of the shortcomings so that they may be set free from the gripping affliction.

In general, the Khasi religious rituals take place within a family household, or in a clan or group with its own ancestress, ancestor and ancestral uncle.

18.3.4 The Changing Worldview

The changing worldview of the Khasis, as reflected in their theology, is to be seen in the perspective of changing environment. As Saraswati (191) points out, "Unlike the 'modern' societies, a basic characteristic of all traditional societies is that there is no gap in their knowledge and existence. The moment a tribal society loses this unique feature, its purity and distinction are lost for ever. But this does not mean that the tribal world is static and closed. There has always been active incorporation of the new elements and reformation of the old, the evidence of which can be found in the elaboration of myths and general beliefs. However, affirmation of new ideas is possible only within the basic ontological categories. Difficulties arise when cosmologies are in conflict. The following autobiographical statements by Pugh (1976), a Christian Khasi by birth, trained in agricultural science in the U.S.A. and a public man of high repute, are relevant:

As a religious man, I believe in God and being a man, my God also in anthropomorphic (the conception of God as having the form, personality or attributes of man or woman) while in my heart of hearts, I do not believe that it can be so. Jesus himself has said: 'God is a spirit' or 'God is spirit'. But being also a Khasi tribal who lives in a Khasi land, in spite of my science and Christian theology, I continue to pray to God who seems to me circumscribed in the environment in which I live.

When I die, my desire is that I may be cremated as I do not wish that my body should lie in close company with the Saints, neither do I wish that my mortal remains should unnecessarily encumber the ground which is so hard pressed because of the increasing population".

18.4 CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON

The two cases that we have discussed separately may now be compared for the sake of our understanding. These two, otherwise incomparable cultures, are compared in order to grasp the wider phenomena underlying a tribal religion. Let us present our finds in a tabular form.

Birhor	Khasi
1. Hunter, gatherer	1. Shifting agriculturist
2. Partilineal	2. Matrilineal
3. Relatively untouched by modern education and occupation	3. Exposed to modern education and occupation
4. Secular and sacred combined in one person	4. Secular and sacred combined with one person
5. Priest chosen of spirits	5. Divinity ascribed to the assembly of people
6. Multiplicity of spirits, having different functions and powers	6. God with diverse names, indicating different functions.

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| 7. World filled with spirits | 7. God omnipresent |
| 8. The supreme spirit created the universe | 8. God the creator |
| 9. Distinction between benevolent and malevolent spirits recognised. | 9. Distinction between God and Devil maintained |
| 10. Spirits distinguished by gender. | 10. Traditional sexual distinction of God, derecognised. |
| 11. Sacred groves. | 11. Sacred groves. |
| 12. Ritual space not restricted to man-made structures. | 12. Ritual space not restricted to man-made structures. |
| 13. Cause of natural phenomena and happenings in life recognised. | 13. Cause of natural phenomena and happenings in life recognised. |
| 14. Divination: rice and cock-sacrifice | 14. Divination: rice and cock-sacrifice. |
| 15. Taboos | 15. Taboos |
| 16. Spirit-powers controlled, averted or repelled by man | 16. Man subject to God's reward and punishment |
| 17. Clan and ancestral spirits worshipped. | 17. Clan and ancestral spirits worshipped. |
| 18. A man as two souls | 18. A man has only one soul. |
| 19. Cremation | 19. Cremation |
| 20. Primacy of ritual without explanation. | 20. Primacy of theological explanation. |

Check Your Progress 4

i) Explain in your own words the Khasi concept of man using about ten lines.

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ii) What are the three ways in which God may reveal Himself to man, according to the Khasis? Use about five lines.

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- iii) Describe at least two features in which the Khasis differ from the Birhors using about eight lines.

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18.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have made the following conclusive observations:

Tribal religions may differ among themselves slightly, or significantly according to their own cultural history or on the basis of the extent to which other religions have made an impact on them.

These may be classified into two broad categories: one with the old beliefs and rituals and another with the old beliefs and rituals undergoing theological orientation. The difference lies not in praxis but in the acceptance of a theory developed outwardly.

Tribal religion of the first order pervades all aspects of life, that is, it performs integrative functions; which the second category is more restricted in its effect.

In the first case, there is no gap between belief and behaviour; in the latter the gap exists and widens with the increase in theological orientation.

The tribal revitalisation of indigenous ritual idiom and the search for a new theology may appear incompatible in their goals; in reality they together aim at securing maximum efflorescence of tribal identity.

18.6 KEY WORDS

Animism	: The belief in attribution of soul to inanimate objects and natural phenomena.
Atonement	: Correcting moral wrongs.
Augury	: Omen, sign portending good or evil.
Charms	: Words or objects or characters supposedly having occult power.
Communion	: Participation in Lord's Super, fellowship.
Congregation	: Assembly of people for religious worship.

Conversion	: Change of religion.
Covenant	: A mutual agreement.
Diviner	: One who is expert in divining the future.
Ecstasy	: Overwhelming feeling of spiritual joy, rapture.
Incantation	: Magic spell.
Indigenous	: Belonging naturally to soil or country.
Invoke	: Call on in prayer, summon spirit by charm.
Libation	: Drink-offering to god or spirit.
Matrilineal	: System in which descent is traced through the mother.
Metaphysics	: Theoretical philosophy of being, knowing.
Monotheism	: Doctrine that there is only one God.
Omnipotent	: All powerful.
Omnipresent	: Present everywhere.
Ontology	: The metaphysics concerned with nature and essence of being.
Patrilineal	: A system in which descent is traced through the father.
Phenomenology	: The philosophy which recognises observed or apparent objects or fact or occurrence and its cause.
Polytheism	: Belief in or worship of more than one God.
Propitiation	: Act of appeasement.
Reincarnation	: Rebirth of soul in new body.
Sacrilege	: Violation of what is sacred.
Shifting cultivation	: A method of slash-and-burn forest farming on a plot of land shifted in cyclical order.
Synagogue	: Building for regular assembly of Jews for religious instruction and worship.
Taboo	: Act, or system, of setting apart a person or sacred thing.
Totem	: Natural object (especially animal) adopted as emblem, of a tribe.
Trance	: A spiritually elevated state of mind.

18.7 FURTHER READING

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18.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Birhors are a nomadic hunting and good gathering tribes, numerically small and located mostly in the Chotanagpur plateau (South Bihar). They are also found in Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. The term Birhor literally means jungle folk (Bir)—jungle and (hor) folk. There are two main divisions: (i) uthalus or Bhulies. They are the wanderers, and (ii) Jaghis or Thantias. They are the settlers.
- ii) Ritual elements or components form an integral part of the Birhor ritual structure. They are all interrelated. For example, the purpose of performing a ritual is related with the performer, the preparation of the ritual and the process of the ritual performance, and so on. Purpose of ritual can be protection from evil, luck in health, success in hunting and so on.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) One of the general spirits propitiated by the Birhors is Singhonga or the supreme spirit. This spirit is symbolised by the sun and is considered to be generally an unconcerned spectator or witness who does not ordinarily cause any harm to human beings and may occasionally protect them from evil.
- ii) Some of the deities recognised by the Birhors which belong to the Hindu pantheon are Devi, Kali Mai, Chandi, Hulman, Satbahini.
- iii) Some spirits are benevolent, some malevolent. The spirits who do not cause harm to human beings and may protect him or her are propitiated with prayers and

sacrifices. Those who have certain powers over Nature and cause harm to human beings are controlled, averted or repelled by spells, threats and such other methods.

- iv) Birhor religion is said to be religion without explanation because although the Birhors believe in a number of spirits or supernatural powers but these powers remain unexplained. They believe in a supreme-spirit, Singbonga, who is the creator of the world. But this creator does not take an active part in the functioning of the universe or the dealings of human beings. This spirit or any other spirit, good or bad in terms of the luck it brings cannot be equated with the concept of God in the Christian sense of the creator and ruler of the universe. Birhor religion lacks the theological explanation of the existence of the cosmos or the explanation, in terms of the theory of knowledge, of the sacred or profane.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) A tribe meets the challenges of a proselytising religion by (a) reorganising traditional Khasis into a new order called Seng Khasi; (b) creation of literature on Khasi religious rites and customs; (c) revitalising the traditional symbols and aesthetic manifestations through ritual idiom; (d) giving new interpretations to their old beliefs.
- ii) What makes a tribal truly religious is not the congregational worship in Churches or temples, not even pilgrimage, but, as the Khasis say, **Kamai ia ka hok**. This means a tribal becomes an intensely religious person by means of honest work, truthfulness in thoughts and words, and justness in all his transactions Religion permeates the life of a tribe in all its aspects because he works to live and honest work is worship.
- iii) a) jhum, cultivation
b) syiem, regional
c) Seng Khasi

Check Your Progress 4

- i) According to the Khasi belief, God created human beings to inhabit this world. They believe that human beings are special beings belonging to God and as such much above the other creatures of this earth. Human beings have the capacity to grow as moral and spiritual beings. This capacity of human beings is a gift of God to human kind which brings in the element of the divine in them. Besides this gift, they believe that God has given them the unique gift of **Ka Ru grew** which means that they can understand their own situation rationally.
- ii) The three ways in which God may reveal Himself to human beings are:
- 1) through His power,
 - 2) through His righteousness, and
 - 3) through His spoken word.
- iii) a) The Birhors believe in the multiplicity of spirits, having different functions and powers while the Khasis believe in God having different names each indicating different functions.
- b) The Birhors believe that the world is filled with spirits while the Khasis believe that God is both the creator and that He is omnipresent.

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UNIT 19 HINDUISM

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Hinduism: The Theological and Metaphysical Basis
 - 19.2.1 Brahman and Atman
 - 19.2.2 Dharma
 - 19.2.3 Karma
 - 19.2.4 Moksha
- 19.3 Basic Cults and Deities in Hinduism
- 19.4 Hindu Social Institutions
 - 19.4.1 Caste
 - 19.4.2 Marriage
 - 19.4.3 Family
 - 19.4.4 Inheritance
 - 19.4.5 Hindu Social Institutions
- 19.5 Hinduism in the Historical Settings
 - 19.5.1 Bhakti
 - 19.5.2 Encounter with Islam
 - 19.5.3 Encounter with the West
- 19.6 Hinduism in the Contemporary Period
 - 19.6.1 Internationalisation of Hinduism
 - 19.6.2 Individualised Cults
 - 19.6.3 Politicisation of Hinduism
- 19.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.8 Key Words
- 19.9 Further Readings
- 19.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

19.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall deal with Hinduism in the context of religious pluralism in India. After reading this unit you should be able to

- explain the theological and metaphysical basis of Hinduism
- describe the basic cults and deities of Hinduism
- discuss the Hindu social institutions
- analyse Hinduism in its historical settings
- examine the emerging facets of Hinduism in the contemporary period.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit begins with a discussion on the theological and the metaphysical basis of Hinduism. It is recognised that it is very difficult to define Hinduism. However, there are a set of central belief systems of Hinduism. The belief systems are centred around the notion of *Brahman*, *Atman*, *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Moksha* and the ideas of purity and pollution. At the outset we discuss these belief systems. There are numerous cults and deities in Hinduism. We discuss some of the basic cults and deities in Hinduism to this unit. The Hindu way of life is reflected through the social institutions of this religion. We also discuss here the social institutions of marriage, family and inheritance in Hinduism at length. Hinduism is the oldest of all great religions of the world. In its historical setting there have been various movements in Hinduism and it has also encountered various exogenous (external) and endogenous (internal) forces.

In this unit we discuss the Bhakti movement in Hinduism and the encounter of Hinduism with Islam and the West. In the last section of this unit we discuss the contemporary facets of Hinduism. Here we cover the aspects related to the efforts made towards internationalisation of Hinduism, emergence of individualised cults in Hinduism and politicisation of Hinduism.

19.2 HINDUISM: THE THEOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL BASIS

Hinduism is followed by a vast majority of Indian population (more than 80%). However, Hinduism is not confined to India only. The followers of Hinduism, the Hindus, spread over to Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, Indonesia, East and South Africa, the Caribbean Islands, Guyana, Fiji, U.K., U.S.A. and Canada and in many other countries of the globe to a lesser extent.

Hinduism is an embodiment of a vast body of literature. M.N. Srinivas and A.M. Shah (1972) point out that the doctrines of Hinduism are not embodied in one sacred book, nor does Hinduism have a single historical founder. There is a vast body of sacred literature in Hinduism. These are the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanisads, Vedangas, Dharmasastras, Niboudhas, Puranas, Itihasas, Darsanas, Aganas, Mahabharata, etc. There are, not one, but innumerable gods, and it is not essential to believe in the essence of god in order to be a Hindu (358). This facet of Hinduism keeps it tolerant and open to dissent from within or without. Hence there are diverse interactions between the theological or metaphysical and the local levels of Hinduism in practice.

We should recognise that it is very difficult to define Hinduism. Hinduism unites a diverse elements of beliefs and practices into a continuous whole. It covers the whole of life. It has religious, social, economic, literary and artistic aspects. Hinduism, thus, resists a precise definition, but a common code of characteristics that most Hindus share can be identified (The New Encyclopaedia of Britannica, 1985: 935).

Hinduism is the oldest of all great religions of the world. In the process of social evolution and change various sects have developed in Hinduism. Each of the sects has distinctive sets of literatures, Gods and Goddesses. However, fundamental to all Hindu sects is a set of eternal belief systems centered around the Hindu concepts of *Brahman* (universal soul) and *Atman* (individual soul), *Dharma*, *Karma*, *Artha*, *Moksha* and the ideas of purity and pollution. Let us discuss these concepts putting them in a broad societal context of Hinduism.

19.2.1 Brahman and Atman

Hindus believe in an eternal, infinite and all-embracing ultimate force called *Brahman*. The *Brahman* is present in all forms of life. The relationship between the *Brahman* (the universal soul) and *Atman* (the individual soul) has been the main concern in Hinduism. However, there are diverse views on this relationship. One view is that there is no existence of God and the *Brahman* is absolute and attributeless. However, most other views recognise the existence of God; and consider the issue of his relations with *Brahman* on the one hand, and the *Atman* on the other. "The *Atman*, considered to be indestructible and passes through an endless migration, or series of incarnations—human, animal or super human, is influenced by the net balance of good and bad *karma* (deeds) in previous births. The goodness or badness is defined by reference to *Dharma* (Srinivas and Shah 1972: 359). Hence let us know the meanings of *Dharma* and *Karma*.

Dharma has plural meanings. It “includes cosmological, ethical, social and legal principles that provide the basis for the notion of an ordered universe. In the social context, it stands for the imperative or righteousness in the definition of good life. More specifically, *dharmā* refers to the rules of social intercourse laid down traditionally for every category of actor (or moral agent) in terms of social status (*Varna*), the stage of life (*ashrama*) and the qualities of inborn nature (*guna*). (We shall discuss the relationships between these three in the following sub-sections). Put simply, for every person there is a mode of conduct that is most appropriate: it is his or her *svadharmā*, which may be translated as ‘vocation’. Indeed the foundation of good life is laid down by *Dharma*. Thus *Dharma* consists of the “rational pursuit of economic and political goals (*Artha*) as well as pleasure (*Karma*)”. The goals of life (*purushartha*) also incorporate the goals of *moksha* or “freedom through transcendence from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. *Dharma*, inclusive of *artha* and *kama*, is a grand design of life, and *moksha* is the alternative (Madan, 1989: 118-119).



Hindu saints often put their teachings into compositions which they sang as part of their devotional activities.

To be more clear let us have a brief discussion on notions of *Purusartha* (goals of a man). *Rins* (obligations) and *Varnaashram* (divisions of the society) and the interdependence among them.

a) **Purusartha**

There has been a constant quest towards achieving a fruitful life in Hinduism. Pursuits of certain goals has been considered inhabitable, for the achievement of such life. The integrated life of a Hindu involves the pursuit of four goals: Dharma, Artha, (material pursuits) *Kama* (love desire) and *Moksha* (salvation). The pursuit of these four fold goals is known as *purusartha*. These goals are to be pursued in a righteous way in this *samsara* (the arena where the cycle of birth and rebirth continues to operate until one attains salvation). Hinduism is a holistic way of living and thinking. The full validity of Hindu life lies in the integration of the above four goals. This process puts every moment of life of a Hindu under self-examination and binds him with enormous social and spiritual obligations. Thus Hinduism calls for the voluntary acceptance and submission to the four defined obligations (*Rins*).

b) **Rins**

There are four important obligations (*Rins*) for a Hindu. These are obligations to the sages, to the ancestors, to god and to human beings. These obligations are fulfilled through the performance of duties in various stages of life (*ashrama*).

There are four stages of life of a Hindu. These are: *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*. In the first stage of life a young Hindu should devote to study. He leads a celibate life, and involves himself in the pursuit of knowledge. The second stage of life is that of a householder beginning with marriage. The third stage begins when the householder accepts the life of a wanderer maintaining some linkages with the household. In the last stage of life the old Hindu breaks away all ties with the household and goes to the forest and accept the life of a sage.

Vidya Nivas Misra in his book *Hindudharm: Jivan me Santan ke Khoj* (Hindi) points out that by studying scriptures, accumulating knoweldge, and following a rigorous way of life a Hindu may fulfil his obligation to the sages. These are the activities of the *Brahmacharya ashram*. The obligation to the ancestors can be fulfilled by leading the life of a householder — the *Grihasth ashram*. As a householder his responsibilities are to procreate, to maintain the tradition of his ancestor, to take care of the young who are at the stage of learning, to take care of those who are at the foresters and wanderers stages of life. In the third stage of life i.e. *vanaprastha* openings are made to be one with the gods. Leaving home behind the lives the life of homelessness. “So be one with gods means to be one with all manifest powers reflected in all elements, all living beings and all nature”. This stage of life prepares him for such a manifestation. In the fourth and the final stage he fulfills his obligations to all beings. He becomes nameless, homeless wanderer and becomes a renouncer.

c) **Varna ashrama**

The goals of Hindu life are achieved within the context of Hindu social organisation. There is a four-fold division of Hindu society in terms of four *varnas*: the brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and sudra. A Hindu is born into a *varna* and follows his *varnadharma* in this birth for *moksha* — the ultimate goal of the life. According to Rig Veda the four varna orders emerged from the limbs of the primeval man who is a victim of the divine sacrifice that produced the cosmos. The Brahmana emerged from his mouth and are supposed to be involved in the pursuits of knowledge. The Kshatriya emerged from his arm to be the warriors and rulers; the Vaishya emerged from his thigh to be in the pursuit of trade and commerce and lastly the Sudras emerged from his feet to be in the pursuit of service of other three varnas.

It is significant that untouchables are not mentioned in the Vedic hymn (Srinivas and Shah, 1972: 358). There are innumerable number of castes within the broad fold of these varnas with ascribed occupation, social status and localised concepts of purity and pollution. Traditionally, each caste (*jati*) performs its *jatidharma* to achieve the goals of life.

All Hindus recognise this system and can place their identity in terms of the *varna ashram*. Most of the basic ideas on *varna* system and its links to the concepts of *Karma* and *Dharma* are universally present in the world view of Hindus.

19.2.3 Karma

“The notions of *Dharma* and *Karma* are closely interlinked to each other and on many occasion they are indistinguishable and inseparable.” If *Dharma* is a social consciousness about the good life, *Karma* is the individual actor’s effort to live according to it”. The literary meaning of the notion of *Karma* is action. According to the message of *Bhagavad Gita* the direction of the *Karma* is value neutral and one must perform *Karma* without expecting the rewards which may be desirable or undesirable. It also accords highest emphasis on the accomplishment of *Karma*. Popularly the notion of *Karma* is also related to the perceptions of birth, rebirth and salvation. It is popularly believed that an individual is born to a higher or lower caste and suffers the pains and enjoys pleasures in the present life in terms of the *Karma* he/she undertook in the past life. Again his or her future life, rebirth or salvation will be determined in terms of the *Karma* he/she undertakes in the present life. In all Indian cultural tradition all human actions have inescapable consequences. The fruits of action brings joy or sorrow depending on whether certain actions have been good or evil. Whatever cannot be enjoyed or suffered in the present life must be experienced hereafter in another birth, which may not be a human birth. To be born a human being is a rare privilege because it is only through such a birth that a soul may be freed from reincarnation” (Madan, 1989: 123). It is significant that there are three pragmatic aspects of the concept of *Karma* as practised in popular Hinduism.



Hindu temple complex. Note the use of conical turrets in the architectural design of the temple.

- i) Orthodox Hindu will explain *Karma* in terms of certain rituals in the form of worship or prayer of favourite Gods and Goddesses which are popularly known as *puja*. Though, the origin of *puja* goes back to *Vedic* period, sacrificial rituals became associated with the concept of *Karma* in the later part of the evolution of Hinduism. It is popularly believed that the direction of life (present or future) can also be determined through the performance of such *Karma*.
- ii) *Karma* has also become identified with life cycle rituals of the Hindus. It is significant that every Hindu is to follow distinctive life cycle rituals (*samskara*) at birth, marriage and death. These rituals are performed for the moral refinement of the individual to make them complete and perfect, and ultimately after death, "transform into an ancestor". Thus the rituals give social identity to the newborn. Through the rituals of marriage the ocean of life is filled with love. "The so called rites of passage are in fact rituals of transformation and continuity in one great chain of being".
- iii) Besides offerings of *puja* (both at home and in the temple) and performing of the life cycle rituals, offerings of prayers at the sacred places (Tirthas) are also important aspects of Hindu way life and the *Karma*. Going on pilgrimages particularly on auspicious occasions are also scripturally recommended *Karma* (you will be able to know more about these aspects in Unit No. 29 of this course).

We may also point out the various sects and cults in India have a very rigorous definition of *Karma* dividing them into various types and linking them to *Samsara* and *moksa*.

It is significant to mention here that a typical Hindu wants liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. To him the *Karmic* store of accumulated merit may appear to be a trap and hereby abandon all worldly *Karma*. However, Bhagavad Gita gives a proper direction towards this dilemma. Gita emphasises on the accomplishment of *Karma* rather than the abandonment of *Karma*. It "teaches the ethics of altruism. If one performs one's duty in a spirit of sacrifice, eliminating one's ego and self interest, one is liberated from the fruits of action even before death. One of the most crucial statements in the Bhagavad Gita bears on this point: "Your entitlement is to *Karma* alone, never to its fruits. The hope of such fruit should not therefore be the motive for action, you should not therefore become inactive". (cf. Madan, 1989: 127).

19.2.4 Moksha

The concept of *Moksha* (liberation from the chain of rebirth) is closely related to the notion of *Karma* and in turn with *Dharma*. It is the reward of the persistent good deeds, *Karma*, that liberalise the individual from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth; and ultimately brings him in contact with the *Brahman* (the universal soul). Hindu theology is largely preoccupied with the issue of achievement of *Moksha*. Sound knowledge, good deeds and love and devotion towards God are the ways through which *Moksha* can be achieved. For acquiring knowledge an individual is required to renounce the world and lead the life of an ascetic. However, this method of achieving *Moksha* was followed only by a few. The most popular form of devotion, however, is the worship of one's chosen God according to tradition. It is significant to mention here that Bhagavad gita has given a new direction for achieving *Moksha*. The Bhagavad Gita has emphasised on the way of works and devotion to bring liberation with the reach of "man-in-the-World", including women and the lower castes. In the last hundred years the Bhagavad Gita reinterpreted by Indian political leaders, including Gandhi and Tilak, to provide the basis for live devoted to altruistic action (Srinivas & Shah 1872: 359).

19.3 BASIC CULTS AND DEITIES IN HINDUISM

It is significant that, although various sects of Hinduism follow their own sets of literature, most of the Hindus recognise the sacredness of Vedas — the oldest text of Hinduism. “Vedism was almost entirely concerned with the cult of fire sacrifice (Yajna) and the continual regeneration of the universe that resulted from it. By means of the correspondences that linked the ritual to both the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, the sacrificer simultaneously contributed to the welfare of the transcendental order and furthered his own interest. These correspondences were explored in the philosophical Vedic texts, the *Upanisads* in which a search for the knowledge that would liberate man from repeated death led to the earliest formulations of Hinduism”. The chief Vedic Gods are *Brahma* the creator, *Vishnu* the protector God of extension and pervasiveness and *Siva* the perserver and destroyer. It is significant that the major deities of Hinduism have many forms based on distinctive mythology. For example, “Vishnu has a number of incarnations, the chief of which are *Rama* (man), *Krishna* (man). The idea behind the many forms is that God periodically allows himself to be reborn on earth, to overcome evil and restore reighteousness.

Box 1

Puja (worship) and *bhakti* (devotion) are important aspects of theistic Hinduism which gradually replaced the Vedic sacrificial cult by devotion and worship to an image of the deity. The main purpose of this *puja* is the communion with deity gradually leading to a more permanent, even a closer relationship between the worshipper and the god. Hence based on worship three important cults emerged in theistic Hinduism: (a) *Vaishnavism*: *the worship of Vishnu). It emphasises a personal relation with a loving and gracious god. (b) *Saivism* (the worship of Siva) is more asceptically inclined. However, it also often incorporates yogic mystical practices into its worship”. (c) *Saktism*: Cult of Goddess is an important component of theistic Hinduism in the form of worship of mother goddesses like Devi, Durga, Kali etc. It follows the tantric methods of tapping the creating energies (Saktis) within oneself. You can find *Saktism* within the broad fold of *Vaishnavism* and *Saivism* whereby Laxmi and Parvati, the divine consorts of Vishnu and Siva respectively are worshipped in many places in India. (*The New Encyclopedia of Britannica* 1985: 935). The mother goddesses like Shakti, Durga, Parvati, Kali, Laxmi, Saraswati are popular deities in Hinduism. Again, Kartikeya and Ganesa the sons of Siva and Durga, *Hanuman* chief of the monkey army of Rama are also popular deities.

Hindu mythology has depicted numerous deities—major and minor. A significant number of these deities are the God of nature viz., *Indra* (the God of Sky), *Agni* (the God of fire), *Varuna* (the God of water). The *Vahana* (vehicles) in the form of birds or animals on which Gods/Goddesses sit, the sun, moon, stars, rivers, mountains, lakes, animals, snakes are also worshipped in Hinduism. Besides, there are important localised deities in Hinduism in various parts of the country viz., goddess Kali and Manasa are popular in Bengal. Some localised deities also become universally accepted in Hinduism over a period of time viz. Mata Santoshi and Goddess Vaishnadevi of northern India, Srivenkatesh of Tirupati, South India.

The trends of localised manifestation of some deities and universalisation of some local deities are of great sociological significance. There are enourmous ties of localised culture in the great tradition of Hinduism. These ties are often reflected in the popularity of localised deities and in the patterns of their universalisation. (For further detail you may see Block 1 of ESO-02).

Check Your Progress 1

i) Tick mark the correct answer.

Hinduism is

- 1) the youngest of all great religions
- 2) the second oldest of all great religions
- 3) emerged in the fourth century B.C.
- 4) the oldest of all great religions.

ii) *Dharma* provides the basis for the notion of an ordered universe based on the principles of

- 1) Cosmologis
- 2) Ethics
- 3) Social and legal
- 4) All of the above.

iii) Which one of the following is not a cult in theistic Hinduism?

- 1) Vaishnavism
- 2) Saivism
- 3) Saktism
- 4) None of the above.

19.4 HINDU SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Hindu social institutions are distinctive in nature both in terms of their form and function. These social institutions ideally operate according to prescribed norms and religious sanction. Let us examine some of these institutions.

19.4.1 Caste

Caste is a hereditary social institution based on the principle of endogamy, hierarchy, occupational specialisation and purity and pollution. Complete commensality prevails only within it. There are various kinds of restrictions imposed on inter caste relationships. These restrictions are explicit in the acceptance of food and drink by the upper castes from a lower ones, their inter caste marriage, sex relation, on going or touching the upper castes by a lower ones etc. The implicit and explicit meanings are that the lower caste people are impure and by their simple touch they will pollute the upper caste members. Hence there are various prescribed rites for the repurification of the upper caste members. Indeed, traditional Hindu life is arranged in terms of the hierarchical orders to the caste system. It is sociologically an ascribed status group. You may like to see Block 5 of ESO-02 to have a better idea on caste system in India.

19.4.2 Marriage

Among the Hindus marriage is an obligatory sacrament. It is in the context that for obtaining salvation a Hindu is required to perform certain rituals towards the gods and the ancestors as prescribed in the religious texts. The rituals are performed by the male descendants. Hence every Hindu must marry to have a male descendent for salvation.

Box 2

There are well defined Samskara (Sacraments) in Hinduism. In Hinduism each and every Samskara has a particular object i.e. to cleanse to be fit to be used in a divine activity. All aspects of Hindu life are a part of the divine activity. Thus through the processes of various *samskara* all aspects of Hindu life are purified to be the part of the divine. The Brahma Sutra (1.1.4) says: Samskara is a happening made possible through investment or accentuation of qualities in a person or an object and through cleansing of the stain attached to the person or the object." Utterances of Mantras is an essential part of the *samskara*. It is believed that such utterances invests a person or an object with same divine power and purifies them. To Vidya Nivas Misra 193 samskaras are investiture-cum-purificatory rites. These are performed in different stages of the Hindus from prenatal to funeral. These are enumerated to be sixteen:

Conception (Garbhadharna = placing the seed in the womb), Invocation to the male child (Pumsavana), Braiding of the hair of the pregnant women (Simantonanayana), Offering to Vishnu, the sustainer (Vishnu Bali in the eighth month of pregnancy), Birth rites (Jata Karma), Giving a name (Nama-Karana), Taking a child out of the house (Niskramana), first feeding (Anna-prasana), Tonsure (Caula-Karma), the rite of letters (Aksararambha), Piercing of the ear lobe (Karnacedha), Sacred thread ceremony (Upanayana = Lit. taking a boy to the place of Guru for study), initiation into the Vedic studies (vedarambha), Entering into life (Samavartana), Marriage (Vivaha), Last rite (Antyesti).

According to the ancient Hindu texts there are three main objectives of marriage. These are *dharma* (honest and upright conduct), *praja* (progeny) and *rati* (sensual pleasure). Thus according to scripture a Hindu is incomplete without a wife and male children. Some of the salient features of Hindi marriage are as follows:

- i) **Monogamy:** It is significant that monogamy (marriage of one man and one woman at a time) is the usual form of marriage in Hinduism. Polygamy was also found among some Hindus based on local customs. However, various social reform movements led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Dayanand Saraswati etc. took place in India against such practices; and the Hindu Marriage Act 1955 permits only monogamous form of marriage.
- ii) **Endogamy:** The Hindus maintain the religious and caste endogamy. Though legally permitted inter-caste and inter religious marriages are very few and confined mostly among the literate sections and in the urban areas.
- iii) **Hypergamy:** According to the rule of hypergamy the status of the husband is always higher than the wife. The hypergamy emerged based on the marriage among different sub-sections of a caste or sub-caste rather than between the castes. The ancient Hindu literature permits hypergamy in the form of *anuloma* whereby a girl is married to upper sub-caste. However, it does not permit *pratiloma* whereby a girl marries a boy from lower sub-caste.
- iv) **Gotra Exogamy:** Hindu maintain the gotra exogamy. *Gotra* indicates the common ancestor of a clan or a family. People with common ancestor are not allowed to intermarry. In recent years *gotra* exogamy is defined in terms of prohibition of marriage within five generations on the mother's side and seven generations on the father's side. However, there are significant variations with regard to the practice of gotra exogamy between the Hindus in the North and the South India. In South India cross-cousin marriages are allowed, while it is strictly forbidden in

North India. (For details you may like to see the Unit No. 8 & 9 of Block 2, ESO-02).

19.4.3 Family

Grihastha Ashrama is the stage of family life of a Hindu. The main objective of the marriage is reflected in the Grihastha ashram. Here a Hindu perform his *Dharma* and *Karma* for the continuity of the family and his salvation. Thus, the ideal typical family of the Hindu is joint in nature where people of three generations usually live together. Hindu joint family is mostly patrilineal, patrilocal, co-residential and common property ownership and a commercial unit. This family is usually composed of a man and his wife, their adult sons and their wives and children. Some times some other close (even distant in many cases) relatives become members of the Hindu joint family. The oldest male member of the family is the head of the family. Here sex and age are the guiding principles of the familial hierarchy.

In recent years in the wake of rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, spread of commercial values, education and mass-communication and implementation of progressive land reforms laws of the joint family system has been under severe threat in India. Indeed, nuclearisation has been the major trend. However, the sentiments of the joint family still continues among most of the Hindu which are expressed on the occasion of family ritual, patterns of ownership of property and in the exigencies of these families. (For details you may see Unit No. 6 Block 2 ESO-02 and Unit No. 7 Block 2 ESO-06).

19.4.4 Inheritance

Traditionally the *Mitakshara* system of inheritance was practiced in most parts of India (except for Bengal and Assam). According to this system a son has a birth right on father's ancestral property and the father cannot dispose this property in a way which can be detrimental to the interest of the son. However, according to the *Dayabaga* (applicable to Bengal and Assam) system of inheritance the father is the absolute owner of this property and he has the right to dispose it according to his will.

Traditionally females are not coparcenary. The customary practices only provide maintenance rights to females. Women in the patrilineal society get some movable property as *stridhana* at the time of marriage.

The Hindu Succession Act and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956 (Applicable to Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs) has established a uniform system of inheritance. According to this act a husband is legally responsible for the maintenance of his wife and children. The individual property of a male Hindu, dying intestate (having made no will), passes on equal share between his son, daughter, widow and mother. Male and female heirs have come to be treated as equal in matters of inheritance and succession. This act has also given a woman the right to inherit from the father and the husband. However, women have no right to coparcenary ancestral property by birth (cf. Unit 6.4.2, ESO-02).

19.4.5 Hindu Social Institutions

In Block 4 of ESO-03 you have learnt how Max Weber has located the stimuli of economic development within the ethics of religious belief system. To him economic development fostered in the Western World because of the rationalisation of religious ethics of Protestantism (especially of the Puritan sects) of Christianity. To him, however, such a process of rationalisation has not taken place in Hinduism. Rather he pointed out that the Hindu belief system, which centered around the doctrines of *Dharma*, *Karma* and *Moksha*, and the social institution of the Hinduism produced

an irrational and 'otherworldly' social atmosphere. This phenomena hindered the economic development and the growth of industrial capitalism. However, the validity of the thesis of Max Weber was challenged by many scholars. For example Milton Singer (1968) pointed out that Hinduism has not hindered the growth of the same. The traditional business families in India have generated the required capital from family sources and their traditional expertise are also used for economic development. Scholars also pointed out that Hindu social institutions and belief systems have enormous elements of rationalisation and this-worldly attitudes required for economic modernisation. However, these elements of rationalisation and this-worldly attitudes are to be understood in the context of the changing need of Hinduism in particular and the society in India in general.

Activity 1

Interview at least 10 heads of the family belonging to different caste groups among Hindus. Collect information on the marriage practices as practised by them in their marriage and in the marriage of their children. Based on your finding write a note of about two pages on the "Features of Hindu Marriage: A Field Observation". Exchange your note with the co-learners of the Study Centre, if possible.

19.5 HINDUISM IN THE HISTORICAL SETTINGS

Hinduism has undergone a process of transformation over millions of years. The Vedic ritualism and Upanishadic philosophies played significant roles in Hinduism. Indeed transformation started in Hinduism with the message of Bhagavad Gita, which added the notion of *Bhakti* (devotion) in Hinduism. Hinduism acquired new dimensions in Bhakti cult. Besides the Bhakti cult, Hinduism has also to encounter with forces of Islam and the West. Let us examine Hinduism in the context of these broad social and historical processes.

19.5.1 Bhakti

There are various important facets of the Bhakti movement. Let us begin with the important facets that the message of Gita initiated.

i) Bhagavad Gita

Bhagavad Gita recognised the Vedic rituals and Upanishadic philosophy of knowledge as the legitimate ways to attain self-realisation which is the goal of life of an ideal Hindu. Hence to the paths of *Karma* (action) and *Jnana* (knowledge) the Gita added the way of Bhakti (devotion). This revived the elements of theistic elements in Hinduism. "After describing the ways of action, knowledge and devotion, the Bhagavad Gita enjoins the seekers to abandon all three ways to seek refuge in God so as to be free of the burden of all moral imperfections. This call to total surrender is as much intellectual as it is devotional" (Madan, 1989: 127).

ii) Alvars

The devotional movement for the first time flourished in South India towards the end of eighth century A.D. among the non-Brahmin groups which expressed the strong desire for theism after Jainism and Buddhism had spread all over India. The followers of this movement were known as the *Alvars* (that is those with an intuitive knowledge of God who were engaged in complete immersion in Him). They questioned the *dharma*s of caste and gender. They tried to exceed such relationships through personal devotion to deities like Siva and Vishnu. The *Alvars* emphasised on the constant companionship of God. However, they expressed their

preoccupation with *Viraha*, (separation) from God. *Nammalvar* was prominent among the Alvars who put forward the notion of devotion as assumption of femininity by the devotee in relation to God *Vishnu* (*ibid*, 128). Hence love of women for Vishnu symbolises the love of the devotees for the supreme soul, the God.

iii) Jayadeva, Srichaitanya and Mira

The love stories of unmarried Krishna (reincarnation of Vishnu) and Radha have got the central place in the Bhakti movement. It emphasised on total devotion to God as a means to self-realisation. In this movement Krishna is symbolised as the supreme soul and Radha as the individual soul. Jayadeva's *Gita Goyinda*, written on the eternal love of Radha and Krishna in the later part of 12th century, has spread all over the country. The origin of many of the Vaishnava sects is located in this movement. In the 16th century Srichaitanya in Bengal, Vallabha in Gujarat, Mira in Rajasthan were possessed with the love of Krishna. Bhakti movement got momentum in the given path of total devotion to Krishna as followed by them.

iv) Sura Das, Tulsidas and Kabir

It is significant that intense religious devotion was also expressed the luminaries of medieval Bhakti Movement in the songs of Sura Das on Krishna (in Brijbhasha), Tulsi Das on Rama (in Avadhi) and in Kabir's devotionism. "Tulsi's bhakti was that of a servant (*dasa*) devoted to the service of his divine master. The love of God for the devotee, who dwells on his own imperfection and therefore on divine grace, is a central theme of Tulsi's sublime poetry...Kabir's devotionism was centered on a personalised god in human form, however, but on an abstract and formless conception of the divine. (Madan, 1989: 131). You will learn more about Bhakti Movement in Unit 28 of Block 6 of this course.



Saints in Hinduism often wrote and sang their religious and spiritual compositions.

19.5.2 Encounter with Islam

Hinduism has been responding to the external religious influences since the classical period. It has responded to distinctive Islamic and the Western influences for almost ten and five centuries respectively. Let us mention here some of the impacts of the encounter of Hinduism with Islam.

It is very difficult to assess the impact of Islam on Hinduism since it has various dimensions. Hinduism dealt with the periodic outbreaks of violence since the time of the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni into North-west India (977-1030). These invasions led to the development of Hindu ideal of territorial kingdom “as the mode for the protection of Hindu values”. Hence the defence of Hindu traditions against Islam came first from the Rajputs of Rajasthan, then the rulers and successors of Vijayanagar Kingdom of South India (1333-18th century) and the Marathas in Maharashtra from late sixteenth century to the close of 18th century. As an immediate impact of the dominance of the Muslim rule “conservative and puritanical tendencies gained momentum in orthodox Hinduism” particularly with regard to the strictness of the caste and purity of women. However, there are many evidences to show that over the years various Muslim themes and features have been incorporated into popular Hindu myths and rituals. Significantly while the orthodox, popular and the domestic form of Hinduism thus drew in on themselves, Hindu sectarian traditions multiplied under the influence of Islam. Notable of these were that of the *Bhakti* cult of Chaitanya in Bengal and sant tradition of North India by Kabir (1440-1518) from Banaras and Nanak (1469-1539) from Punjab. Kabir and Nanak propagated devotion to one God “that combined aspects of Islamic *Sufism* and Hindu *Bhakti*. They brought in Hinduism an exclusivist monotheism like that found in the tradition of Islam. Their teachings rejected both the caste system and idol worship. Guru Nanak laid the foundation of Sikhism that synthesised philosophies of Islam and Hinduism.

Emperor Akbar in his *Din-Elahi* synthesised Islam and Hinduism. He propagated religious tolerance. However, his successors abandoned his path and followed *expansionist* policies. These policies of expansion aroused resistance from the heirs of the Vijaynagar and the Rajpur Kingdoms, and also from the Sikhs and the Marathas. ‘The seeds of a nationalist vision of Hinduism may be traced through these movements (Hiltebeitel 1987: 358). (We shall discuss some related aspects of this issue in the last section of this Block).

19.5.3 Encounter with the West

Hinduism has been widely influenced by West and the beliefs and practices of Christianity. Various reform movements started in Hinduism in the 19th century as the direct impact of Christianity. The *Brahmo Samaj* was founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1928 which advocated monotheism and rejected the caste order, idolatry and animal sacrifice.

Activity 2

Make a list of 10 religious organisations with the help of knowledgeable people. Your list should have a few sentences about the purpose and the goals of these organisations and how they differ from each other.

The *Arya Samaj* was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. This movement rejected the Puranic Hinduism and attempted the return of Vedic Hinduism. According to them image worship has no sanction of Veda. They also advocated monotheism. They denied the religious base of the caste and the Varna.

Rama Krishna Mission was founded in 186. Swami Vivekananda carried forward

the activities of this mission on the line of traditional Hindu values. The followers of this mission uphold strong tradition of Bhakti and tantric strains along with Vedanta philosophy and Ramakrishna's experiences of the oneness of all religions through visions not only of Hindu deities but of Jesus and Allah". (*ibid* 360). Rama Krishna Mission aims the propagation of a modern and activist version of Hinduism. It is engaged in a variety of cultural, educational and social welfare activities and has branches in cities throughout the world. The Rama Krishna Mission, modelled after the European Christian missions of the nineteenth century in India, has itself provided a model for numerous other Hindu organisations (Srinivas, 192: 130).

To eradicate some evil customs and practices as traditionally followed in Hinduism several religious organisations came into being during the British rule. These organisations also took up the task of the promotion of education and social reform. As a result of prolonged contact with West various significant changes have taken place in Hinduism. Some of these changes can be listed here:

- a) Activist streak in Hinduism has received significant attention and the Bhagavad Gita has become the single most important book of the Hindus.
- b) Leaders of various Hindu religious institutions are now undertaking various social reform and welfare activities viz. running of schools, colleges, hospitals etc.
- c) The idea of purity and pollution, which permeated daily life, life cycle rituals, and the intercaste relations, particularly by the higher castes, are rapidly weakening, especially in the urban areas. A caste-free Hinduism may emerge in future out of these changes. The movement of caste-free Hinduism is supported by the cult of the new godmen (e.g. Sri Saibaba etc.) in Hinduism.
- d) Another change has been that of the "emergence of militant forms of Hinduism, partly in response to the evangelical activities of the missionaries among the Harijans and tribals, and to the appearance of separationist tendencies among certain religious and ethnic minorities in India (Srinivas 1992: 130).

It is significant to note here that, Hinduism has also influenced other religions in India. Many of the important traits of Hinduism are found among other religious groups also. The caste system can be put here as a ready reference. The caste divisions also exist among the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and the Jains. Indeed, conversion to any other religions does not necessarily dissolve the caste order. Occupational specialisation, caste endogamy, social distance etc. are practised even after conversion.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Explain how Bhagavad Gita revived the theistic elements in Hinduism? Answer in about six lines.

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- ii) Mention a few important impacts of the encounter of Hinduism with Islam. Use five lines to answer.

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 iii) Which one of the following is not an impact of the West on Hinduism?

- 1) promotion of education
- 2) promotion of social reform and welfare activities
- 3) weakening of the idea of purity and pollution in the urban areas
- 4) none of the above.

19.6 HINDUISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

In recent years Hinduism has acquired various new dimensions most important of which have been the efforts towards internationalisation of Hinduism, emergence of various personalised cults in Hinduism and politicisation of Hinduism. In the following sub-sections we shall be dealing with these aspects with the help of some caste studies.

19.6.1 Internationalisation of Hinduism

There have been numerous efforts for internationalisation of Hinduism. The Rama Krishna Mission and International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) have made important efforts in this matter. In Unit 28 of this course the activities of Rama Krishna Mission have been discussed at length. In this section we shall discuss the case of ISKCON.

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

The devotional Hinduism with its missionary aspiration was spread over the U.K., U.S.A., Canada and other Western Nations by the followers of ISKCON, popularly known as *Hare Krishna* cult. It has become an international movement with numerous centres all over the world, especially in the English speaking world. The founder of this society was A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, a Bengali by birth. he was initiated by his *guru* Bhaktivedanta Saraswati to the path of *Bhakti* in 1922 in the devotional line of Chaitanya. He gave up the householder's life in 1954 and became an ascetic by 1959. Bhaktivedanta Swami went to USA in 1965, to spread the message of Srimad Bhagavatam there in the USA. Slowly his followers grew in New York, Los Angeles, Berkeley, Boston and Montreal. Bhaktivedanta Swami established various centres of ISKCON in those places with its headquarters in Los Angeles. There he printed more than fifty volumes of translations and original works of his guru.

Recitation of the name of Lord Sri Krishna was considered instrumental for salvation by the followers of ISKCON movement. Hence they performed public chanting of the *Hare Krishna Mantra*. Thus over the years the Krishna Consciousness movement has been visible in the English speaking world.

Bhaktivedanta has introduced several practices for the ISKCON followers viz. wearing of traditional Indian saffron dress and shaving of heads by the male devotees and wearing of saris by the female devotees, early rising and timely devotional services etc. ISKCON has spread over to every continent of the globe.

Bhaktivedanta expired in Vrindavan in 1977. Just before his death he appointed eleven disciples as initiating guru to keep the Chaitanya chain of disciples unbroken and missionise the rest of the world. By early 1980s ISKCON branches grew rapidly in many overseas areas, where they found more tolerant environments (Shiva, 1987: 267).

It is necessary to point out that ISKCON is only one example and that Hinduism based cults have spread all over the world.

19.6.2 Individualised Cults

Hinduism has been a breeding ground for the emergence of personalised religious cults in recent years. Some of these cults have received wide attention from their followers. Satya Sai Baba, Acharya Rajnees, Muktananda etc. are prominent among them. It is not possible to discuss all of them in this unit. Here for your specific understanding of this phenomenon we shall be discussing the cult of Satya Sai Baba as a case study.

Satya Sai Baba

In contemporary India Satya Sai Baba is the most famous deity saint in Hinduism. He is worshipped by his followers as the *Avatar*. His followers have increased tremendously in recent years.

Satya Sai Baba was born in a village called Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh. He belonged to the *Raju* Caste and was named Satyanarayana by his parents. He was fond of *bhajan* (devotional songs) and performing of Hindu mythological dramas during his young and school days.

As claimed by Satya Sai Baba and accepted and propagated by his followers Satya Sai Baba is the reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi in Maharashtra. He is the embodiment of Lord Shiva and is consort Shakti in one soul. Lawrence Babb writes that Sathya Sai Baba's assertion of divine status is expressed in first person; he states it boldly and repeatedly. He has come in the present age of wickedness and misery, he says, not merely to alleviate individual misfortunes (though he does this for his devotees), but to set the whole world right, to usher in a "Sai Age". In the form of Shirdi Sai Baba his mission was to establish Hindu-Muslim unity, in the present incarnation he will re-establish Vedic and Shastric religion. On his rebirth as Prem Sai, he will be born in Karnataka and bring all his work to completion (Babb 1991: 284). The followers of Sai Baba are not only the Hindus. There are Muslims, Christians, and others among his prominent followers.

Though he is the manifestation of all gods and goddesses, his dominant identity is that of Shiva. He is portrayed in association with Shiva. *Mahashivratri* is the most important festival of this cult. In this festival Satya Sai Baba materialises vast quantities of *vibhuti* (Sacred Ash) from his hand and *Shivalingam* (which symbolises God Shiva) from his mouth.

This cult has rapidly attracted a large number following not only in India but also abroad. Majority of his devotees are from urban middle classes. His devotees recognise him as "Bhagwan". Baba attracts followers by his personal charisma and the miracles he often performs. He also cures the illness of his devotees. However, Baba often maintains distance from his followers living in his "personal constituency" and giving only occasional darshan.

Some basic features of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings are as follows: He does not impose strict rules of conduct on his devotees. Moderate and vegetarian diets, avoidance of alcohol and smoking, practice of householder's life and celibvacy after

age of fifty, tolerance, gentleness and kindness towards others, non-violence are encouraged by him. He also suggests meditations of the God (who is in fact Baba) for inner peace. A significant aspect of Baba's teaching is that he considers the influence of Western culture as inimical to India. To him Indian folk traditions should be adhered to. Thus he professes a cultural nationalism.

He recognises inherent inequalities existing in the society. Though he has discontent against the present day state, he does not advocate radical change in the existing economic and social institutions.

Social service is an important aspect of the cult of Satya Sai Baba. Feeding the poor, assisting authorities in the relief work, expansion of education, child development are some of the important areas of social service of the cult.

What is sociologically important here is that Baba attracts a large numbers of followers through the performance of his charisma repeatedly. He also legitimates his position in term of the Hindu notion and rebirth and karma. He, however has incorporated the missionary zeal of social service in his regular activities. The charisma and legitimacy of Sai Baba is accepted not only by the common followers but also by some of the prominent social, political and business elites of the country.

19.6.3 Politicisation of Hinduism

In Hinduism there has always been a tradition of tolerance and hospitality to other religions. These elements of tolerance and hospitality have paved the way to declare India a secular state. It is significant that in the nineteenth century there were the revivalist tendencies and attempts in Hinduism advocating a return to the *Vedas* and occasionally Indian nationalism was expressed itself in the Hindu idiom. However,



Satya Sai Baba is a most famous deity saint in contemporary Hinduism.

during the British rule in India there emerged a group of westernised elite which “while rooted in the country and its tradition, was committed to independence, democracy, egalitarianism and secularism. It is this elite that not only declared India a secular state but also attempted whole heartedly to establish the principle of equity of man (Srinivas and Shah 1972: 364).

The Constitution has declared India a “Sovereign Secular Socialistic Democratic Republic”. In the process of democratic functioning of the state and the society our religious life has been widely politicised in recent years. Politicisation has emerged as a pervasive process in post-independence India. Religion is not free from this process. In recent years Hinduism has been politicised for certain political ends. In general, protection of the interest of the Hindus, creation of Hindu Rashtra etc. have been the major objectives of such a process of politicisation of Hinduism.

While discussing politicisation of Hinduism, the activities of RSS and its front organisations are generally widely discussed. Let us know briefly the origin and activities of the RSS. The RSS was founded in Maharashtra in 1925-26 by Dr. K.B. Hedgewar. The RSS operates at the political level through its various front organisations viz., Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh, Vidyarthi Parisad etc. In recent years it has been using the wider front organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parisad. In the passage of time the RSS has acquired well-defined ideology and organisational strength. As articulated by its second guru, Guru Golwalkar the ideology of the RSS is explicitly represented by Hindu nationalism. Creation of a Hindu Rashtra and bringing of all round glory to the Hindu Rashtra are the main objectives of the RSS. Golwalkarji writes:

The non-Hindu population of Hindustan must adopt the Hindu culture and languages, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of glorification of Hindu race and culture, i.e. they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ungratefulness towards this land and its age long tradition but also must cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead, in a word, they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation...”. Ideologically the RSS equates Hindus with the Aryans and its characteristic Vedic age as the Golden Age of India.

In recent years India has visualised a considerable increase of the efforts towards politicisation of Hinduism. There has been the growth of fundamentalism as well. M.M. Srinivas has made an important observation on this emerging phenomena. To him: in the last few decades Hinduism has had to cope with certain momentous changes such as the division of Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan, the latter being theocratic state... That period also saw the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel and Buddhist states in Sri Lanka and Burma. It also witnessed the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in a vast region extending from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific. How can Hinduism remain immune to all these forces and events? To him fundamentalism in Hinduism has grown as a matter of challenge faced by it, because of the growth of fundamentalism in other religions and also in the neighbouring countries (Srinivas 1992: 16).

Whatever may be the reason for the growth of fundamentalism in Hinduism, the facts remain that there has been deliberate tendency to politicise Hinduism as a means to gain power. However, reaction of the average Hindus towards such development is of great significance. Through democratic process they have upheld the noble tradition of tolerance and hospitality of Hinduism and the secular basis of the nation.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Activities of the ISKCON was confined mainly to

- 1) the French speaking world
 - 2) the English speaking world
 - 3) the Hindi speaking world
 - 4) the Non English speaking world
- ii) As claimed by Satya Sai Baba, he is the embodiment of
- 1) Lord Shiva
 - 2) Goddess Shakti
 - 3) Both of Lord Shiva and Goddess Shakti
 - 4) None of the above

19.7 LET US SUM UP

Hinduism is the oldest of all great religions of the world. It has encountered various forces in various historical settings. However the central belief system has remained eternal to Hinduism. We discussed in this unit the central belief system of Hinduism as reflected in the notions of *Brahman*, *Atman*, *Dharma*, *Karma*, *Moksha*, and the notion of purity and pollution. We also discussed the basic cults and deities in Hinduism.

The social institutions of marriage, family and inheritance are also discussed in this unit. The Bhakti Movement in Hinduism and the encounter of Hinduism with Islam and the West are discussed at length. Lastly we discussed the emerging facets of Hinduism. Here we discussed the effort towards internationalisation of Hinduism, emergence of individual cults in Hinduism and politicisation of Hinduism based on some case studies.

19.8 KEY WORDS

Altruism	: Unselfish concern for the welfare of others.
Ashrama	: There are four well-defined stages of life in Hinduism. These are <i>Brahmacharya</i> (for youth), <i>Grihastha</i> (for adult), <i>Vanaprastha</i> (for middle aged) and <i>Sanyasa</i> (for old aged).
Case study	: A sociological method of analysing and presenting data using specific examples.
Bhaktism	: Religions ideology of devotionism.
Gotra	: Exogamous groups indicating common ancestor of that group, family or clan.
Ritual	: A systematic and repetitive system of actions directed towards a specific target or religions goal.
Stridhana	: Movable property given to women at the time of marriage.
Varna	: Broad ascribed status groups in Hinduism. There are four <i>Varnas</i> in Hinduism—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra.

19.9 FURTHER READINGS

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19.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i) 4)

ii) 4)

iii) 4)

Check Your Progress 2

i) Bhagvad Gita suggests the paths of action (Karma), knowledge and devotion for self-realisation. Bhagavad Gita finally enjoins the seekers to abandon all these paths and to seek refuge in God so as to be free from the burden of all imperfections.

ii) (a) As an immediate impact conservative and puritanical tendencies gained momentum in Hinduism, (b) Sectarian traditions multiplied in Hinduism (c) Muslim themes were incorporated in popular Hindu myths and rituals.

iii) 4)

Check Your Progress 3

i) 2)

ii) 3)

UNIT 20 JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 The Emergence of Jainism and Buddhism
 - 20.2.1 The Political System
 - 20.2.2 Territorial Expansion and Collapse of *Gana Sanghas*
 - 20.2.3 Political Philosophy
 - 20.2.4 New Organisation of Production
 - 20.2.5 Social Stratification
 - 20.2.6 The Religious Philosophies
- 20.3 Jainism: Basic Teachings
 - 20.3.1 The Founder of Jainism
 - 20.3.2 The Central Doctrine
- 20.4 Growth and Development of Jainism
 - 20.4.1 Growth of Jainism
 - 20.4.2 Sects in Jainism
 - 20.4.3 Jain Scriptures
- 20.5 Religious Practices of the Jains
 - 20.5.1 Religion among the Jains
 - 20.5.2 The Jain Ways of Life
 - 20.5.3 The Jain Festivals
 - 20.5.4 Jain and Hindu Religious Practices
- 20.6 Buddhism: Basic Teachings
 - 20.6.1 The Founder of Buddhism
 - 20.6.2 The Essence of Buddhism
 - 20.6.3 Buddhist Social Order
- 20.7 Buddhist Philosophy and Society of that Age
- 20.8 The Growth, Development and Decline of Buddhism
 - 20.8.1 The Hinayana, Mahayana and the Vijjrayana
 - 20.8.2 The Neo-Buddhist Movement in India
 - 20.8.3 Decline of Buddhism in India
- 20.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.10 Key Words
- 20.11 Further Readings
- 20.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

20.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with the religious belief systems and philosophies of Jainism and Buddhism. After reading this unit you should be able to

- explain the social, political and economic background of the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism in India
- describe the basic teaching of Jainism
- explain the growth and development of Jainism in India
- discuss the Jain ways of life
- describe the basic teachings of Buddhism
- discuss the relationship between the Buddhist philosophy and the society of that age
- examine growth and development of Buddhism over a period of time
- highlight the similarities between Buddhism and Hinduism and discuss the decline of Buddhism in India.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit of this Block, we discussed Hinduism. In this Unit we shall be dealing with Jainism and Buddhism which evolved from within Hinduism. These religions developed against the backdrop of certain political systems, political philosophy, economic and social order, and practising of particular religious activities in ancient India. This Unit begins with an indepth discussion on the background of the emergence of these religions. In this unit we discussed the central doctrine of Jainism in Section 20.4 of this unit. In the section 20.5 of this text we discussed the religious practices and ways and life of the Jain and the similarity of Jainism and Hinduism. Gautam Buddha is the founder of Buddhism and he has given a significant direction to the religious ideologies of India. We discuss these aspects in section 20.6. The relationship between Buddhism and society of that age is discussed in the next section (i.e. 20.7). Buddhism has grown over a period of time and acquired various new dimensions. We discuss all these aspects in section 20.8. In this section besides discussing various sects in Buddhism we also discussed the similarity of Buddhism with Hinduism and decline of Buddhism in India.

20.2 THE EMERGENCE OF BUDDHISM AND JAINISM

The sixth century B.C. has left a permanent impress on Indian history mainly because it witnessed an intense preoccupation with philosophical speculation. Among the various thinkers contributing to this unique phase were the Mahavira and Buddha, who more than any other historical personages born in India have compelled the attention of the world as the most humane thinkers, the Indian tradition has produced. Jainism and Buddhism represent the most serious and most comprehensive attempt to analyse the rapidly changing society in which it originated and to provide an enduring social philosophy for mankind. Buddhism created the vision of an alternative society, the possibility of organising society on different principles from the hierarchical and inegalitarian ideology and practices that had begun to gain ground.

The roots of Mahavira's and Buddha's social philosophy can be clearly traced back to the society of the sixth century B.C. Politically it was situated in the context of state formation and the emergence of certain institutions.

20.2.1 The Political System

The political system at the time of Mahavira and Buddha was characterised by the existence of two distinct forms of government: monarchical kingdoms and clan oligarchies or *gana-sanghas*. The geographical location of these units is itself interesting with the monarchical kingdoms occupying the Ganga-Yamuna valley and the *gana-sanghas* being located near the foothills of the Himalayas. The *gana-sanghas* were inhabited by either one or more Khatriya clans such as the **Sakyas** or **Mallas**, or the **Licchavis**. The *gana-sanghas* were organised on the lineage principle with the entire clan participating in the exercise of power.

There was constant conflict between the various political units and the picture that emerges from the Jain and Buddhist literature is that it was a period of expanding horizons and political consolidation which ultimately ended with the establishment of the Mauryan empire.

It is possible to document the process of state formation, especially in the case of Magadha, from the Buddhist literature. Bimbisara, the 5th century B.C. Magadhan ruler, began a systematic and intensive phase of state organisation. The earlier pastoral-cum-agricultural economy with tribal organisation had given way to a more

settled agrarian-based economy which became a major factor in state formation. It made possible the support of a large standing army which was imperative for the expanding frontiers of the kingdoms of the Ganga valley and as an instrument of coercive control within the kingdom. Simultaneously, the agrarian based economy encouraged the formation of an impressive officialdom which is an indispensable aspect of state formation. The standing army, formally divided into various specialised groups, replaced the tribal militia of the earlier society and became an instrument of coercion directly in the control of the king. The growing armies of the aggressive expanding monarchies even attracted the ambitious youth of the *gana-sanghas* who saw in them a possible outlet for their military skills especially since the *gana-sanghas* themselves were collapsing one by one.

20.2.2 Territorial Expansion and Collapse of Gana-Sanghas

The process of territorial expansion and the consolidation of the early Indian State was operating at two levels in the age of the Buddha. The monarchical kingdoms of the Ganga valley, especially Kosala and Magadha, were each expanding at the expense of their immediate and weaker neighbours. But at the same time they were locked in a struggle for supremacy among themselves, in which Magadha ultimately triumphed. The *gana-sanghas* were the first to collapse and the smaller ones like the *Sakyas* and *Mallas* had already caved in during the lifetime of the Buddha. What was at stake in the conflict between the *gana-sanghas* and the monarchies was not just a different political form but also a whole way of life based on communal control of the land by the clan. However, the collapse of the *gana-sanghas* became inevitable in the face of the rapid changes taking place in 6th and 5th centuries B.C.



Buddha, the Enlightened one meditating in the lotus pose.

20.2.3 Political Philosophy

The most notable aspect of political philosophy in the age of the Buddha and Mahavir was the completely pragmatic approach to power. Kingship is marked by the absolute and arbitrary exercise of power with no evidence of effective checks upon the king's ability to impose his will on the dominion. The king had total control over his people and is often depicted as using power in a wilful and captitious manner rather than in a legitimate and controlled capacity. Even the law was not applied consistently but in a highly personal and arbitrary way. The literature indicates very clearly that in the process of change old institutions had collapsed but had not yet been replaced by others; the collective power of the people of the earlier society which had been expressed through tribal institutions, were no longer feasible in the expanding territorial units. Power thus became less an instrumental value viewed from the point of view of the community as a whole, and instead became an end in itself. This had important consequences for Buddhist social philosophy (as we shall see later in this Unit).

20.2.4 New Organisations of Production

Historians differ about the extent to which iron contributed to the emergence of new relations of production in the age of Buddha and Mahavira. However there is a fair degree of consensus on various elements that marked the new relations of production. There was a noticeable expansion of the economy and within that of agriculture. Rice cultivation based on transplantation led to a virtual demographic revolution. The Jain and Buddhist texts mention numerous settlements attesting to an expansion of settlements, the extension of cultivation, and of people, into hitherto unexploited lands. Along with an expansion of cultivation, and of people, into hitherto unexploited lands. Along with an expansion of agriculture and settlements there was increased craft production; numerous crafts are mentioned in the texts as also coinage signifying a money economy, trade and trade routes, and corporate commercial activity in the form of *srenis*. The age of the Buddha has also been characterised as the period of the second urbanisation.

From the texts it is also clear that the *gahapatis*, a category of persons mentioned often in the accounts in the context of economic activity played a crucial role in the expansion of agriculture. Some of them were in control of substantial tracts of land. The *gahapatis* were the primary tax payers in the monarchical *janapadas* and in this capacity they were regarded as intrinsic to the sovereignty of the king.

20.2.5 Social Stratification

The growing complexity of the economy was expressed in the emergence of a sharply stratified society. While some sections of society had large concentrations of land, there were others who had no access to the means of production. The period is marked by the appearance of such categories as *vaitanika* (wage earner) and *Karmakaras* (labourers who hired out their labour). *Karmakaras* are mentioned often along with *dasa* (servile labourer) and together they implied elements of servitude and made them unfree in some way. The term *dalidda* (pali for *daridra*) denoting extreme poverty, also appears for the first time while its counterposition with wealth suggests sharp economic contradictions in the new society. Economic contradictions were accompanied by social contradictions — certain families were regarded as of high status, others were regarded as low; the Brahmanas were staking their claims to pre-eminent status based on birth but there is evidence of such claims being vigorously contested.

To sum up, in the sixth century B.C. was one which was in the throes of rapid change. Apart from the emergence of inequality, the transformation and reformulation

of political units and social and economic institutions entailed the breakdown of clan and kin organisations and the collective units of the earlier periods. In its place what was visible was individuals, individually and greed. There was unbridled power in the hands of some, while no norms had yet evolved which could mediate between the exploiters and the exploited or between the king and his people. Jainism, Buddhism and other 'heterodox' philosophies were the creative response of thinkers to such a society.

20.2.6 Samanas and Brahmanas: The Religious Philosophies

All the major ideas of Indian philosophy can be seen, at least in rudimentary form, in the 6th century B.C. The philosophers articulated their world view through their ideas on the one hand and through the institutional practices within which they created in their organisations on the other. The most significant feature common to the philosophies was the *renunciation tradition*. The period was characterized by the *paribbajakas* or *samanas* who had renounced their household status. They wandered above from place to place with the object of meeting and having discussions with others like them. It is through this ceaseless movement that they propagated their ideals and built up their followings.

What united all the *samanas* together was their opposition to the established tradition of the *Brahmanas* based on the cult of sacrifice, central to the ideology of the latter. They were also opposed to the claims of the *Brahmana's* preeminence in society and for these reasons they had been described as non-conformist sects. The range of ideas indicates the complexity of attempting to understand the rapidly changing society around these philosophers. It has been argued that the breakdown of the earlier simple communal existence had already created a sense of alienation which provided the common backdrop against which the individual philosophers grappled with the problems of human existence. And against such a backdrop Jainism and Buddhism emerged in Indian society. In the following sections of this unit we shall be dealing with the religions of Jainism and Buddhism.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The political system at the time of Mahavira and Buddha was characterised by the existence of
- monarchical kingdoms
 - clan oligarchies
 - Both of the above
 - None of the above

- ii) Explain three main features of state formation in age of Mahavira and Buddha.

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- iii) Who among the following claimed the highest status in the society based on birth in the age of Mahavira and Buddha?
- Karmakaras
 - Dasa
 - Brahmanas
 - All of the above

20.3 JAINISM: BASIC TEACHINGS

Jainism is a living religious faith in India. Though the followers of this religion are found all over the country, they are concentrated mainly in the Western India, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Historians have noted the fact that both Jainism and Buddhism originated with Kshatriya belonging to the *gana-sanghas*, both were associated with non orthodox thinking which rejected *Vedic* authority, *Brahmanic* and the caste orders, and founded orders comprising *bhikkhus* who renounced the world.

20.3.1 The Founder of Jainism

Both Jainism and Buddhism are fundamentally offshoots from ancient Hinduism. Historically Jainism is older than Buddhism. The great Prophet of Jainism, Mahavira (599-527 B.C.) who was the last in the great succession to give Jainism the latest form, was the older contemporary to Buddha (560-480 B.C.).

There are twenty four great circles of time believed in by the Jain; and in each circle one great prophet comes to the world. According to the Jain tradition these great prophets are known as the *Tirthankaras*. Mahavira is remembered as the last of the 24 great teachers or *Tirthankaras* or “ford-makers” of the Jains.

Mahavira was a prince. He abandoned a comfortable pleasurable life and became a wandering ascetic when he was about 30 years old. His father was a ruling Kshatriya and chief of the Nata clan. Mahavira grew up as a boy, as a youth, loving and dutiful to his parents; but ever in his heart is the vow that he had taken to become a Saviour of the world. After the death of his parents, he renounced the world. He retired into the forest. There for twelve years he practised great austerities, straining to realise himself and to realise the nothingness of all things but the self; and in the thirteenth year illumination came upon him and the light of the Self shone forth upon him, and the knowledge of the Supreme became his own. He shook the bonds of *Avidya* (ignorance) and came forth as teacher to the world, teaching for forty-two years of perfect life (Besant, 1968: 87). He spent the rest of his life teaching his philosophy in the Gangetic kingdoms which were the site of Buddha's spiritual career also. He died of self starvation, an accepted way of ending an earthly existence among the Jains. Mahavira added certain features to an earlier set of beliefs among the *Nirgranthas* rather than creating a new body of teachings. Jainism is fundamentally atheistic, in that while not denying the existence of the gods, it does not give them any important part in the universal scheme. The world, for the Jain is not created, maintained, or destroyed by any personal deity but functions only according to Universal Law.

20.3.2 Central Doctrine

There are two main sects in Jainism — the Digambara “sky-clad” (and thus naked) and the Svetambara, “white clad”. (We shall discuss these sects in Section 20.4.2). By the time of separation of these two sects, the doctrine had been fixed for the whole community; this accounts for the fundamental agreement in the main tenets professed by the Svetambaras and the Digambaras (Caillat, 1987: 507). In this section we shall discuss the central doctrine of Jainism which has been accepted by both the groups.

One might almost sum up the central doctrine of Jainism in one phrase that man by injuring no living creature reaches the *Nirvana* which is Eternal peace. That is the phrase that seems to carry with it the whole thought of Jain is: Peace — peace between man and man, peace between man and animal, peace everywhere and in all things, a perfect brotherhood of all that lives (Besant, 1966: 83).

The central doctrine to Jainism is that all of nature is alive—everything from rocks to the minute insects have some form of a soul, called *jiva*. The archaic concept of the soul is carried to its extreme conclusion in this teaching. Jainism thus “spiritualises even the material”. The souls have always been in existence in an eternal cosmic pool of souls and were not created by any divine force. Like the *atman* (of Hinduism) all *jivas* are eternal but in contrast to Upanishadic Hindu thought there is no infinite cosmic *atman*. However, the Jains accept both *Karma* and *Punarjanm* (reincarnation) that determines the new embodiment of a being in accordance with earlier deeds.

As important as the concept of *jiva* is that of “non-violence” — *ahimsa*. According to Mahavira’s “pure unchanging eternal law all things breathing, all things living, all things existing, all beings whatever, should not be slain, or treated with violence, or insulted, or tortured, or driven away”. But self mortification and rigorous asceticism were recommended as a means of achieving liberation surmounting all passions and earthly ties where being dissolves into the impersonal universal whole. When this state is achieved the cycle of rebirth ends. Only the soul of the ascetic could actually achieve liberation. This is evident from the title of Mahavira — *jina* — one who conquers. It was associated with victory over earthly feelings and possessed ascetic implications.

An important economic result of Jain non-violence was that even lay members of the community rejected agriculture for fear of ploughing under living things and turned instead to commerce and banking regarded as non-violent occupations.

20.4 GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF JAINISM

In this section we shall be dealing with the growth and development of Jainism over a period of time. Here, we shall cover the spread of Jainism, development of sects and sub-sects in Jainism and the Jain scriptures.

20.4.1 Growth of Jainism

In a short span of time Jainism spread over to various parts of India. Initially, the followers of Jainism lived mainly in the ancient Kingdoms of Videha, Megadha and Auga in east India and westward as far as Kasi (modern Varanasi) and Kosala. The influence of Jainism also spread to Dasapura (Mandasor and Ujjain). It also spread over to Nepal and in some parts of South India. In the 2nd Century B.C. the king of Kalinga (modern Orissa) professed Jainism. He also excavated Jain



Statues of Mahavira, in the lotus posture (L) and as a spiritual personage in the standing posture (R).

caves and set up Jain images and memorials to monks (Encyclopaedia of Britannica 1985: 275).

Jainism got great patronage from King Samprati, the grandson of Great Asoka. such patronage facilitated the spread of Jainism in South India. Tamil literacy classics such as *Manimakkalai* and *Cilappalikkaram* attest to the high degree of Jain influence in South India itself. From the 5th to the 12th Century the Ganga, Kadamba, Chalukya and Rastrakuta dynasties of South India accorded royal patronage to Jainism and facilitated the spread of Jainism.

During the Gupta period (AD 320-600) Jainism became stronger in the Central and Western India. From 7th Century the Jain Svetambara order gained strength in Gujarat and Rajasthan due to royal patronage. Again from about 1100 Jainism gained prominence in the court of Chalukyas of Gujarat. Jainism still plays a crucial role in the religious faith of the people in these parts of India. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1985: 276).

20.4.2 Sects in Jainism

All living religions accommodate various views within their broad fold. In the process of such accommodation various sects and subsects emerge. Literature reveals that the first schism (*nihava*) in Jainism took place during Jina's life time. Seven more such schisms took place in Jainism before the gradual emergence of two principle sects in Jainism — the *Svetambara* (white clad) and the *Digambara* (sky clad). The split occurred about 609 years after Mahavira (however, there are controversies over the actual date) mainly on the issue of whether a monk should wear cloth or not. Another difference was that of the *Digambara's* belief that women cannot attain salvation.

In the process of growth of Jainism over centuries the main sects of this religion have also been divided into various sub-sects (*gaccha*). In the 16th century "Sthavakavis" a sub-set of the Svetambaras emerged in western India. This sect rejected the practice of image worship of Jina. In the 16th century itself a sub sect of the *Digambara* known as *Taranapantha* was organised which also denied the sanctity of idol worship in Jainism. It is significant that of the 84 *gacchas* of the *Svetambar* developed over the centuries only few have survived. The most important of these sects of Svetambara are the *Khasatara*, *Tapa* and *Ancala* *gacchas*. Some important *Digambara* sub-sects are *Nandi*, *Kastha*, *Dravida* and *Sena*.

20.4.3 Jain Scriptures

The Jain sacred literatures were initially preserved orally from the time of Mahavira. These literatures were systematised by the Jain council from time to time. The first systematisation of the Jain canonical literature took place in a council at Pataliputra (Patna) by the end of 4th Century B.C. and again in two other council in the early 3rd century B.C. in Mathura and Valabhi. The fourth and last Jain council took place at Valabhi in 454 or 467 A.D. This council is said to be the source of the *Svetambara* Jain scripture. The *Svetambara* canon consists of 45 *Agamas*: 11 *Anga* (parts) (originally consisted of 12 *Angas*, the 12th having been lost) 12 *Upanga* (sub-parts) 4 *Mula-Sutra*, 6 *Chedasutras*, 2 *Chulika-Sutras*, 10 *Prakirnakas* (mixed texts). This makes the canon of the Jain (*Svetambara*) religion.

Thus the *Svetambaras* follows the *Agama* as their secret scripture. The *Digambaras*, however, are of the opinion that the original canon of Jainism is lost and that the substance of Mahavira's message is contained in the writings of ancient religious figures. They recognise two works in Prakrit: the *Karmaprabharta* chapters on *Karman* — composed by Puspadanta and Bhutabalin and the *Kasayaprabharta*

— chapters on *Kasayas* composed by Gunudhara. They also respect some other Prakrit works.

Check Your Progress 2

Tick mark the correct answer.

- i) Jainism
 - a) accepted Vedic authority
 - b) rejected Vedic authority
 - c) remained indifferent to Vedic authority
 - d) all of the above are correct.
- ii) The central doctrine of Jainism is that
 - a) all of nature is alive.
 - b) only human beings are alive
 - c) nothing is alive
 - d) mocks etc. become alive after worship.

20.5 RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF THE JAINS

In the earlier section we discussed the central doctrine of Jainism and its growth and development over a period of time. Let us examine the religious practices and ways of life of the Jain.

20.5.1 Religion among the Jains

The religious practices among the Jains are broadly influenced by two interdependent factors, namely the specific Jain convictions and the Hindu social milieu. Usually Jains should be members of four-fold congregation (*sangha*) composed of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. **They have deep faith in the *triratna* — the right faith, right knowledge and right conduct.** They believe that the strict adherence to *triratna* will bring liberation from bondage for them. Though the external and internal liberation can be obtained by the monks (*nirgantha*) the householders are permitted certain ceremonies viz., worshipping of images etc. Significantly the Jain church has not been able to ignore the devotional aspiration of the laity, who are also attracted Hindu ritual. Hence although temple worship with burning and waving of lamps, plucked flowers and fruits, preparation of sandal paste etc.) implies violence, cultic practices are tolerated, being considered ultimately to the worshippers progress. The monks and the laymen are to take some vows. The monks and the nuns pledge to abstain from (a) injuring life (b) taking food and drink at night (since it may lead to injury to insects which might go unnoticed in the darkness. The Jains four fold congregation can be brought under two great bodies; the laymen/laywomen (*Shravaka*) and the ascetic (*Yati*). The lay believers (*Shravaka*) are also to take a few important vows. These include non-violence, truthfulness, charity etc. These householders also perform some obligatory duties following the examples of life style of the monks:

- i) cultivate right state of mind
- ii) regularly practice meditation
- iii) observe fasts on the eighth and fourteen days of the moon's waxing and waning period

iv) confess their faults etc. (Caillat, 1987 : 510).

The Jains have the strict rule that no intoxicating drug or drink may be touched; nothing like bhang, opium, alcohol etc. is allowed to be consumed. They follow strict vegetarianism. Even honey and butter also listed in the category of forbidden food, since in the gaining of honey lives of bees are often sacrificed and so on. Regarding regular life for the laymen the Jain rules laid down that: He must rise very early in the morning and then he must repeat silently his mantras, counting its repetition in the fingers; and then he has to say to himself, what I am, who is my *Ishhadevata* and who is my *Gurudeva*, what is my religion, what should I do, what should I not do? (Besant, 1968: 97).

20.5.2 The Jain Ways of Life

The Jains are a comparatively small community. However, they are a powerful community not by its numbers, but by its purity of life and also by the wealth of its members — who are mostly merchants and traders. Though the four *varnas* of the Hindus are recognised by the Jains, the vast mass of them are the *Vaishyas* — the traders, merchants and the manufacturers. In northern India the Jaina and the Hindu Vaishyas intermarry and interdine. They usually do not regard themselves as of different religion. The Jain ways of life are distinctive and many of which have similarity with those of Hinduism.

Their family life is similar to that of the traditional Hindu joint family. They strictly follow monogamous form of marriage. However, they have a well defined code of conduct, that makes them distinctive.

Jains are self conscious and they should never loose control over their mind and body. From childhood, a child is taught to check thoughtlessness, continual carelessness and excitement which are the great banes of human life. The children are thus educated and socialised to be thoughtful, caring, considerate and submissive. Thus Jain laymen/lay women are by nature quite, self-controlled, dignified and reserved.

The life style of the ascetic Jains are more strict. Fasting is a part of their life just like the fasting of the great ascetic of the Hindu. There are both men and women ascetics among the *Svetambaras*. They are to follow strict rules of begging and renouncing of property. However, they must not renounce the body. They must beg food enough to support the body, because only in the human body one can be gain liberation. They are to attach prime importance to the teachings of the Guru. Hence they must not renounce the Guru, because without his teaching progress will be impossible. Hence the ascetic worldview is confined to four things — the body, the Guru, disciplines and study.

The female ascetics are also to follow the same strict rule of conduct. It is the duty of the female ascetics to see that Jain women, wives and daughters are properly educated. They lay great stress on the education of the women. It is significant that there are no female ascetics among the *Digambaras*.

The ascetic dies by self-starvation when an ascetic realises that his body cannot make any further progress, he is to put it aside and pass out the world by death by voluntary starvation (Besant, 1968: 99-100).

20.5.3 The Jain Festivals

The major festivals of the Jains are related to the auspicious occasions of the life of great masters of Jainism. These occasions are (i) descent in the mothers womb

(garbha-dharana, cyavana) (ii) birth (Janma) (iii) renunciation (diksa) and (iv) attainment of omniscience (Kevalajnana) and (v) death and final emancipation of Jina.

Pajjusana (also known as *Pryusanna*) is the most popular festival of the Jain. It is performed in the month of Bhadrapad (August-September) with the aim of purification by forgiving and rendering service with whole hearted effort and devotion. In the last day of this festival the Jains distribute alms to the poor and take out a procession with the image of Mahavir. During the festival annual confession is made to remove all ill-feelings.

A fasting ceremony known as *oli* is observed by fasting twice a year. This is observed nine days each during the month of Caitra (March-April) and Ashwin (September-October). In the *Diwali* day the Jains celebrate *nirvana* of Mahavir by lighting lamps. The *Jnana Panchami*, five days after the Diwali, is celebrated by the Jain with temple worship and especially with worship of scriptures in manuscript form.

In the full-moon night of the month Caitra the Jains celebrate Mahavir Jayanti, the birth day of Mahavira.

It is significant that in common with the Hindus the Jains celebrate many of the Hindu festivals like Holi, Makara-Sankranti, Navaratri (in north) Pongal, Kartika, Yugadi etc. (in South).

The Jains take part in temple worship and worship is an obligatory rite to them. They worship not only the image Mahavir, but also of all liberated souls, monks and the scriptures in various occasions. Idol worship, chanting of hymns, consecration of images and shrines are parts of Jain rituals. All these show the reflection of Hindu influence of Jainism. It is significant that it only the *Svetambaras* decorate the temple idol with clothings and ornaments. The *Digambara* authors put more emphasis on mental culture than on idol worship.

20.5.4 Jain and Hindu Religious Practices

There are certain important similarities in the beliefs, rituals and religious practices between Hinduism and Jainism. The Jain philosophy of *karman* is similar to the Hindu doctrine of *karma* and rebirth. Hinduism has also been widely influenced by the doctrine of *Ahimsa*. Mahatma Gandhi applied Mahavir's doctrine of *Ahimsa* in all spheres of life in India, social, economic and political.

The dietary restriction among the Vaisnavas of Hinduism is also a result of Jain influence in Indian society. It is significant that Jainism also received various elements of Hindu rites and rituals. The Jain rituals are modelled mainly on 16 Hindu *Samskara* (for details you may see Box 1 of Unit No. 19 : Hinduism).

Jainism has also influenced by the Hindu caste order. During the medieval period several castes arose among the Jains. However, it is to be noted here that caste system is not followed by Jain monks. The Jain caste names are sometimes common with the Hindus, some are named after places while others are exclusively Jains. Though features of Hindu caste system, such as hierarchy also appear in Jain castes, social differentiation is not so clearly marked. Some castes are common to both *Svetambaras* and *Digambaras*, while others are exclusive to one or the other (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1985: 280). In this context is again significant to mention here that since most of the Jains belong to the business communities in India, they are widely considered akin to the Vaishya castes. Indeed social reciprocity is higher among the Vaishya Hindus and the Jains.

Activity 1

Collect information on the festivals of the Jains. Based on your observations write a two page note on the "Religious Festivals of the Jains". Exchange your note, if possible, with other students at the Study Centre.

20.6 BUDDHISM: BASIC TEACHINGS

In this section we shall be talking about the founder of Buddhism and its basic teachings.

20.6.1 Founder of Buddhism

Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. His family name was Gautama and Siddhartha was the name given to him by his parents. He was the prince of the Kingdom of *Sakyas* and *Kshatriya* or warrior by caste. Siddhartha had a spiritual and humanistic outlook since his childhood. He was married at the age of 16 years with Yosadhara. The turning point of his life came at 29, when he realised that men are subject to old age, sickness, and death — that human life is suffering. He himself resolved on the great renunciation, to give up the princely life and become a wandering ascetic. He departed from the palace leaving his wife and infant son behind. He met various teachers in search of truth. Being unsatisfied he practised severe austerity and extreme self *mortification* for nearly six years. He, however, again abandoned this path and selected his own path (middle way — a path between a worldly life and extremes of self denial) to enlightenment. This he accomplished while seated crosslegged under a banyan tree at a place now called Buddha Gaya in Bihar, where Siddhartha Gautam became a supreme *Buddha* (the Enlightened one) in 528 B.C.

20.6.2 The Essence of Buddhism

The essence of the Buddha's early preaching was said to be the *Four Noble Truths*: acceptance of sufferings, knowing the cause of sufferings, bring to an end of sufferings and the eight fold path as a mechanism for release from sufferings. Let us examine these truths in greater length.

i) Life is fundamentally disappointment and suffering

Many experts have pointed out that the basic propositions of Buddha's philosophy are psychological and not metaphysical. The central proposition upon which all others are contingent is that of *dukha*, or pain or human misery, which no one can escape from. The first sermon of the Buddha at Sarnath begins with the inevitability of suffering:

"This O monks is the sacred truth of suffering. Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, being united with loved ones is suffering, to be separated is suffering, not to obtain what one desires is suffering, clinging to the earthly is suffering".

Thus the starting point of Buddhist philosophy is thus a recognition of what has been termed the "*tyranny of pain*". But while the origin of pains were specific to the different experience of individuals the Buddha dwelt on the universal aspects of the agony he found everywhere. While the generalised idea of misery could be drawn from the tyrannical acts in the unsettled conditions of his age, they were formulated as psychological universalities afflicting all human beings cutting across all lines. This focus explains the significance of the three signs witnessed by the Buddha, of disease, old age and death, which recurs in all the narratives of the Buddha. It is

one of the best attested of the early traditions and most characteristic of Buddha's understanding of human experience.

ii) Suffering is a result of one's desires for power, pleasure and continued existence

The centrality of pain is linked to the second proposition in the four noble truths where the cause of suffering is located in *tanha* the "thirst for pleasure, thirst for being, the thirst for power". The universal all consuming thirst itself may well be a product of the insatiable greed for wealth and for territory. Some passages in the Buddhist texts capture the insatiable greed of men most aptly thus: "the rich in this world give nothing of the goods that they acquired to others; they eagerly heap riches together and further and still further go in their pursuit of enjoyment. Although the king may have conquered the kingdoms of the earth and be ruler of the land this side of the sea he would still cover that which is beyond the sea". Finally only by cutting off individually and the abandonment of selfhood will there be end to *tanha*.

Dukkha and *tanha* arise out of ignorance about the nature of the universe; both are part of a world which is in perpetual flux (*anicca*), in the process of continuously changing. Buddhist philosophy has thus aptly been characterised as the "metaphysics of perpetual change", further in the Buddhist view the world is *anatta*, it is soulless. According to the Buddha there is no stable entity, no soul which transmigrates, although the process of *causation* and *karma* ensures rebirth. However, what transmigrates is individual consciousness; as a person dies his/her consciousness and the desire for fulfilling the unsatisfied cravings propelling it forward enters another life, another body, in the same way as one lamp fades out and kindles another.

iii) To Stop Disappointment and Suffering One Must Stop Desiring

The cessation of sorrow is the aim of Buddhist philosophy and is attainable by the code of personal ethics. The criterion of Buddhist ethics is self-control which when it reaches its highest point leads to *nibbana*, the blowing out of the individual. This is the only stable entity, a state of rest, in a world of ceaseless flux. It is a state of bliss reached by the Buddha and other *arhants* (who attained Nirvana) or perfected beings.

There are other features of Buddhism which are unique to it; these include a steering away from issues regarded by the Buddha as irrelevant (*avyaktani*), taking one away from the path to be pursued — the most important being the existence of god. The existence or non-existence of god in no way altered the basic propositions of Buddhism. In keeping with this position was the emphasis on self reliance in early Buddhism wherein the Buddha exhorted his followers not to look for support outside of themselves but be "lamps unto themselves". Equally significant was the centrality of compassion for fellow beings.

iv) The Way to Stop Desiring and Suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path

Suggested by Buddha, these paths are right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

20.6.3 Buddhist Social Order

When someone joins the Buddhist order he or she is required to subscribe to no creed. In one part of the ceremony of initiation he says:

I go for refuge to the Buddha

I go for refuge to the Law

I go for refuge to the Order.

Buddha suggested his serious disciples to abandon the ordinary civil life since it was difficult to follow the Eight Fold Path in such a life. Hence two main types of followers are there in Buddhism: members of *monastic communities* and the *lay disciples*.

i) The member of the monastic community are to forsake family, occupation and society and lead a solitary life either as anchorities or as members of a monastic community. There are rigid rules of this monastic community: simple dwellings, three piece garments (an undergarment, a kind of coat and a cloak), shaved off head and beard. He must beg his food, must observe prohibition to meat diet. The monastic life must follow ten commandments. They *must refrain from* (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) unchastity, (4) lying, (5) intoxicants, (6) solid food after midday, (7) dancing, music and theatrical representation, (8) using garlands, perfumes and salves, (10) using hig and broad couches, and (11) accepting gold and silver.

There are further minutest details of the monastic life. *Pratimoksha* (the oldest Buddhist document) contains a list of about 250 contraventions by which a monk have to test his conscience twice every month. *Uparasatha* (day of fast) is used for this heart searching. Any one, without caste restriction, without the sin of parricide etc. without some form of serious disease and without lack of personal liberty can be a member of the monastic order.

Box 1

In the monastic order there are four stages to enter into *Nirvana*. It begins with the entrants, i.e. the novice who has stepped into the stream. In the second stage there are those who will return here on the earth only once more. In the third stage there are those who will not return here on the earth any more. They will be in a higher world 'heaven' and thence with enter into 'Nirvana'. The highest stage is that of the *arahat* (saint) who will pass immediately from his present existence into Nirvana (Hackmann, 1988: 307).

ii) For the laymen/women Buddha also laid down certain instructions. They are advised to lead a moral life "in keeping with the demands of the time, and to fulfil all duties towards parents, teachers, wives, children, servants, subordinates, and ascetics". He suggested five commandments for the laymen disciples. They are advised to *retrain from* a) killing, b) stealing, c) unchastity, d) lying and e) intoxicants. Though for a laymen highest salvation was not possible through these prescribed methods; it would help them to procure a favourable reincarnation here on the earth. So it would be possible for them to become a member of the monastic community and ultimately attain the rank of *arahat* (Hackmann 1988 : 307). Such an ideal of reincarnation is associated with the doctrine of *karma* of Hinduism.

A laymen is not called to celibacy, but is required to be faithful to his wife. As an aspect of simple life the Buddhism does not suggest elaborate ceremonies.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Write a short note on the essence of Buddha's Four Fold Noble Truths in about seven lines.

.....
.....

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-
-
-
- 2) Which one of the following is not a commandment for the laymen follower of Buddhism.
- Refraining from killing
 - Refraining from lying
 - Refraining from intoxicants
 - Refraining from dancing and music

20.7 BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIETY OF THAT AGE

How can we relate these ideas to the society in which Buddhist philosophy originated and what impact did it have upon that society? Further how different or shared were these ideas in relation to existing Brahmanical ideas? Let us examine some of these points here.

a) Break with Brahmanism

Most important, while there were a few ideas that Buddhist philosophy shared with the Upanishadic thought and with the sramanic (renouncer) tradition Buddha did not merely rehash ideas; his ideas marked in innovative and radical move in the direction of creating a new social philosophy with an enduring appeal for human kind. There was not only a break with Brahmanism but also an interrogation and rejection of its basic beliefs. A later Buddhist philosopher, Dharmakiritti, put this successfully when he characterised ignorance as accepting the authority of the Veda and someone as creator, the desire of gaining merit through the holy dip, the vanity of casteism and torturing the body to redeem sin.

The sharpest dimension of the break that the Buddha made with Brahmanism was in his understanding of social institutions. In the Buddhist view since there was no creator all social institutions were arrangements which men made. Private property, the family, occupational categories and kingship originated in human social arrangements.

b) The Demystification of Kingship and Caste

Both these institutions were considered divinely ordained in Brahmanism. Buddhism opened up immense possibilities for reordering social arrangements. The impulse and legitimation for reordering social arrangements could also come from the Buddhist emphasis on change. For example, if everything was permanently in a state of change, varna divisions and despotic kingship could also change. It was in conceptualising the new social arrangements that the bases of Buddhist social philosophy may be discerned. In response to the contradictions that the bases of Buddhist social philosophy may be discerned. In response to the contradictions of society in his age Buddhism also recognised the direction of historical forces. For example, while the breakdown of the *gana-sanghas* and the earlier traditions of clan-based societies could not be reversed, they provided models for the Buddhist *sangha*. In the Buddhist *sangha* all were equal regardless of their origins; there was no individual property and all decisions were taken through consensus or voting. The *sangha*, in the words of D.P. Chattopadhyaya, was the embodiment of the

“imaginary sustance of the tribe, a symbol of people’s memories and of their aspirations;” it was the vision of an alternative society.

However, this egalitarian order applied only to the *bhikkhus*, i.e. to the *samana* who renounced both family and property to pursue salvation goals. In the world outside the *sangha* Buddhism did not envisage radical rearrangements. Buddhism introduced norms which by emphasising charity, self control, and moderation, moderated the excesses of an exploitative economic order. Buddhist ethics required a reciprocal ‘giving’; masters should treat those who worked for them well in return for which their servants would word hard for their masters. These norms would however require no re-ordering of the existing economic order in which some had too much, others too little. Similarly kingship was to be exercised according to *dhamma* moderating the despotic goverance of existing rulers.

c) Arrangements for Redistribution of Surplus through Dana

In keeping with the dual arrangements of Buddhist social philosophy, one for the world of the *sangha* and the other for the world outside, it was the central place given to *dana*, or alms giving. This was the link between the two worlds — pious laymen maintained the *sangha* and others who had renounced the world. *Dana* was also a way of ensuring that society maintained its marginalised groups, renouncers and the indigent. In substituting *dana* for the Brahmanical *yagna* the Buddha was providing a structural inversion; while the *yagna* ensured that no surplus could be built up, *dana* effected its redistribution.

To sum up the social philosophy of Buddhism, it can be seen that while Buddhism did not envisage the complete eradication of inequalities on society, Buddhist social ethics provides *a code for civilised living rather than creating for an equalitarian society*. As the “middle path”, it sought to contain the excesses of an exploitative order. It also interrogated Brahmanical values especially hierarchies based on birth and the sacred legitimation of secular institutions. It thus became the first and in some ways the most lasting critique of Brahmanism. It is not surprising therefore that oppressed groups in India have seen in it the vision of a new society. It has also appealed to rationalist humanists both in age of the Buddha and the present. For these and a number of other reasons Buddhism became popular not merely within India but in south, south-east and east Asia — by far one of India’s most significant contributions to the world.

20.8 THE GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE OF BUDDHISM

Within a few centuries following the age of the Buddha the philosophy that originated with him spread out from its earlier location in eastern India. As it spread, its philosophical content expanded and was transformed through its creative interaction with its new environments and the changed social processes. Kings and other elites provided support for its expansion; by the second century B.C. it had spread into Sri Lanka and south east Asia; by the 4th and the 5th centuries A.D. it was well established in east Asia.

20.8.1 The Hinayana, Mahayana and Vijrayana

Buddhist philosophy *did not remain static* during its long history. In the centuries following the promulgation of the original teaching and the formation of earliest community, India Buddhism underwent a massive process of missionary diffusion throughout the Asian world, assimilating new values and undergoing major changes in doctrinal and institutional principles. Today, under the impact of conflicting ideologies and of science and technology, Buddhism as a religious belief system has undergone

several changes. Its original propositions had focussed on each individual working towards salvation through the path formulated by the Buddha. Although these formulations were not really esoteric, they were not so easy to continuously observe so as to reach the goal of becoming the perfected being, or the *arhant*. Fairly early, certain ancillary supports began to be incorporated into Buddhism such as showing reverence to the symbols associated with the Buddha, and other popular cults such as the worship of Tumuli. However the most striking development took place around the 1st century B.C. or 1st century A.D. As Weber has pointed out, in order to become popular an abstract religion has two courses; it can become 'soteriological', that is, adopt the notion of a saviour or of salvation, or become magical, Buddhism did noth — first, it adopted the notion of a saviour and later incorporated Tantrik elements. Finally the three different strands of Buddhism came to be known as Hinayana, Mahayana and Vijrayana for reasons that will become evident presently.

- i) **Hinayana:** After the death of Buddha several Buddhist councils were held to decide the questions of faith and religious orders in Buddhism. This finally led to the distinction between those who believed they held the most ancient traditions (*Theravandins*) and those who claimed their understandings represented the highest and most complete account Buddha's message (*the Mahayanist*). *The Theravada* or *Hinayana* (located mainly in the lands of South East Asia, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia) represents the sole survivor of the numerous ancient Indian schools. It has a fixed body of canonical literature, a relatively unified orthodox teaching, a clearly structured institutional distinction between the monastic order and laity. The *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets) consists of *Vinaya Pitaka* (Basket of Discipline), *Sutta Pitaka* (Basket of Discourses) and *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (Basket of Scholasticism) written in Pali language is the *Hinayana* canon of sacred literature. This tradition explicated necessary regulations for the community, meditative techniques and rituals and the stages leading to *arhatship*.
- ii) **The Mahayana** (located in Nepal, Sikkim, China, Korea and Japan) is a diffuse and vastly complex combination of many schools and sects, based on a heterogenous literature. The main thrust of their principle is that of being against the principle of Hinayana. However, in China and Japan its literature 'ranges from the most abstruse philosophy to popular devotional theism and magic. Institutionally it has appeared both in monastic and in radically laticized forms and it has occasionally served well defined church—state configurations.

The ideal of the Mahayana school was that of a *Boddhisattva* (Enlightenment being), whose compassionate vow to save all human beings was contrasted with the aloof self-concern of the Hinayana *arhat* (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1985: 603).

Box 2

The incorporation of the idea of a saviour was facilitated by the belief in *Boddhisattvas*, a series of previous personages of the Buddha before he achieved an *arhant* status in his last life. The *Boddhisattva* was a potential Buddha or a potential *arhant*. The focus on compassion laid by the Buddha resulted in the ideas that accumulated merit of a *Boddhisattva* could be transferred to help those who were struggling to escape from their various states of miseries; that once one became an *arhant* one was of no use to anyone else so that the *arhant* status should be postponed rather than achieved immediately, and finally that a future Buddha would as a saviour, make salvation possible for a large number of ordinary individuals. This form of Buddhism came to known as Mahayana, or the great vehicle, which would carry many people into salvation in contrast to the earlier form of Buddhism called Hinayana, the lesser vehicle, as it could not carry so many people to salvation.

The following are some of the ways in which Mahayana Buddhism differs from Hinayana. In the Hinayana deity worship had no place and no doctrine of God. The Mahayana introduced the idea of deity into this religion. The popular form of theism of Mahayana was the doctrine of *Bodhisattva* (one whose nature is pervaded by *bodi*). According to this doctrine through the history of human being a large number of noble men tread the path of Buddha and all of them had to follow the stages of *Bodhisattva* before they could attain the status of Buddha. However, a large number of them stopped at the *Bodhisattva* stage (and did not take up the final step to achieve the status Buddha) because they were filled with infinite pity for the suffering of the world. They prefer to wait to help those who are in need. Thus the *Bodhisattva* intervenes and saves from danger and death. He protects the weak and the helpless, frees the captive, fights plague and famine, consoles the sorrowful and comforts those who are ready to despair. Thus with this peculiar creation of *Bodhisattva* by the Mahayana the centre of gravity of Buddhist doctrine was completely shifted.

- iii) The **Tantrayana** or **Vijrayana** (prevalent in Tibet, Mongolia, and some parts of Siberia) dominantly identified with Tibetan Lamaism and its theocracy.

The third stage in Buddhist philosophy was the incorporation of a magical — mystic dimension where the followers of Vajrayana believed that release or salvation could be best achieved by acquiring magical powers which was called *Vajra*, meaning thunderbolt or diamond. This form of Buddhism was focussed on feminine divinities who were the force or potency (*Sakti*) behind the male divinities. These feminine 'spouses' or the Buddhas or *Bodhisattava* of the new sect were the saviouresses (*Taras*) of their followers. Those who reached a high state of detachment and mental training acquired supernatural power and were capable of following these magical practices. The *Vajrayana* school flourished in Bengal, Bihar and in Tibet where it has survived. One of the formulae of Tantric Buddhism still chanted is "Om mani padme hum"; such formulae were expected to bestow magical power on the worship and lead to the highest bliss.

20.8.2 Neo-Buddhist Movement in India

Buddhism is against the Brahmanic social order. It is against the caste based social inequality. As it emerged as a response against the Brahmanic cult in the ancient India, in contemporary India. Buddhism has been used as the instrument of eradication of ascribed social inequality. Hence the most significant Buddhist mass revival of the new age was led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in India. He found in Buddhism the message for the uplift of the oppressed in India. He used and interpreted Buddhism as the ideology to bring social equality and justice for the oppressed mass, especially for the Scheduled Castes. After many years of spiritual search, he became convinced that Buddhism was the only ideology that could effect the eventual liberation of India out Castes. On 14 October 1956 he performed a mass 'consecration' of the Scheduled Castes to Buddhism in Nagpur, Maharashtra. The new converts were mostly from the Scheduled Mahars Castes (a Scheduled Caste) (Gamez, L.O. 1987: 381). This mass conversion aimed at the rejection of the untouchability, participation of the oppressed castes towards undertaking more social and political activities for their liberation from the exploitative forces. One aspect of conversion movement was to radically undermine the Hindu dominant culture by rejecting its basic tenets of hierarchy, purity and pollution. This understanding of Hindu culture created a tendency of negation among the Dalits of Maharashtra. This negation was very important in as much as it developed negative consciousness which drove the Dalit of Maharashtra to undertake move creative and organised political action for their emancipation. Ambedkar's idea behind conversion was to make it a part of the larger political movement based on the material contradictions inherent in Indian Society (Guru, 1989: 419-420).

20.8.3 Decline of Buddhism in India

Before analysing the process of decline of Buddhism in India we should know the similarity between Buddhism and Hinduism and also the influence of Buddhism on Hinduism. It is significant that these aspects have contributed significantly for the decline of Buddhism in India. Originally there are certain similarities in the fundamental doctrine of Hinduism and Buddhism. The idea of transmigration of soul or incarnation is common to both the religions. Both these religions are against taking animal life. It was no doubt, permitted to Hindus by epics and in fact prevailed in Vedic times but was given up under the influence of Buddhism. Buddhism also brought phenomenal change on the mode of worship and rituals of Hinduism. Vedic sacrifices were mostly superseded by other form of worship associated with temples and veneration of images. This is however, to note here that Buddha only suggested sermons and meditation to his followers. However, the ordinary follower of Buddha in the due course of time accepted the worship of relics of Buddha and his chief disciples. The Buddhist tradition of worshipping of great teachers helped the process of deification of Rama and Krishna. Even in Hinduism Lord Buddha has been regarded as the 10th incarnation of Vishnu.

Significantly the *Mathas* of Hinduism owe their origin to Buddhism. For the first time in the history of Hinduism *Mathas* were established by Sankara, the South Indian revivalist, in the 9th century A.D. modelled on the pattern of Buddhist monasteries. The *mathas* at Saingiri, Puri, Dwaraka and Badrinath which are established by Sankara, helped in the revival of Hinduism by enforcing the disciplinary concepts of Buddhism. These *mathas* still attract thousands of Hindu pilgrims.

Buddhism received a set back in the land of its birth. Many of the noble ideas of Hinduism were incorporated in the broad fold of Hinduism including Buddha himself as the reincarnation of Vishnu. Hinduism struggled with Buddhism from the 4th to 9th century. The greatest danger of Buddhism came from its emphasis on tolerance and obliteration of differences. The very fact that Buddhism and Hinduism came nearer to each other led to the disintegration of the former. Decadence of Buddhism in India was hastened by its alliance with forms of magic and erotic mysticism called *Saktism*. Hindus had, in the meanwhile, absorbed all the good points which Buddhist had to offer. Sankara, led a crusade against Buddhism in 8th and 9th centuries. He took the Buddhist institution as his model and arranged the ascetic orders of Hindus accordingly. His philosophy was also based on Mahayana Buddhism. The final disappearance of Buddhism was, however, mainly due to the destruction of its great monasteries by the Muslim invaders...it must be understood that the decline of Buddhism from India was not its annihilation or exclusion but absorption (Chopra, P.N. 198: 48-50).

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) In the new social philosophy of Buddha there was a
 - a) reconciliation with Brahmanism
 - b) improvement upon the Brahmanism
 - c) break with Brahmanism
 - d) a parallel development of Brahmanism
- 2) Write a note on feminine divinities in Buddhism in about six lines.

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20.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed Jainism and Buddhism. We started with the discussion in the background of the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism. There we discussed the political system and the political philosophy, the economic and the social orders and the then existing religious philosophies, in the context of which Jainism and Buddhism developed. While discussing Jainism we highlighted the aspects related to the founder and essence of Jainism. The Jain ways of life, Jain festivals and the similarities between Jainism and Hinduism are also discussed in this unit. While discussing Buddhism we highlighted its basic teachings, the relation between its basic philosophy and the society of that age and its growth and development over a period of time. The similarities between Buddhism and Hinduism and the decline of Buddhism in India were also discussed in this unit.

20.10 KEY WORDS

- Heterodox** : Ideas opposed to usual practising religious beliefs.
- Ganga-Sanghas** : Geographically located units and inhabited and ruled by the Khshatriya clans.
- Oligarchies** : A form of government in which ruling power belongs to few people.
- Orthodox** : Conforming to the established religious doctrine.

20.11 FURTHER READINGS

Besant, A., 1985. *Seven Great Religions*. The Theosophical Publishing House: Madras.

Chopra, P.N. (ed) 180. *Buddhism in India and Abroad*. Min. of Education and Culture. Govt. of India: New Delhi.

20.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- i) c.
- ii) a) Emergence of settled agriculture.
 b) large standing army for the expending frontiers of the Kingdom and effective control within the state.
 c) formation of an impressive officialdom.
- iii) c.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) c.
- ii) a.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) According to Buddha life is
 - a) fundamentally disappointment and suffering
 - b) suffering is a result of one's desires for pleasure, power and continued existence
 - c) to stop disappointment one must stop desiring
 - d) the way to stop desiring is the noble Eight fold path — right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.
- 2) d

Check Your Progress 4

- i) c.
- ii) The followers of Vajrayana believe that salvation could be best achieved by acquiring magical power. This form of Buddhism focuses on the feminine divinities who were the force behind the male divinities. These feminine 'spouses' of the Buddhas of the new sect were the saviours of their followers.

UNIT 21 CHRISTIANITY

Structure

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- 21.2 Sources and Beliefs
 - 21.2.1 The Founder of Christianity
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21.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are to acquaint you with the religious belief system and social order of Christianity. After reading this unit you should be able to

- discuss the chief sources and beliefs in Christianity
- examine the teaching of Jesus Christ
- explain the Christian social order
- describe Christian view on the Church and the world
- discuss various aspects of Christianity in India.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

As indicated, India is a plural society. One of the significant elements of this plurality is that of the religious belief systems and religious practices. Religion is an important dimension of group formation. The world view and the behavioural patterns of a social group are largely shaped by their religious practices and beliefs. Christianity is an important world religion. A sizeable section of the Indian population follows Christianity. It will be sociologically significant to analyse and know the basic tenets of Christianity and social organisation of its followers.

In Unit 17 of ESO-02 we discussed the Christian social organisation with special reference to India. In this unit we shall introduce you to the basic tenets of Christian religious belief. We also will introduce you briefly to the socio-religious aspects of Christianity in India. After reading this unit, you should be able to know the Christians belief system and about their life on earth and hereafter. The Christian way of life and the ideal Christian society are also discussed in this unit. How the faith of Christians is nourished and how they derive spiritual inspiration about the consequences of the adaptation of the Christian community to the world, and some broad ideas about Christians in India are discussed at length in this unit.

Though the Christians are heavily concentrated in the countries of the European and American continents, the followers of Christianity are found in almost all the countries of the world. They are subdivided into a large number of churches and denominations based on organisational and doctrinal differences. These subdivisions can be subsumed under the three broader categories of (1) the Roman Catholic Church, (2) the Eastern Orthodox Church and (3) the Protestant denominations. The first two categories date from the early period of Christianity and the third category of churches sprung during the last few centuries owing their origin to dissident groups from the parent bodies. The basic elements of Christianity described in this lesson are, however, common to all the above categories of churches. Besides these Christian churches, there are certain cults such as *Christian Science*, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, *Mormonism* or "*Latter-day Saints*", *the Unification Church* or "*Moonies*" and so on, which though akin to Christianity, differ from the Biblical Christianity in important respects.

In describing Christianity from the sociological perspective, in this lesson, some of the functions which a religion is expected to perform will be kept in view. These functions include the assistance which religion provides the individual in gaining added power and satisfaction, the explanation of the problem of evil, the offer of the hope of better life in the future, the formulation of a plan for salvation, the improvement of the quality of the present life and an outline of an ideal society.

21.2 SOURCES AND BELIEFS

Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ, but it has its roots in the Judaic tradition. It is counted among the revealed or divinely inspired religions. The divinely inspired religious precepts are contained in the holy book of the Christians known as the Bible. The Bible is divided into two books: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Most of the books of the Bible are written mostly by different authors at different points of time starting from the ancient times. The books of the *Old Testament* dealing with the period before the birth of Jesus Christ were originally written in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic, and the books of the *New Testament* dealing with the life and teachings of Jesus and the Acts of his Apostles which depict the formative period of Christianity, were originally written mostly in Greek or partly in Aramaic. The first four New Testament books telling of the life, death and resurrection of Christ are known as the *Gospels*.

21.2.1 The Founder of Christianity

Central to the Christian faith is the identity of its founder, Jesus Christ. Christ was a historical figure born about 2,000 years ago. He lived a short span of 33 years and his public life covered only the last three years during which he healed people, performed miracles, even raising people from the dead, and taught his disciples how to live lives that would be pleasing to God. But the most remarkable feature of Jesus' life, according to Christian belief, is that after he was crucified, dead and buried, he rose again on the third day and appeared to his Apostles and disciples before ascending into heaven. Jesus claimed that he was son of God and behaved

as such by forgiving sinners on his own authority, which was a sore point with the Jewish religious leaders. But his disciples believed that he was God. Therefore, one of the basic tenets of the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus Christ is true Man and true God.

During his life Jesus made many disciples and followers. They, however, did not form themselves into a separate community or church. It was obvious that until his death and resurrection Jesus did not complete his religious mission. As a matter of fact, the arrest of Jesus by his enemies and his ignominious death on the cross came as an apparent anticlimax to the work of propagating his faith. On the day before his death, when Jesus was arrested, his Apostles who were his constant companions, panicked and deserted him. Even his favourite Apostle, Simon Peter who was following him from a distance, denied having known Jesus when questioned by others on three occasions. The Apostles who believed in Christ as the Son of God were disenchanted when he seemed powerless at the hands of his enemies. At his death they hid themselves for fear of being apprehended.

After the third day Jesus rose from the dead. From then on until the fortieth day when, according to the Bible, Jesus ascended into heaven, he appeared to his Apostles and other disciples several times. It is during that time, having accomplished his mission, Jesus commissioned his Apostles to spread his faith to all nations saying: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mathew 28: 18-20).



Jesus on the cross, with his mother Mary in the foreground.

21.2.2 The Biblical Concept of God

In this context it may be pointed out that the Biblical concept of God is rather complex. God is one but has revealed Himself in the Bible as three persons — *the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*. Such a conception of God is described as the mystery of the *Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity*. According to the Bible Jesus is God, the Son, born of the Virgin Mary who conceived by the Holy Spirit. The incarnation of Jesus as man, according to the Bible, is a part of the divine plan for the atonement of the sins of mankind.

In order to understand why it was necessary for God to become man so as to save mankind, one needs to know that the Bible teaches about the origin of *sin* and *evil* in this world. According to the Bible, God created heaven and earth and he made Adam and Eve the first ancestors of mankind in his own image. But Adam and Eve were disobedient to their creator thereby bringing sin and evil into this world. As a result all mankind became heir to the original sin and lost the privilege to be regarded as children of God. It was only the suffering and death of a sinless man, Jesus, which could atone for the sins of mankind. And God so loved mankind that he sent his only beloved son to save mankind from eternal damnation. Jesus is therefore called the Saviour of mankind. The Bible states that whoever believes in him will be saved (John 3:16).

21.2.3 The Biblical Concept of Body, Soul and Salvation

The Bible teaches that man has body and soul; whereas the body perishes with death, the soul survives eternally. Salvation in Christianity means the survival of the soul or the individual personality in a happy existence in heaven after death. Contrary to the belief in the transmigration of souls, Christianity teaches that human beings live only once on the earth and so have only one chance to make sure of a happy after-life. Although the original sin-condemned man to eternal damnation, Christ's suffering has redeemed mankind. But any individual can attain salvation only if, he or she were to accept Jesus as Saviour. The Bible is clear on this point in quoting Christ's own words: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John, 14:6). This and other references in this lesson are in the Books of the New Testament in the Bible.

Box 1

The unfolding of the scheme of salvation in Christianity also establishes the link between the Old and the New Testament of the Bible. The Old Testament is an essential part of the Jewish tradition. Jesus Christ was a Jew who followed the Jewish tradition which provides the point of reference for his teaching. The basic link between the Old and the New Testament lies in the fact that the Old Testament is always looking forward to One who was to come about, whom there are several promises, prophecies are descriptions which are fulfilled in Jesus. So from the point of view of Christians, the New Testament bears witness to the unique event foreseen in the Old Testament. Moreover, the Old Testament is a constant reminder that God punishes the evil and rewards the good and that he never forsakes those who believe in Him. Together, the Old and the new Testaments constitute the progressive self-revelation of God.

21.2.4 Organisation and Communion

The organisation of the early churches was based on the belief in Jesus as the 'Risen Lord'. In the beginning the Christians gathered daily for their worship, but in due course, one day in a week called the 'Lord's day' (Sunday) was set aside

for the worship service. This practice is generally followed in the Christian churches even today. The core of the worship service consists of religious instruction, preaching, prayer and the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread or the 'Lord's Supper' has a special significance in Christian worship. This practice follows from what Jesus did at his last supper with his Apostles on the night before his death. He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his Apostles saying, "This is my body given for you; this is remembrance of me". In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you". (Luke 22 : 19, 20). This incident symbolises Christ's suffering and death on the cross which is the central act of salvation, freeing mankind from sin.

The replication of the 'Lord's Supper' at the worship is believed to realise once again, Christ's presence (called the living presence). In the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine a direct and intimate union with Christ is achieved. This part of the worship service is also known as Communion or Eucharistic rite.

In general, the religious services of Christians are mainly aimed at Worshipping God in spirit and truth (John 4:24), that is, worshipping the Father through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Indicate the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible in about eight lines.

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- ii) Narrate the concept of body and soul as depicted in Christianity in about five lines.

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- iii) Jesus rose from the dead after the

- a) fifth day
- b) fourth day
- c) third day
- d) second day

21.3 TEACHINGS OF CHRISTIANITY

Although Jesus did not reduplicate the Judaic tradition, he abrogated some of the Jewish conventions, gave a radical twist to the old ethical principles and spelt out the fundamental principles of the ideal social order.

21.3.1 Purity of a Person and the Moral Deeds

Among the archaic Jewish practices which Jesus brushed aside, reference may be made to the rituals to ward off pollution. When the Jews complained that his disciples did not adhere to their traditional custom of ritual "cleaning" of hands before meals, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' (Mark 7 : 14,15). Jesus thus teaches the important truth that it is not outside rituals or ceremonies or eating of special foods that make a person clean before God. It is the purity of a person's heart and mind that makes one clean in God's sight.

According to his instructions the norms of proper conduct are not to be anchored on the morality of this world but rather on the other-worldly criteria of fulfilling the will of God and of pleasing Him. 'Therefore, a Christian is not supposed to expect reciprocity or popularity from his good deeds; his rewards come from wheat pleases God to bestow upon him both in this and the outer world.

In doing moral deeds or giving charity, a person should not draw attention to oneself so as to be honoured by others; God rewards such deeds done in secret (Mathew 6 : 1-4).

21.3.2 Forgiving Sins and Evils

Jesus impresses upon his followers that let alone murder, even the expression of anger against others amounts to sin and that God does not accept prayers and gifts unless we first reconcile ourselves with each other (Mathew 5 : 21-23). So also God forgives the sins of persons who forgive others who sin against them (Mathew 6 : 14, 15).

It is the way of the world to pay back the aggressor in his own coin. But Jesus tells his followers, "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Mathew 5 : 38, 39). So also, consider what Jesus has to say, "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mathew 5 : 43-45).

These precepts of Jesus seem to be so unreasonable and impractical. But his own conduct during the most trying time of his life is a telling demonstration of his preaching. When Jesus was falsely charged and sentenced to death, he neither resisted his captors nor defended himself before the court. What is more, when he was crucified during his dying moments, he uttered from the cross these stunning words of mercy to his enemies: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23 : 24). Thus Jesus not only taught his followers a new way of life but also in his exemplary life showed how it could be accomplished.

21.3.3 Evangelisation and Baptism

Christ's mandate to his disciples to spread his message of love and forgiveness throughout the world is considered to be an obligation on the part of all Christians to do likewise. The act of spreading the gospel of Christ is termed evangelisation.

However, the decision of accepting the message or of becoming a convert to Christianity, should be left to the persons who receive the message, which is regarded as the work of the Holy Spirit.

The acceptance of the Christian faith by renouncing their old religious beliefs and practices meant for the converts a rupture from their old communities as well. So the new Christians formed themselves into communities or churches of their own. The churches drew people from different religious and ethnic groups, who were welded into a new Christian identity. The new recruits to the faith were admitted with a simple ceremony called Baptism.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) According to Christian thought the norms of proper conduct are to be anchored
 - a) on the moality of this world
 - b) on the other wordily criteria without fulfilling the will of God
 - c) on the other wordly criteria of fulfilling the will of God
 - d) on self-interest.

- 2) The act of spreading the gospel of Christ is termed
 - a) Universalisation
 - b) Christianisation
 - c) Evangelisation
 - d) Spiritualisation

- 3) What is the significance of Lord’s Supper in Christianity? Answer in about five lines.

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21.4 CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ORDER

Social order of every religious group is organised based on certain principles. These principles provide the base of togetherness and commonness of ideas and coexistence. It would be interesting to see how the Christian social order is organised. From the teachings of Jesus it is possible to identify some of the basic principles of the Christian social order.

21.4.1 Universal Brotherhood

The fundamental principle of the ideal society according to Jesus is the idea of universal brotherhood. But just as the justification and motive for the ideal conduct stem from the desire to please and fulfil the will of God, the basis of universal brotherhood is also the love of God. The idea that the love of man flows from the love of God was made clear by Jesus when he was answering a question by a Jewish jurist. In replying to the question, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law”? Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”. This is the first and the greatest commandment.

And the second is like it. 'Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments' (Mathew 22 : 35-40). The term neighbour used in this context, as Jesus explained (Luke 10 : 28-37) transcends the traditional connotation of spatial proximity, but embraces the broader meaning of fellowmen/women irrespective of the spatial or social connections. The love of fellowmen is not ordinarily ingrained in social structures which always made a 'distinction between 'we' and 'they'. It is the love of God which makes the Christian ideal of loving one's fellowmen/women, attainable.

21.4.2 Egalitarian Outlook

A second important principle of the Christian social order is the egalitarian outlook. The Christian church brought together people from different races, cultures and classes and forged a new spirit of coherence, unity and equality among them. Paul, the most prominent among the organisers of the early church emphasised, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3 : 28). The early Christians who were liberated from the fetters of their former communities, addressed one another brothers and sisters, shared their provisions or contributed their income generously for common use and formed themselves into an egalitarian community.

The egalitarian ideal is further supported in the new kind of leadership and authority enjoined upon his followers by Jesus. Ordinarily, a leader tries to wield his power and authority to command compliance by persons whom he leads, and people seek the office of leadership for the privileges which accrue from it. But Jesus taught that all power and authority comes from God and the function of the leader is to serve the people under his charge.

21.4.3 Service of the Underprivileged

Yet another major principle of the ideal society according to Christ's teaching is the concern and commitment for the service of the underprivileged. During his lifetime as man, Jesus showed great compassion for people in distress. Exhorting his followers to do likewise, he pointed out that the heavenly king namely God, would apply reward those who took care of the poor, the strangers and the oppressed. Acts of kindness done to such people were equivalent to showing kindness to God Himself.

The ideal society in Christianity, which stands for universal fellowship, equality of members, a service oriented leadership and a special solidarity with the disadvantaged sections, is ultimately based on the belief in and love of God. Such a society is termed the reign of God or the kingdom of heaven.

Activity 1

Based on your observation and experience of the Christian society write a note of about two pages on the 'Christian Social Order in our Society'. Exchange your note, if possible with your colearners at the Study Centre.

21.5 THE CHURCH AND THE WIDER WORLD

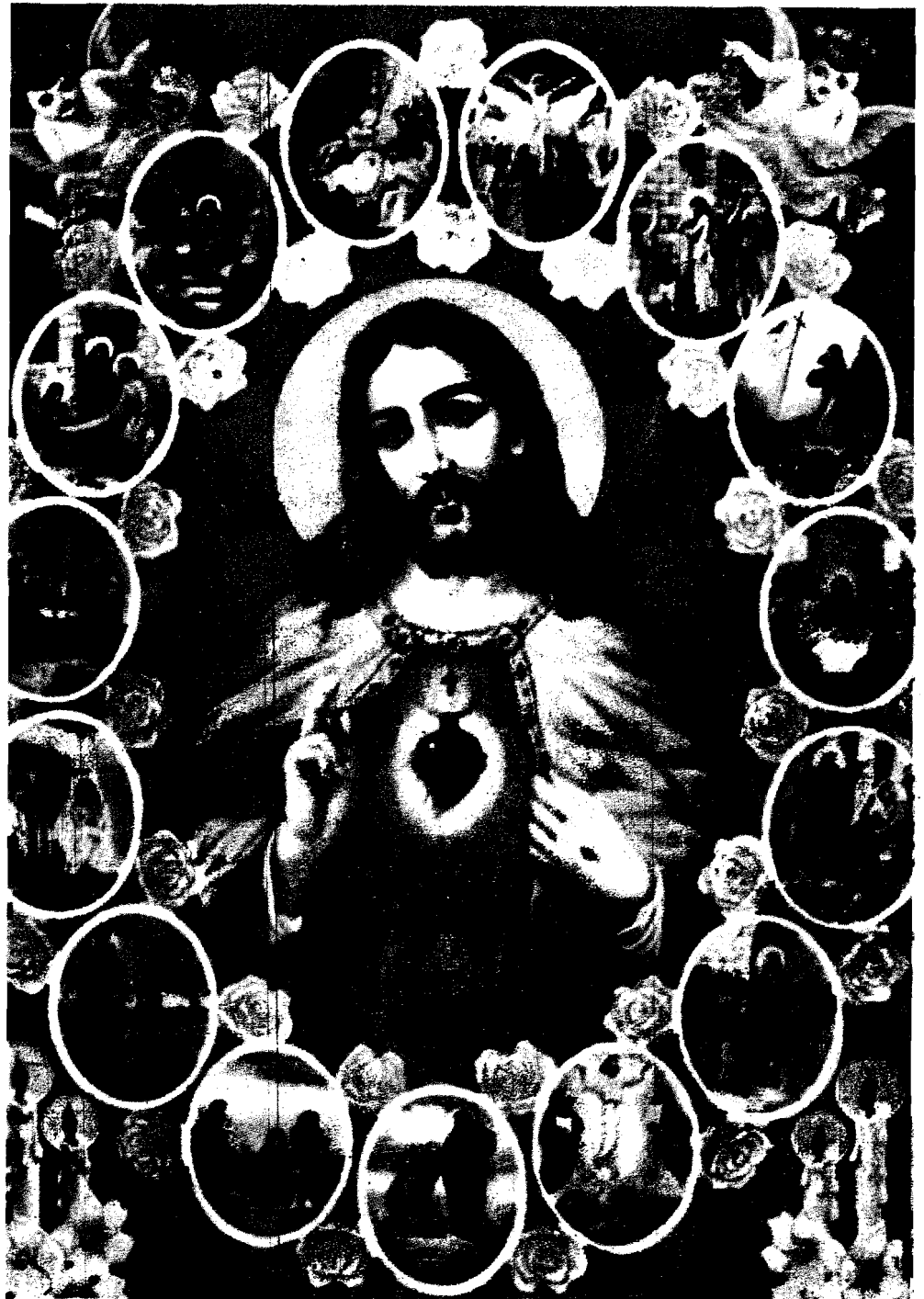
The church plays a key role in the Christian society. It determines largely the Christian world view. It is of great sociological significance to see how the church encounters itself with the wider society and the world. The church is the actualisation of the ideal society according to the teachings of Jesus. At the same time, it has to function within the wider society whose values and patterns of social relations are inconsistent with the Christian social order. Right from the beginning, the Christians were painfully aware of this contradiction and had to suffer on account of it. While

regarding the ideal Christian society as the heavenly kingdom, they referred to the existing social order as the worldly society or the 'world'.

The disjunction between the church and the 'world' (wider society) raises several questions; how does the church adapt itself to the 'world'? What impact has the church made upon the world? What impact the world has made upon the church? Indeed, these are the sociological issues of adaptation and assimilation.

21.5.1 Adaptation to the World

In its adaptation to the 'world', there is no question of the church's accepting the world totally in spirit and in fact, for that would amount to a negation of the



Jesus in the centre of the photo, with vignettes from his life and teachings depicted all around him.

Christian ideal. It was also not possible to reject the world totally as that would involve in a head-on collision with the powerful political and religious authorities leading to a bloody revolution which is against the spirit of Christianity. The early church actually took course in between the two extremes. It rejected the world in spirit but accepted it in fact. In a sense this approach agreed with what Jesus did; he did not try to destroy the old order but attempted to transform it. It was, however, implied that the Christian way of life was superior to the worldly life and should there be serious conflict between God's commandments and the civil law, a Christian is obliged to obey God rather than man (Acts 5 : 29).

21.5.2 Civil Authority

In the compromise that was struck between the church and the 'world', it was recognized that the political powers and civil authorities were ordained of God and hence merited obedience (Romans 13:1), and the Christians carried out their civil obligations including the payment of taxes faithfully. Similarly, although everyone is considered equal in Jesus Christ, as a seeming accommodation to the prevailing patriarchal and feudal practices, the wife was enjoined to obey the husband and the slave to obey the master, although the persons in authority, were also required to treat their subordinates with love and consideration (Ephesians 5:2-25, 6:5-9).

With the spread and gaining influence of the church, Christian values and ideals began to percolate into the larger society. The humanitarian ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity which gained acceptance in the Western civilisation, owe their origin to the teachings of Jesus.

21.5.3 Society's Impact on Church

If the Church has influenced the wider society, sometimes the latter also has had its impact upon the former. This happened in Europe especially during the Middle Ages when the entire European society became Christian and the Church acquired considerable political and economic power. In that process the church became infected with worldly values.

21.5.4 Sects and Sub-divisions

The complex form in which the Christian church finds itself at present with its many subdivisions can be attributed to the rise of pressure groups when the parent bodies deviate too much from the biblical path. Such dissident pressure groups which are called sects are either (1) integrated into the parent body or (2) they secede or are expelled from the main church, when the dissident groups establish churches of their own.

- i) The first type of phenomenon is represented by the monastic movements of the 4th, 5th and the 6th centuries, which were attempts on the part of some of the members to live in line with the teachings of Jesus when the parent bodies (the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches) were more inclined to the worldly life. The monastic movements were ultimately integrated into the parent bodies which underwent a renewal as a result.
- ii) The second type of phenomenon can be illustrated with the 16th century Reformation movement in Europe, when several dissident groups left the Roman Catholic Church and underwent a renewal as a result of that challenge. The Protestant churches recognize the authority of the Bible alone, whereas the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches also recognized their church traditions as authoritative, besides the Bible.

Box 2

Thus the compromise between the church and the 'world' also leads to the ever present processes of dissidence, renewal or secession. However, in all these changes the Bible serves as the steadying force. Besides lending stability to the churches, the Bible is also responsible for bringing about a basic unity in beliefs and values among the different churches. There are however, differences among the churches in the interpretation of the Bible. As a student of sociology, you should be interested to know the dynamics of group formation. This section must have given you some insights on the group formation in Christianity. You may also be interested to know the institutional network through which the Christian society operates. You may also be interested in the aspects of festivals and ritual of that society. To know, all these aspects you may like to see Unit 17 of ESO-02.

21.6 CHRISTIANITY, MODERN SOCIETY AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

Christian movement delineated a condition for the selection of human beings and also for the creation of a society for peaceful survival of human being based on new values. Christianity has been one of the important factors of modernisation and economic development through the societal values it has legitimised. However, at every stage of the social evolution and modernisation as such, the Christian religious system and its values stood in complex relations of interdependence with other factors viz., economic and political institutions, the social institutions like family and kinship, the system of stratification etc.

i) Institutionalisation

In this context it is essential to have an idea on the forms of Christian institutionalisation. The *first* pattern of the institutionalisation assumed that the existence of the religious association of the Christian is essentially a separate entity without established relations to the rest of the society. The example can be that of the Pietistic sects.

The second type of institutionalisation is that of the Catholic Church. "This is interpreted in the sense of an established church, which is the state religion of a politically organised society". The church and the state are the distinct organisations. Hence the church achieved a transcendental orientation and became to be concerned eventually with its particular version of monasticism and to give the orders a kind of primacy, over the secular priesthood. This in a sense gave by default a special position to the secular political authority, since there was no papal monarchy to match the secular.

The third type of institutionalisation is that of the emergence of the Protestant sects. Here the break is fundamentally with the sacramental system, making the "true" Church invisible and salvation dependent, from the human side, on faith above... The shift to the Protestantism essentially meant the *abandonment of this tutelage with its special kind of religious paternalism*. The main branch of Protestantism, i.e. the Calvinists, laid great emphasis on the worldly activism for the creation of the kingdom of God on the earth.

The Protestant reform movement opened the door for modernisation and economic development through its general trend of social and cultural change. The Protestant followed science, trained in law. The reform movement of the Protestant became intimately related to the development of nationalism — vernacular translations of

the Bible multiplied and some protestant areas achieved distinction very rapidly in economic development — (Weber, W. 1972 : 246).

ii) Protestantism and Economic Development

Max Weber locates a casual link between the Protestant ethic and the development of capitalism in Europe. In his famous treatise on *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber points out that the Puritan sects of the Protestantism rationalised their religious beliefs and values towards “this worldly asceticism”. This rationalisation was possible through the concept of calling — (task set by God) which was a product of Reformation movement. To Weber the major callings for the Protestants of Puritan sects are:

- a) There exists an absolute transcendent God who created the world and rules it, but he is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the finite mind of man,
- b) This all powerful and mysterious God had predestined each of us to salvation or damnation, so that we cannot by our works after a divine which was made before we were born,
- c) God created the world for his own glory,
- d) Whether he is saved or damned, a 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 (Aron, 1967 : 221-222).

These callings helped the Calvinist Protestants to be self-disciplined, dedicated to work, honest and follow the path of “this worldly asceticism”. For them work is worship and there is no space for idleness or laziness. This specific character of Calvinistic belief accounted for the relation between Calvinist doctrine and the spirit of capitalism which was characterised by a unique devotion to the earning of wealth through legitimate economic activity. This is rooted in a belief in the value of efficient performance in the chosen vocation as a duty and a virtue. The affinity between the two and the emergence of capitalist economic regime as defined by Weber existed only in the West. However, such an affinity is particular only to the Protestant ethics. It is not found in the Catholicism; not in any other religion like Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, Judaism and Buddhism of which Weber made a comparative analysis. For further detail you may see again Unit 15, Block 4 of ESO-03.

21.7 CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

In Unit 17 of ESO-02, we discussed in detail the Christian social organisation in India. You are advised to go through that unit to know about the institutions like family, marriage and inheritance in the Christian society in India.

Christianity was introduced into India almost from its inception by Thomas, one of the Apostles of Christ. According to tradition Thomas landed on the coast of Kerala in 52 A.D. and set up seven churches in different areas. Then he travelled to Madras where he was martyred at *Mylapore* in 72 A.D. The descendants of the early Christians of Kerala were known as St. Thomas Christians. They are also called Syrian Christians, not because they came from Syria; but because they follow the Syrian liturgy as distinguished from the Latin liturgy, in their worship. The Syrian Christians formed part of the society in Kerala as a prosperous community and were ranked among the higher castes. They did not seem to have made much effort in spreading their faith in other parts of the country.

21.7.1 Advent of Europeans

The spread of Christianity in India came with the advent of the Europeans from the early 16th century. The Portuguese missionaries were followed by the Dutch, the French and the British along with other European and American missionaries. The Indian Christians belong to different churches and denominations after the religious background of the missionaries who converted them. On the other hand, since the missionaries from different countries worked in different areas of India where their respective country had political influence, the Indian Christians of different religious denominations were also spread in different parts of the country.

Although the Britishers among the European nations wielded the greatest political influence in India, they were initially circumspect in permitting missionary activity. The missionaries, during their regime worked mainly in the tribal areas and among the former untouchables. The Portuguese missionaries had the biggest success in converting Indians to the Roman Catholic faith especially in the west and east coasts of South India, so much so, at present about two-thirds of the Christians in India are to be found in the southern states and that the Roman Catholics outnumber all the other denominations of Christians put together.

21.7.2 Christian Population

According to the 1981 Census the Christians in India numbered 16.77 million or 2.43 per cent of the total population. They are found in every state and almost in every district of the country, but most of them are concentrated in a few pockets or regions. Their major concentrations are found in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Goa and most of the states of the North Eastern Hill areas comprising Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Manipur, Tripura etc.

21.7.3 Denominations and Sects

The multiplicity of divisions in the world body of Christians is also reflected among Christians in India. Most of the Protestant denominations are divided into two main churches termed the Church of North India and Church of South India. Other Indian Christians include the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans and Syrian Christians who have maintained separate identities. The Roman Catholics who comprise the largest group are further divided into those who follow the Latin rite and those who adhere to the Syrian rite.

These different churches have their pockets of concentration in different areas which are often mutually exclusive, reflecting the history and circumstances of their conversion.

21.7.4 Missionaries and Welfare Activities

Consistent with the social philosophy of their religion, the Christians in India are well represented in the social welfare activities in the country with particular concern for the service of the underprivileged. Their work in the fields of health and education is well recognized. The fact that Kerala is the most literate state having the best health-care delivery system in the country is no less due to the pioneering efforts of the Christian churches than to the impetus given by the enlightened rulers of the region.

Activity 2

Write a note of about one page on social activities of the Missionaries based on your observations and experience. Exchange your note with other students of the Study Centre, if possible.

As a student of sociology you would be interested to know how Christianity has been influenced by the plurality of India civilisation and culture. In unit 17 of ESO-02 you should be able to get some glimpses of these aspects.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Mention the three fundamental principles of ideal society as propagated by Christianity.

- a)
- b)
- c)

ii) Describe the consequences of the adaptation of the Church to the World in five lines.

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iii) Indicate major denominations of Christianity in India.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

21.8 LET US SUM UP

This unit began with a discussion on the life and message of Jesus Christ. Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ who is believed to be the son of God but became man, suffered, died and rose alive, in order to atone for the sin of mankind. The divinely inspired teachings or the Word of God as accepted by Christians, are contained in the Bible, the holy book of the Christians.

We explained in this unit the teachings of Christianity. The life and teachings of Jesus are central to Christianity. Jesus taught and lived a way of life which was contrary to the common practice. The ethical conduct and social life that he preached and practised was founded on the love of God and the love of fellowmen flowing from it. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, a remarkable transformation took place among his disciples, which is attributed to the descent upon them of the Holy Spirit. Ever since, the Holy Spirit is believed to provide spiritual strength and inspiration to Christians who live according to the teachings of Jesus. The religious services of the Christians are mainly aimed at worshipping God, the Father through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christian social order and the role of Church in the Christian society are also discussed in this unit. The community of Christians, the church, is modelled after the teachings of Jesus. However, the fact that the church has to adapt itself to the larger world with its contradictory norms of behaviour, poses peculiar problems to the Christians.

Lastly we discussed some aspects of Christianity in India. Christianity was introduced into India at its inception in the first century A.D., and a Christian community

flourished in Kerala. But its spread in different parts of the country took place with the advent of the European missionaries from 16th century onwards. Although the Christians in India form only 2.4 per cent of the population according to the 1991 census, they are found concentrated in a few regions of India in considerable proportions. They have made a mark in the country in social service activities.

21.9 KEY WORDS

Apostles	: Jesus Christ's twelve original disciples and Paul.
Baptism	: A ritual by which a person is admitted to the Christian community.
Gospels	: The first four New Testament books telling of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Holy Spirit	: The active presence of God in human life constituting the third person of the Trinity.
Incarnation	: The union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ.
Liturgy	: Body of rites prescribed for public worship.
Prophet	: One who utters divinely inspired revelations.
Resurrection	: The rising of Jesus Christ from the dead.
Trinity	: The unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three persons in one God, according to Christian dogma.

21.10 FURTHER READINGS

Clemen, C. 1988. *Religions of the World*, Reprint (English Translation) Manas Publications: Delhi.

Barton, A.G. 1990. *The Religion of the World*, Olympia Publications: New Delhi.

Macquarrice, J. 1966. *Principles of Christian Theology*, S.C.M. Press: London.

21.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The unfoldment of the scheme of salvation which is the integral part of the Christian religion, stretches over both the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament contains promises, descriptions and prophecies about the coming Saviour, which were fulfilled in Jesus whose life and teachings are dealt with in the New Testament. In this sense the New Testament bears witness to the Old Testament. Jesus was a Jew and his teachings which are found in the New Testament, often refer to the teachings in the Old Testament.
- ii) As mentioned in the Bible, man has body and soul. The body perishes with death but the soul survives eternally. Salvation means the survival of the soul in heaven after death. According to Christianity, human beings live only once on the earth and there is no re-birth.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) c.
- ii) c.
- iii) The breaking of bread of 'Lord's Supper' has special significance in Christian Worship. The replication of the 'Lord's Supper' at the Worship service is believed to realise once again his presence (called the living presence) and intimate Union with Christ. This part of the Worship service is known as Communion.

Check Your Progress 3

- i)
 - a) Universal brotherhood,
 - b) Egalitarian outlook,
 - c) Service of the underprivileged.
- ii) In the Christian belief there is neither the total adaptation to the world nor total reflection. There is a balanced approach. The early church reflected the world in spirit but accepted it in fact.
- iii)
 - a) Roman Catholic
 - b) Eastern Orthodox Churches
 - c) Syrian Christians

UNIT 22 ISLAM

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 The Advent of Islam
- 22.3 Tenets of Islam
 - 22.3.1 Islamic Concept of God
 - 22.3.2 The Angels of God
 - 22.3.3 The Book of God
 - 22.3.4 The Messengers of God
 - 22.3.5 The Day of Judgement or Resurrection
 - 22.3.6 The Duty of a Muslim
- 22.4 Major Schools of Thoughts, Movements and Sects
 - 22.4.1 Major Schools of Islamic Thoughts and Movements
 - 22.4.2 Sects in Islamic Society
- 22.5 Social Institutions as Viewed by Islam
 - 22.5.1 The Family
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 - 22.5.3 Institutions Governing Inheritance
- 22.6 Islam and Indian Muslims
 - 22.6.1 Elements of Castes
 - 22.6.2 Asharaf and Arzal
- 22.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.8 Key Words
- 22.9 Further Readings
- 22.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

22.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to

- explain the pre-Islamic conditions prevailing in Arabia and the advent of Islam
- discuss the meaning of Islam and its sources and tenets
- describe major schools of Islamic thought and sects
- explain the social organisation
- describe the Islamic society in India.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

In the plurality of Indian culture and civilisation Islam played a crucial role. The life style of the Islamic society is shaped by the tenets of Islam. As a student of sociology you should be interested to know the belief of that society. You would also be interested to know the movements and the conditions leading to the emergence of various sects in that society. We should also know the organisational arrangements of that society through which the belief system operates in daily life. Towards this effort in this unit, we shall discuss the tenets of Islam, the movements schools of thought and sects in the Islamic society in a socio-historical perspectives. We shall also touch upon the social organisations of that society briefly (for details see the course ESO-02, Unit 16 on, Muslim Social Organisation provided above Islam). We shall begin our analysis with an introductory note on the pre-Islamic conditions prevailing in Arab society to know the historical context of emergence of Islam. We shall also describe the meaning of Islam, its sources and tenets. Apart from this, we shall highlight the major schools in Islamic thought and its various sects. Various

social institutions like marriage, divorce, institution governing inheritance in communities following Islam will also be discussed in this unit. An attempt will be made in this unit to analyse the influence of Islamic teachings on social structure. Lastly, we will describe briefly the Islamic society in India.

22.2 THE ADVENT OF ISLAM

Before the advent of Islam, the Arab Society was confronted with many social problems. It was a tribal society. It was centred around a tribe or a kindred. It was a patriarchal society in which all rights were available to the male members and female members were not entitled to any right and were treated like a commodity. They were exchanged and even offered to the guest for sexual pleasure. Over all, the Arab society was confronted with many such evils and the society reached to the point of degeneration. Social reformers and people of wisdom started thinking of bringing reform in the Arabian society. Prophet Mohammad was also perturbed by the decadence in the religious life of the Arabs. He sought an opportunity of chastening their morals by placing before them new values of life. He tried to bind people on the bases of faith rather than on the old bond of blood. This new community was the community of Islam which was based on the brotherhood. The word Islam literally means "Absolute submission to God's will", but this does not imply any idea of fatalism. In its ethical sense, it signifies striving after the ideal of righteousness. The word Islam is also derived from a root word which means "peace". Thus, the true Muslim submits to God's will and obeys His Commandments, and lives at peace with his fellow men.

22.3 TENETS OF ISLAM

Islam does not profess to be a new religion formulated by the Prophet Mohammad but is the continuation of all former religious principles decreed by God through His revelations to all prophets including Moses and Jesus. Islam demands faith in:

- God
- The Angels of God
- The Book of God
- The Apostles of God.
- The Day of Judgement or Resurrection

22.3.1 Islamic Concept of God

Every Muslim believes in God's oneness, that He is one and has no partner, that He is omnipotent, all-owerful, eternal and is every-qualified with the attributes of supreme greatness. All are humble unto Him. All should seek exaltation through Him and humility unto Him, for they all are mere subordinate creatures seeking His favour and most favoured by Him are the pious ones who obey His commandments.

22.3.2 The Angles of God

God has created the Angles. All Muslims must have faith in their existence but they are not to be worshipped. They are created and are free from carnal desires.

22.3.3 The Book of God

It is the belief of Muslims that God has sent Books in different ages in which God revealed. Muslims believe in *Holy Quran* which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

22.3.4 The Messengers of God

As Muslims believe in the Books revealed by God, they also believe in the messengers sent by God in different ages to reclaim mankind from infidelity, idolatry and superstition. The Holy Quran makes no distinction between the Prophets sent by God but according to them Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet of God.

22.3.5 The Day of Judgement or Resurrection

The Muslims also have belief in the Day of Judgement. The dead shall rise from their graves, and every individual shall give an account of his or her own actions. Muslims also have belief in Heaven and Hell.

22.3.6 The Duty of a Muslim

Apart from these beliefs, a Muslim should do the following duties.

- i) Recital of the creed
- ii) Prayer to God five times a day — at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, directly after sunset, and an hour-and-a-half later. A special midday congregational prayer with sermon is binding on Fridays.
- iii) Paying the *Zakat* or legal alms which is a form of charitable tax.
- iv) Fasting during the month of “Ramzan”, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar.
- v) *Haj* i.e. Pilgrimage to the ‘Holy Kaba’ in Mecca once in a life time by those who can afford it.

Through these practices of devotion, a Muslim becomes the master over his passions and desires and attains, through worship and observance of Islamic rules, the apex of dignity, human conduct and elevation of mind.



Mohammedan mother teaching a child to read the Holy Quran, the main scripture of Islam.

Thus according to Islam, a Muslim must have faith in the above mentioned beliefs and must practise the above mentioned practices in order to surrender before the “Will” of God and hence attain a place in the Heaven after his death.

Activity 1

Prepare a two hundred word note on the duty of a Muslim performed by your Muslim friends/colleagues/persons known to you. Exchange your note with other students in the Study Centre, if possible.

22.4 MAJOR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHTS, MOVEMENTS AND SECTS

No religious beliefs and practices operate in isolation. It has to encounter the world around. In this process it influences others and also get influenced. Let us know how Islam encountered the world. Even though the Quran being a guiding principle for the Muslims to carry out their life according to its teachings but as it migrated to other parts of the world its institutions were affected by conditions in different regions during the centuries of their existence. There is a *principle of movement in Islam*, and Muslim institutions and the Muslim way of life have changed in terms of space and time. Let us try to understand the nature and scope of this principle of movement in Islam.

In the absence of a clear and categorical answer from the Holy Book (Quran), the absolute word of God, the prophets’ decisions — His percepts, His acts and practices’ negative as well as positive — were regarded as decisive. An inherent conservatism canonised the *Sunna* — Custom, usage of the ancients; any stepping aside from it was a *‘biddat’* innovation and had to win its way by its merits, in the teeth of strong prejudice. Islam did exchange this practice and replaced it by the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. After the death of Prophet Muhammad, *four* schools came into being to interpret and provide guidance in dispensing justice. As a matter of fact the use of judicial opinion was seriously questioned and its scope precisely defined in the ninth century A.D. Under the *Abbasids* the sources of Muslims law were discussed, and the four schools founded in this period defined the scope of legal friction and equity in the development of Muslim law. These four schools are discussed below briefly.

22.4.1 Major Schools in Islamic Thoughts and Movements

i) Abu Hanifa (AD 699-766)

He founded a School of Islamic jurisprudence and opined that when *Quran* and *Sunna* are silent about a problem, this school emphasized the role of *‘Qiyas’*, reasoning by analogy, to guide the people to carry out the activities.

ii) Malik Ibn Anas (AD 713-95)

Another School of Islamic law was founded by Malik Ibn Anas. According to this school *Quran*, *Suna* and *Ujma* (all religious scriptures) should become the basis of the interpretation of new situation.

iii) Ash-Shafi (AD 767-820)

This School was founded with the intention that the traditions of Prophet Mohammad should become the main source of the interpretation instead of individual opinion, *istihsam*, as well as *istislah*. He fell back on the principle of agreement, *ijma*.

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22.0 OBJECTIVES

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social institutions like marriage, divorce, institution governing inheritance in communities following Islam will also be discussed in this unit. An attempt will be made in this unit to analyse the influence of Islamic teachings on social structure. Lastly, we will describe briefly the Islamic society in India.

22.2 THE ADVENT OF ISLAM

Before the advent of Islam, the Arab Society was confronted with many social problems. It was a tribal society. It was centred around a tribe or a kindred. It was a patriarchal society in which all rights were available to the male members and female members were not entitled to any right and were treated like a commodity. They were exchanged and even offered to the guest for sexual pleasure. Over all, the Arab society was confronted with many such evils and the society reached to the point of degeneration. Social reformers and people of wisdom started thinking of bringing reform in the Arabian society. Prophet Mohammad was also perturbed by the decadence in the religious life of the Arabs. He sought an opportunity of chastening their morals by placing before them new values of life. He tried to bind people on the bases of faith rather than on the old bond of blood. This new community was the community of Islam which was based on the brotherhood. The word Islam literally means "Absolute submission to God's will", but this does not imply any idea of fatalism. In its ethical sense, it signifies striving after the ideal of righteousness. The word Islam is also derived from a root word which means "peace". Thus, the true Muslim submits to God's will and obeys His Commandments, and lives at peace with his fellow men.

22.3 TENETS OF ISLAM

Islam does not profess to be a new religion formulated by the Prophet Mohammad but is the continuation of all former religious principles decreed by God through His revelations to all prophets including Moses and Jesus. Islam demands faith in:

- God
- The Angels of God
- The Book of God
- The Apostles of God.
- The Day of Judgement or Resurrection

22.3.1 Islamic Concept of God

Every Muslim believes in God's oneness, that He is one and has no partner, that He is omnipotent, all-owerful, eternal and is every-qualified with the attributes of supreme greatness. All are humble unto Him. All should seek exaltation through Him and humility unto Him, for they all are mere subordinate creatures seeking His favour and most favoured by Him are the pious ones who obey His commandments.

22.3.2 The Angles of God

God has created the Angles. All Muslims must have faith in their existence but they are not to be worshipped. They are created and are free from carnal desires.

22.3.3 The Book of God

It is the belief of Muslims that God has sent Books in different ages in which God revealed. Muslims believe in *Holy Quran* which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

22.3.4 The Messengers of God

As Muslims believe in the Books revealed by God, they also believe in the messengers sent by God in different ages to reclaim mankind from infidelity, idolatry and superstition. The Holy Quran makes no distinction between the Prophets sent by God but according to them Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet of God.

22.3.5 The Day of Judgement or Resurrection

The Muslims also have belief in the Day of Judgement. The dead shall rise from their graves, and every individual shall give an account of his or her own actions. Muslims also have belief in Heaven and Hell.

22.3.6 The Duty of a Muslim

Apart from these beliefs, a Muslim should do the following duties.

- i) Recital of the creed
- ii) Prayer to God five times a day — at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, directly after sunset, and an hour-and-a-half later. A special midday congregational prayer with sermon is binding on Fridays.
- iii) Paying the *Zakat* or legal alms which is a form of charitable tax.
- iv) Fasting during the month of “Ramzan”, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar.
- v) *Haj* i.e. Pilgrimage to the ‘Holy Kaba’ in Mecca once in a life time by those who can afford it.

Through these practices of devotion, a Muslim becomes the master over his passions and desires and attains, through worship and observance of Islamic rules, the apex of dignity, human conduct and elevation of mind.



Mohammedan mother teaching a child to read the Holy Quran, the main scripture of Islam.

Thus according to Islam, a Muslim must have faith in the above mentioned beliefs and must practise the above mentioned practices in order to surrender before the “Will” of God and hence attain a place in the Heaven after his death.

Activity 1

Prepare a two hundred word note on the duty of a Muslim performed by your Muslim friends/colleagues/persons known to you. Exchange your note with other students in the Study Centre, if possible.

22.4 MAJOR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHTS, MOVEMENTS AND SECTS

No religious beliefs and practices operate in isolation. It has to encounter the world around. In this process it influences others and also get influenced. Let us know how Islam encountered the world. Even though the Quran being a guiding principle for the Muslims to carry out their life according to its teachings but as it migrated to other parts of the world its institutions were affected by conditions in different regions during the centuries of their existence. There is a *principle of movement in Islam*, and Muslim institutions and the Muslim way of life have changed in terms of space and time. Let us try to understand the nature and scope of this principle of movement in Islam.

In the absence of a clear and categorical answer from the Holy Book (Quran), the absolute word of God, the prophets’ decisions — His percepts, His acts and practices’ negative as well as positive — were regarded as decisive. An inherent conservatism canonised the *Sunna* — Custom, usage of the ancients; any stepping aside from it was a *‘biddat’* innovation and had to win its way by its merits, in the teeth of strong prejudice. Islam did exchange this practice and replaced it by the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. After the death of Prophet Muhammad, *four* schools came into being to interpret and provide guidance in dispensing justice. As a matter of fact the use of judicial opinion was seriously questioned and its scope precisely defined in the ninth century A.D. Under the *Abbasids* the sources of Muslims law were discussed, and the four schools founded in this period defined the scope of legal friction and equity in the development of Muslim law. These four schools are discussed below briefly.

22.4.1 Major Schools in Islamic Thoughts and Movements

i) Abu Hanifa (AD 699-766)

He founded a School of Islamic jurisprudence and opined that when *Quran* and *Sunna* are silent about a problem, this school emphasized the role of *‘Qiyas’*, reasoning by analogy, to guide the people to carry out the activities.

ii) Malik Ibn Anas (AD 713-95)

Another School of Islamic law was founded by Malik Ibn Anas. According to this school *Quran*, *Suna* and *Ujma* (all religious scriptures) should become the basis of the interpretation of new situation.

iii) Ash-Shafi (AD 767-820)

This School was founded with the intention that the traditions of Prophet Mohammad should become the main source of the interpretation instead of individual opinion, *istihsam*, as well as *istislah*. He fell back on the principle of agreement, *ijma*.

iv) **Ahmad Ibn Hambal (AD 780-855)**

This School minimised the role of *ijma* and *Qiyas* in the interpretation of law and stressed the Quran, and Sunna as the primary roots of Islamic law.

v) **Ibn-i-Taimiyya (13 Century)**

After these schools, certain movements were started to interpret and provide solution to the problem arising out of changing situations to the Muslims. Ibn-i-Taimiyya in the 13th Century provided the basis of the reorientation of Islamic belief and practices according to Quranic injunctions and the traditions of the Prophet.

22.4.2 Sects in Islamic Society

Followers of Islam are divided into various sub-divisions in terms of sects. Broadly speaking the Muslim world is divided into two fairly defined sections of Islam, namely, *Sunni* and *Shiah*, the first being by far the larger and more influential.

1) **The Sunni**

The Sunnis are the ardent followers of the faith in the *Sunna* or Traditions. But they differ from the Shias in points other than belief in tradition. They made the position of the *Khalifa* a matter for selection or choice by the selected people of the community. They assert that Muhammad never intended that a *Khalifa* should succeed him in any other way.

ii) **The Shiah**

This is another sect of Muslims who only differ from the *Sunnis* in terms of hereditary right of the descendents of Muhammad to be the only legitimate *Khalifa*. They say that the three *Khalifas* — Abu Bakr, Omar and Osman were imposters and usurpers, and only Ali and his heir should have followed the Prophet as leaders or Imam of the faithful. They emphasise the right of Ali from the fact of his nearness of relationship, he being not only the Prophet's *cousin*, but the husband of Fatima, the only surviving daughter of Prophet Muhammad.



A mosque (L) and the Holy Kaaba (R)

Check Your Progress 1

i) Describe the meaning of Islam in five lines.

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ii) Mention duties expected of a Muslim.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

iii) Indicate the major sects of Islam and points of difference among them in five lines.

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22.5 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AS VIEWED BY ISLAM

The belief system of the religious organisations are operated through certain social institutions. As a student of sociology, you should be interested to know the very nature of these institutions. There are three main *bases* of the Muslim social institutions:

- Family
- Marriage, divorce
- Institutions governing inheritance

In Unit 16 of ESO-02 we discussed the institutions of family, marriage and the laws of inheritance among the Muslims in India. In this section we shall try to present a broad view of these institutions within the Islamic religious and social order.

22.5.1 Family

Family has existed in all societies though it takes different forms in different cultures. The institution of family in Islam should be studied in the light of Islamic way of life and Islamic culture. Islam has given full importance to family and laid down certain rules and regulations to maintain its shape and to stop it from disintegration. About one third of the Quran and many traditions of the Prophet are related to the family and to process how a family can work properly and smoothly and how every member of the family can have equal rights.

In Islam the family is an extended family — taking within it members from three or four generations. Its structure has generally three folds. The first and most close consists of the husband, the wife, their children, their parents who live with them and their *servants*. The second group of the family consists of a number of close relatives with whom marriage is prohibited. It is not necessary for them to live together. They have claims upon each other. This relationship emerges from blood relations, relations by marriage and foster nursing. Relations based on blood include the following categories:

- Father, mother, grand-father, grand-mother and other direct ascendants.
- Direct descendants that is, sons, daughters, grand-sons, grand-daughters etc.,
- Relations of the second degree (such as brothers, sisters and their descendants).
- Father's or mother's sister (not their daughter or other descendants),

The relations based on relations by marriage include:

- Mother-in-law, father-in-law, grand-mother-in-law, grand-father-in-law,
- Wife's daughter, husbands' sons or their grand or great grand daughters or sons respectively,
- Son's wife, son's son's wife, daughter's husband, step mother, step father.

It is significant to mention there that a number of religions decrees asked people to consider their slaves and servants as part of the family and should be give them proper treatment.

The family, with all its contributory and co-existing factors, forms the nucleus of the total Islamic order. Those relations which are not included in these three folds forms the outer layer of the family. As they are included in the second or third lines of the inheritors, they too have their rights and obligations.

a) Objectives and Functions of Family

The main objective of family is the preservation of human society and civilisation. The whole socio-cultural structure is based on it. It is just like a mechanism which is self-sustaining in order to ensure social, ideological and cultural stability over entire society. The main functions and objectives of the family as described in *Qur'an* and *Shariah* are as follows:

i) Preservation and Continuation of Human Race

The mechanism of preservation and reproduction is based on the survival of human race and culture, and continuity in the functioning. For this purpose nature has provided differences, both psychological and physiological, between the sexes. Both the sexes are complimentary to each other. This process of procreation and all the facts effecting it, can only function when the whole process will have stable structure. Men, women and child, they all have a definite role to play while living in a society. They all need a stable and lasting institution so that they can perform their roles well. The family is considered as the main institution which can take care of the whole process. The Quran says:

“O Mankind, be conscious of your duty to your Lord, who created you from a single soul, created of life nature, his mate, and from the two created and spread many men and women“ (Holy Quran Ayat. - 4:1).

“Your Women are a tillage for you; so come in to your tillage as you wish and take care of what is for you, and be conscious of your duty to God and know that you shall meet him” (Holy Quran Ayat - 2: 223).

Here “take care of what is for you” means the children expected from this relationship, their education, upbringing, moral training and socialisation.

ii) Protection of Morals

Islam forbids non-marital sex in all its forms. But marriage is a substitute which enables men and women to fulfil their urge which is quite natural and procreative.

iii) Psycho-Emotional Stability—Love and Kindness

To maintain psychological, emotional and spiritual fellowship is the another important objective of family. The relationship between husband and wife is spiritual and not of selfishness. This function of marriage and family is emphasised in the Quran in a number of ways. At one place, the relationship of husband and wife is described as that of body and garment. “They are like garment to you and you are (like) a garment to them” (Holy Quran-Ibid-2-187).

This expresses and emphasises their closeness and oneness much more grand than legal equality. As cloth protects the body in the same way husband protects the wife and they become guardians to each other.

iv) Socialisation and Value Orientation

Family is supposed to be the basic organ of socialisation. And this is referred by prophet at various places in *Hadith* when he has said that “of all that a father can give to his children; the best is their good education and training”.

Although to take care of one’s children, and younger brother and sister is the primary responsibility but the family covers a number of relatives far or near. Quran and *Shariah* has emphasised at several places at the care of parents and of the relatives who are poor and weak.

v) Social and Economic Security

Social and economic rights of the family members are saved by the institution of family, which is an important part of the Islamic system. The Prophet has said:

“When God endows you with prosperity, spend first on yourself and your family”.

The husband is legally directed to look after his family even if the wife holds the property. Blood relatives should be helped and it is emphasised at a number of places. Any social contribution and *Zakat*, poor relatives have first claim over it.

22.5.2 Marriage and Divorce

For the preservation of family and to make this institution function smoothly, marriage is enjoined and encouraged vigorously. The Prophet emphasised the necessity of marriage saying “To live in marriage is to observe my way. He who turns away from this way is not of me”.

The Islamic view of marriage is that it is a means of reproduction and not the means of satisfying sexual desire. This is made clear by a very short saying of Prophet:

“Marry and generate”

The Arabic word for marriage is “*nikah*” which means uniting. Except for some special reason, every Muslim is supposed to marry.

Box 2

Quran declares marriage as a contract, a contract between husband and wife. The marriage contract is entered into by the agreement from both the parties, that is the parties of husband and wife. This agreement is made in the presence of some witnesses, and this is only essential while making a marriage contract. At the time of marriage, a particular amount is settled for the woman which is called *mehr*, but the marriage is also valid even if the *mehr* is not settled or the amount of the money to be given is not fixed.

a) Prohibited Marital Ties

The Quran makes certain marriage relationship unlawful□:

“Forbidden unto you are your mothers, and your daughters, and your sisters, and your father’s sister, and your mother’s sister and your brothers’ daughters and your sisters’ daughters, and your foster mother, and your foster sister and your mother-in-law and your step daughters. And that (it is forbidden into you) that you should not marry two sisters at a time.

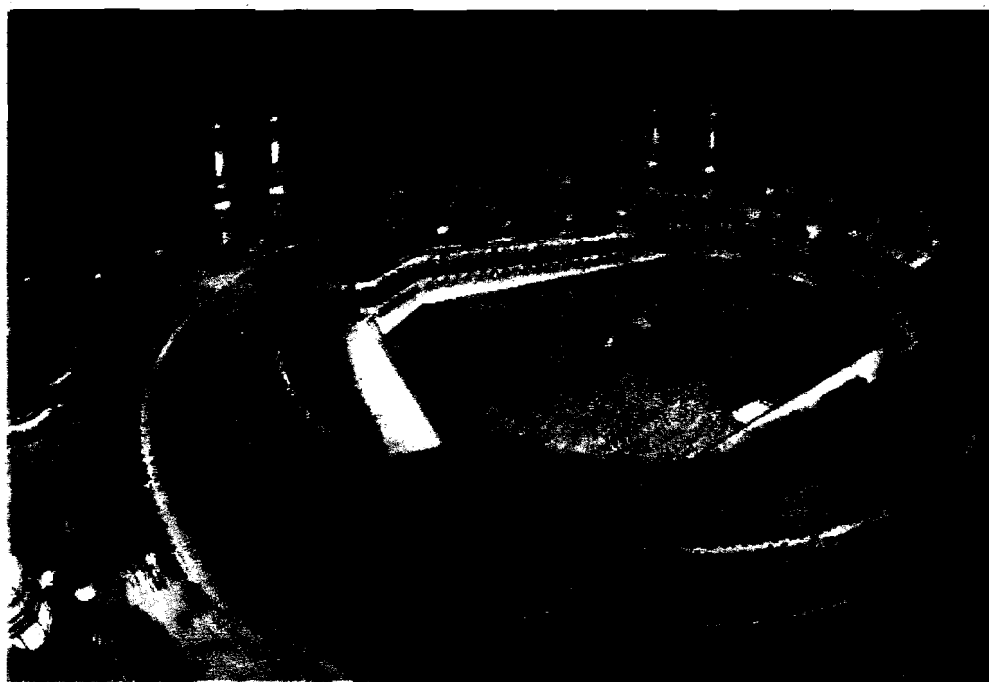
A woman should not marry a man who is already married to her paternal aunt.

b) Types of Marriage

i) Polygamy

Before Mohammad, the number of wives depended upon the will of Arabian people and their social and economic conditions. They were free to marry at any time and this marriage was supposed to be valid. The new rules which came into practice, in the time of Prophet was the check on the number of wives. Quran restricted this number to four but side by side Quran makes it necessary to treat all the four equally.

ii) Banning of Polyandry



Kaaba, the famous pilgrimage centre of the Muslims.

As a rule, Islam does not allow woman, in any case, to marry more than one husband at a time.

iii) **Muta marriage**

From pre-Islamic times, there exists another type of marriage called *Muta* marriage. The object of this marriage was to provide a man with a wife when he is away from home for any reason. The distinguishing character of this type of marriage is that this contract is purely personal and it is made without any consultation with the relatives of the woman. The children of such marriages are legitimate and they have equal share in the property of the father, but unlike the ordinary wife, the wife in such marriage has no legal right of maintenance over the husband. She does not even inherit the property of her husband, nor her husband has any share in her property.

In Iran and other Shi'ite countries, this is a very common practice to take a woman for a fixed period. This time varies from a day to a year or several years. However, all the sects of Muslims agree that this type of marriage is unlawful and illegal except *Akbarishiahs*.

c) **Divorce**

In Islam, marriage is just a civil contract. The Prophet framed the laws of marriage and divorce in such a way that it ensures the permanence of marriages without affecting the freedom of the individual. The total body of Islamic law is governed by the principle of flexibility that is why under certain circumstances it allows more than one wife, and favours the dissolution of marriage. Sometimes in married life such situations do arise when it becomes very difficult for both husband and wife to live together. In such situations either the dissatisfied husband or dissatisfied wife was compelled to exercise this right of divorce. But this step is taken as the last resort when all the attempts at reconciliation fail. The Prophet has condemned divorce in most serious terms by pronouncement that:

“Of all the things permissible the most displeasing to Allah is divorce”.

Even when divorce becomes necessary, the parties are enjoined to honour each others rights. They should separate from each other to kindness and the man in no case allowed to take back any of the gifts or property he has given to the wife.

i) **Husband's Right of Pronouncement of Divorce**

Although Quran permits husband to pronounce divorce yet a lot of limitations are put upon the exercise of this right. Certain conditions were imposed by the Prophet upon exercising the right of divorce which on one hand put a check on the use of one sided and unwise power, and on the other hand it provided enough time for the husband and wife for an agreement if they so desire. The types of divorce which are recognised by the Islamic law, the one which has got the approval of the Holy Prophet is the *Ahsan* type of Talaq. This form of divorce, involves the following conditions each of which provides a way for reconciliation or prevent from permanent break up.

- The husband, in the first place, must pronounce only *one repudiation*, the object of this limitation being, that he may subsequently, *when better sense prevails*, revoke the repudiation.
- The repudiation must be pronounced when the wife is in a state of purity, and there is no bar to sexual intercourse, it being declared unlawful to pronounce repudiation when the wife is in menses.

- The husband must abstain from *connubial* intercourse with his wife after pronouncing repudiation for the period of three months.

The purpose of this tradition is to avoid hasty decision on the part of the husband. The time period which is provided to the husband through disinclination arising from the wife's impurity, and by fixing a long period of abstinence, is enough to reconsider his decision of divorce. In the meantime he can repent and can take back his wife before the expiry of the term fixed. But if the time period fixed passes and reconciliation is not made, the wife becomes unlawful to him.

ii) Wife's Right of Divorce

Like every other institution women are given an equally balanced position regarding divorce. The wife can ask her husband to give her a divorce but she has to return back *mehr* (the dowry). The technical term for the wife's right to divorce is called *Khula*. The wife can take a divorce under these conditions.

- The wife can take divorce if her husband is missing for seven years and cannot be located.
- If the wife fails to return the *mehr* which is necessary in *Khula*, there is yet another way by which a wife can get separation from her husband and that is *Mubarat*. In this type no compensation is necessary and complete separation can be sought just by mutual consent of the husband and wife.
- If husband ill-treats his wife, and is abusive and brutal she should complain against her husband and she can have the formal separation by the decree of court.

If the judge finds her complaints true, he asks the husband to repudiate her. In case husband refuses to do so the judge himself will pronounce a repudiation and it will operate as valid, and the husband will be liable to pay whole of the deferred dowry. This process is known as *Tafriq* or legal reparation in the Mohammadan law, and it is based on the words of Muhammad:

"If a Woman be prejudiced by a marriage, let it be broken off"

A divorce may be granted by the court for:

- Habitual ill-treatment of the wife,
- Non-fulfillment of the terms of marriage contract,
- Insanity,
- Incurable impotency,
- Any other similar causes which in the opinion of the court justify a divorce.

22.5.3 Institutions Governing Inheritance

Inheritance exists in every society in one form or the other where institution of private property is recognised as the basis of social and economic system. Inheritance is the process in which the property of the dead person is given in the possession of the living person. Islam introduces many reforms in the laws of inheritance. Islam defined and determined in clear terms the share of each inheritor. A check was imposed on the right of the property owner. He cannot dispose off his property according to his will. The social and economic rights of women were safeguarded by allotting a definite share in the property. She becomes the co-sharer with males. In this way the dignity of women is restored. The general principle of inheritance is first laid down in the following words:

For man has a share of the what parents and the near relatives leave, and for women a share of what the parents and near relatives leave, whether it be little or much: (Holy Quran-Ayat 4, 7).

If a person dies leaving behind a son and a daughter, the property of the deceased will be divided into three parts, out of which two parts will be given to the son and one to the daughter.

i) Shares and Quranic Heirs

There is a very exhaustive description of laws relating to inheritance in Quran. The first group of heirs of those relatives who are very close to the deceased and a specific share is allotted to them by the Quran. The Quranic heirs

- Heirs by affinity,
- Husband,
- Wife,
- Blood relatives,
- True grand father,
- Sons' daughter,
- Full sister,
- Consanguine sister,
- Uterine brother,
- Uterine sister,
- Share for Blood relations.
- Share by affinity: The husband's share is one half of the property of the deceased wife. In case of children it is one fourth.
- The wife is not entitled to one fourth, if the husband dies childless, otherwise it is one eighth.

Father's share is one sixth when the deceased leaves a son or a son's son, but when the deceased is not survived by a son or grandson, his father will, in addition to this share also get a share being a *Asaba*.

Check Your Progress 2

i) How has the relationship between husband and wife been described by the Holy Quran?

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ii) Mention the nature of Muslim marriage in four lines.

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iii) Describe shares by affinity in about three lines.

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22.6 ISLAM AND INDIAN MUSLIMS

India is a plural society. There has been the coexistence of various religious groups for centuries. In the process of this co-existence the Islamic society has been significantly influenced by the indigenous norms, values, customs and traditions.

Normally, Islamic society is divided into sects i.e. *Sunnis* and *Shias* as they hold divergent views of and interpretation over Islamic texts and traditions. In India, a vast majority of them are *sunnis*. But Indian Muslims are divided into various groups which reflect the influence of Hindu beliefs and practices specially those related to caste system.

22.6.1 Elements of Castes

Indian Muslims, although divided on the caste lines, yet, these divisions cannot be said to have the characteristics of a caste in the true sense of the term. These divisions are based on the basis of the occupations followed by each group. Different groups are identified on the basis of the occupations followed by them and the group does not specify the occupation as in the case of the caste system. Apart from this characteristic, other characteristics of the caste are not visible among the Muslims such as endogamy, hierarchy, untouchability, purity and pollution. There is however, a section of Sociologists in India who say that the Muslim society is divided on the caste line such as: Syed, Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan. They are also of the view that the elements of caste are apparently visible in the Muslim society. Though, there is no caste system among the Muslims, there are caste-like traits apparent in their social groupings.

22.6.2 Asharaf and Arzal

Some sociologists are of the opinion that there is no caste system among the Muslims but they are divided into two categories: *Ashraf* (honourable) and *Arzal* (unclean). Ashrafs are those who claim to be descendants of early Muslim immigrants and historically were near to the seat of power. *Arzal* means new converts and common people.

In spite of difficulties in applying the caste model on Indian Muslims, it cannot be denied that Indian Muslims have developed a sort of caste-like divisions among them owing to the impact of Hindu social organisation.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Describe the elements of caste as found among Muslims in India. Use four lines for your answer.

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22.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, an attempt has been made to explain the basic principle of Islam. First of all, the pre Islamic conditions of the Arab society have been described. You must have got an idea, through this unit, about the sources and tenets of Islam. Like other world religions, there are certain sects and schools of thought in Islam also. This unit has thrown light on them. After the advent of Islam, the social institutions were reorganised around the principle of *Shariat*. This has also been covered by this unit. In the last section of this unit we discussed the Islamic society in India, briefly.

22.8 KEY WORDS

Sunna	: Customs, Usages.
Biddat	: Innovation. It sometimes it may mean deviation also
Quias	: Reasoning by analogy to guide the people to carry out the activities.
Akbarishiahs	: A practice observed by Shia Muslims, particularly so in Persia, to keep a woman as a wife for a fixed period.
Asaraf	: Honourable
Arzal	: Unclean

22.9 FURTHER READINGS

Ameer, A. 1978. *The Spirit of Islam*, Idarah-1 Adabiyar: Delhi.

Kader, A.A. 1989. *The Conception of God in Islam*, The Islamic Centre: Washington.

Takle, J. 1988. *The Faith of Islam*, Deep & Deep: New Delhi.

22.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Prophet Muhammad propagated a faith in Arab known as Islam. The literal meaning of Islam is 'Absolute submission to God's Will'. It is derived from a root which means 'peace'. As a religion, it is a continuation of former religious principles decreed by God through his revelations to all prophets including Moses and Jesus.
- ii)
 - a) Recital of Creed,
 - b) Prayer to God five times a day,
 - c) Paying the *Zakat*,
 - d) Fasting during the month of *Ramzan*,
 - e) Haj i.e. Pilgrimage to the Holy Kaba
- iii) Broadly speaking, Muslim world is divided into two major sects: *Sunni* and *Shia*. The *sunnis* are the ardent followers of *sunna* or traditions. The major difference

between these two sects is on questions of succession and *khalif*. The *Sunnis* believe that Muhammad never intended that a *khalifa* should succeed him and have equal faith in Abu Bakr, Omar, Osman and Ali as Khalifa, whereas, *Shias* believe that only Ali is legitimate successor and khalifa.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Quran declares marriage as a contract between husband and wife—the contracting parties. The contract is made in the presence of witnesses. At the time of marriage, a particular amount is settled for the woman which is called the *mehr*.
- ii) The Islamic view of marriage or *Nikah* is that it is a means of reproduction and not the means of sexual satisfaction. The meaning of *Nikah* is uniting together. Every Muslim is supposed to enter this *sacred* contract.
- iii) In the shares of affinity, the husband's share is one half of the property of the deceased wife but if she has children, it is one-fourth.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) There are certain elements of caste among the Indian Muslims. The position of Saiyad, Sheikh and Pathan is determined on the basis of birth. There is a feeling of hierarchy among the superior Muslims (Asharaf) and Muslims considered to be low (Arzal), though Islam believes in the equality of its followers.

UNIT 23 SIKHISM

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 The Origin and Growth of Sikhism
 - 23.2.1 Socio-cultural Context
 - 23.2.2 Guru Nanak's Life and Message
- 23.3 Development of Sikhism
 - 23.3.1 Creation of New Society
 - 23.3.2 Development of Sikhism
- 23.4 Sikh Worship and Rituals
 - 23.4.1 The Worship Pattern
 - 23.4.2 Life Cycle Rituals
 - 23.4.3 Baptism Among the Sikhs
- 23.5 Sikh Code of Conduct and Reform Movements
 - 23.5.1 Code of Conduct
 - 23.5.2 Movements of Socio-Religious Reform
 - 23.5.3 Impact on Indian Society
- 23.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.7 Key Words
- 23.8 Further Readings
- 23.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

23.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with Sikhism, its religious belief system and development and functioning as a religious society in India. After reading this unit you should be able to

- explain the socio-cultural background of the emergence of Sikhism
- describe the model of Sikh society as shown by Guru Nanak
- discuss the development of Sikhism over a period of time
- explain the pattern of worship and ritual life among the Sikhs
- analyse the broad features of the religious reform movements as emerged in Sikhism.

23.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 19 of ESO-02 we discussed various aspects of the social organisation of the Sikh society in India. You may like to see that unit before you start reading this unit on Sikhism. As a student of sociology, you would be interested to know the socio-cultural background on which Sikhism emerged in India, its development and functioning. You also would be interested to know the reform movements as emerged in Sikhism. All these aspects are discussed in this unit keeping in view the plurality of Indian culture. This unit has been written from the socio-historical perspective.

It begins with a brief discussion on the socio-cultural background from which Sikhism emerged in India. In the initial section (Section 23.2) we also discuss the philosophical foundation of Sikhism as depicted in the life and message of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak established a model of the Sikh society. We discuss that model in section 23.3. Sikhism has undergone various stages of development. We discuss these developments in the context of the arrival of the Gurus in Sikhism. Sikh society follows a distinct pattern of worship. They follow distinct rituals and baptism.

We discuss these aspects in section 23.4. Lastly we discuss Sikh code of conduct and movements of religious reforms in Sikhism. Here we discuss only the Nirankari, Namdhari and the Akali movements briefly as examples for your understanding.

23.2 THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF SIKHISM

In this section we shall deal with the social background of the development of Sikhism and the belief system around which Sikhism revolves.

23.2.1 Socio-cultural Context

Sikhism was born at a time when there was a growing conflict amongst the two dominating religious traditions of Hinduism and Islam of India. Guru Nanak the founder of the Sikh faith is generally depicted as a reconciler of the two conflicting traditions. This is how the Guru is still fondly remembered in Punjab:

“Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindu Ka guru, Musalman Ka Pir”.
(Baba Nanak, the great man of God
The *guru* of the Hindus and the *pir* of the Musalmans).

While early chronicles of the Sikhs have generally described this faith as the offshoot of the Bhakti movement, some modern Western scholars tend to describe this as a part of the Indian Sant tradition. Without denying that Guru Nanak and the movement that he started was greatly influenced by the Bhakti movement in which he was born, a careful study of the Sikh religion and philosophy shows that it had distinct features of its own. That is why it developed into a full-fledged religious movement soon after its birth. This is the reason why in this block, a separate unit has been devoted for discussing its teachings and their relevance for the followers of Sikhism in particular and for others in general.

The work Sikh is derived from the Sanskrit word Shishya, meaning disciple or learner. Thus those who followed Guru Nanak, the founder, came to be known as the Sikhs. In the Sikh faith reverence for the Guru (Preceptor) is the cardinal quality and devotion to their teachings a sacred duty. Great emphasis is laid in Sikh way of life upon practising moral and spiritual values. These values are mainly related to honesty, sharing and doing away with the distinction of high and low/rich and poor.

23.2.2 Guru Nanak's Life and Message

Sikh belief system was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539). A precocious child, Nanak had a deeply meditative cast of mind and hence all attempts to engage him in wordly pursuits failed. Guru Nanak was a contemporary of three Lodhi rulers — Babbar Lodhi (1451-1489), Sikandar Lodhi (1489-1517) and Ibrahim Lodhi (1517-1526). The Guru also saw the foundation of the Mughal Empire being laid by Babar, who was succeeded by his son Humayun during the life span of Guru Nanak. In his hymns Guru Nanak refers to the times and makes pointed references to the omissions and commissions of the Lodhi and Mughal rulers. Guru Nanak refers to the army of invaders whom he calls as “crowd of sins in a bridal procession” demanding the hand of the bride called India. Right from childhood he was engrossed in spiritual pursuits. Prevalent hypocrisy in the name of religion greatly upset him. Nanak delighted in serving the poor and needed. A story is told that his father gave him some money and sent him to neighbouring town to do some profitable business. On the way Nanak met some Sadhus who had not eaten for many days. Nanak purchased eatables with the money his father gave and ate the hungry Sadhus. When Nanak's father asked him as to what he had done he replied, that he had made a “most profitable bargain”. On noticing that Nanak was not interested in

business his father sent him to Sultanpur Lodhi, a town in the Kapurthala District of Punjab. Here Nanak was employed as a storekeeper by the local ruler. This duty was discharged by Nanak with great rectitude.

i) Enlightenment of Nanak

It was during his stay in Sultanpur that Nanak got his enlightenment. According to popular traditions one morning when Nanak went for a dip in the river Beas flowing nearby he was absorbed in thoughts of God and, as is narrated by the Biographers, in this state he was ushered into the Divine Presence. Blessed by the Almighty, Nanak came out of the rivulet to preach holy name of the God. The first words that Nanak uttered after his enlightenment were, "There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman". At a time when Hindus and Muslims were engaged in sectarian conflicts these words heralded Nanak's new mission of reconciliation of the two.

ii) Message of Nanak

Nanak, the Guru was accompanied by a Muslim musician named Mardana on long journeys to preach his gospel of love and truth. He travelled to different parts of India and other countries and visited religious centres of Hindus and Muslims. Through dialogues he convinced people that good actions alone could ensure salvation. While in Mecca he was asked who was superior, a Hindu or a Muslim, to which the Guru replied that without good actions both were of no consequence. "Truth is high but higher still is truthful living", said he.



Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism.

The Guru was moved by the sufferings of the population that he could not help taking even the creator to task:

“Though *Khurashan* has been shielded by Thee,
 Though terror has struck at the heart of Hindustan,
 Thou, O Creator of all things,
 Takest of Thyself no blame;
 Thou hath sent *Yama* disguised as the great Moghal, Babar.
 Terrible was the slaughter
 Loud were the cries of the lamenters.
 Did this not awaken pity in Thee, O Lord?
 Thou art part and parcel of all things equally, O Creator;
 Thou must feel for all men and all nations.
 If a strong man attack the another who is equally strong;
 Where is the grief in this, or whose is the grievance?
 But when a fierce tiger preys on the helpless cattle,
 The Herdsman must answer for it”.

The Guru was particularly moved by the helpless and pitiable condition of the young women who were reduced to slavery by the invading army and thus described the condition in one of his hymns:

“The tresses that adorned these lovely heads,
 And were parted with vermilion,
 Have been shorn with cruel thears:
 Dust has been thrown on their shaven heads.
 These beauties lent charm to the couches they reclined on,
 Now they are dragged away, with ropes round their necks;
 Barbarous soldiers have taken them prisoners and disgraced them”.

The following hymn of Guru Nanak in *Majh-di-Var* best described the time of Guru Nanak:

“The *Kalyug* is a dagger, the rulers are butchers;
Dharma has taken wings and flower away.
 The dark night of falsehood reigns supreme, and
 The moon of truth appears not to have risen anywhere”.

iii) Guru Nanak's Philosophy

Guru Nanak preached strict monotheism and described the Creator as *Ikk* (one), without a second. Guru Nanak's philosophy of God is best described in *Japji*, the primal creed. His teachings were strictly monotheistic, without scope for the worship of any deity or human teacher. Contrary to medieval Indian practice of denouncing the world for spiritual elevation, Guru Nanak believed that the world was worth living in. “This world is the abode of God and the Tune One lives therein.” Guru Nanak believed that it was possible to live pure among the impurities of life. “As the lotus like the detached in waters, as the duck floateth care-free on the stream, so both one cross the Sea of Existence, his mind attuned to the Word. One liveth detached; Enshrining the One Lord in the mind, shorn of hope, living in the midst of hope.”

iv) Three Principles of Nanak's Teaching

Guru Nanak's teachings can be summed up on three simple Punjabi words, *Naam Japna*, *Kirti Karni* and *Wand Chakna*. Translated into English this means “always remembering God, earning one's livelihood through honest means and sharing the fruits one one's labour with others”. To practise his teachings of equality Guru

Nanak started the twin institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat*, emphasizing that all sit in a congregation and while partaking food from the community kitchen should sit in one line without distinction of high and low or rich and poor.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The work *Sikh* was derived from the word *Shishya* originally derived from:
- Sanskrit
 - Parsi
 - Pali
 - Punjabi
- ii) Write a note on enlightenment of Nanak in about six lines.

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- iii) What are the three principles of Guru Nanak's teachings?

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23.3 DEVELOPMENT OF SIKHISM

In this sub-section we shall deal with the model of the Sikh society by Guru Nanak and development of Sikhism over a period of time.

23.3.1 Creation of a New Society

Sociologically you would be interested to know how a new society is developed based on religious faith and how it controls the behaviour of its followers. Guru Nanak helped develop a new society. Let us see how he defined the code of conduct and behaviour patterns of the member of that society. Towards the last phase of his life Guru Nanak settled at a small village on the banks of river Ravi (now in Pakistan) and called it Kartarpur, i.e., God's abode. There he worked on the field and shared his earning with others. A community of disciples grew up at Kartarpur but it could not be described as monastic order. On the other hand, it was a fellowship of ordinary men and women engaged in normal occupations of life, earning their livelihood through honest means and sharing the fruit of their labour with others. But what was remarkable about Kartarpur was that this provided a model of loving which was to become the basis for the development of Sikh society and Sikh value systems in the days to come. Herein the Guru and his followers got up before dawn and after ablutions performed their prayers. The spiritual routine being over, the Guru and his followers partook the sacred food from the community kitchen and then attended to the day's work. In the evening they again assembled

at a common place and performed their evening prayer and shared food. Before going to bed they all recited *Kirtan Sohila*, songs of acclaim.

Box 1

The Sikh Gurus laid great emphasis on early rising and remembering God. This new philosophy of life with its emphasis on early rising, working hard and always remembering God created a new society in which there could neither be any exploiters nor exploitation and exploited. The emphasis on honest living and sharing one's earnings with others laid the foundations of an egalitarian order. The Sikh Gurus brought about a happy union between the spiritual and temporal domains.

23.3.2 Development of Sikhism

As you saw in the case of other religions that over a period of time various developments took place in the religious philosophies enriching the content of the same. Similarly various developments have taken place in Sikhism over a period of time.

In the processes of these developments various institutions had evolved in Sikhism. Guru Nanak was followed by nine successive Gurus who not only continued his precepts and ideals but made significant contributions in evolving different institutions for the Sikh community.

The second Guru, Guru Angad Dev, evolved a distinct script called *Gurmukhi* (coming from the mouth of the Guru) which became the sole medium for sacred writings of the Sikhs. It is in this script that the *Guru Granth*, the holy book of the Sikhs, is written.

The Third Guru, Guru Amar Dass, strengthened the Sikh movement by starting the institutions of *Manjis* and *Piris*. There are positions which important male and female Sikh missionaries occupied in their respective areas. For obliterating the caste distinctions, which then plagued the Indian society, the Guru made it obligatory for all the visitors to eat in the community kitchen before they could see him. There is a strong Sikh saying that the contemporary Mughal Emperor Akbar who went to see the Guru at Goindwal had to eat in Langar while sitting in one line on the floor among with his nobles and servants. The Emperor was so much impressed by the Guru's strict practice of equality that he donated a village on which the modern city of Amritsar came up later during the time of the fourth and fifth Sikh Gurus. The Guru also got many *baolis* (small tanks) constructed to help his followers take morning bath which is considered important for purification of body and mind. The Guru evolved simple and meaningful rituals for the Sikh community.

The Fourth Guru, Guru Ram Dass, laid the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar, which later developed as the spiritual capital of the Sikh faith. By inviting artisans and traders and by encouraging them to settle there the Guru also laid the foundation of a big trade and industrial centre which developed around the newly founded city.

The fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev, son and successor of Guru Ram Das, built the Harmandir, which is popularly known as the Golden Temple and compiled and installed the Holy Book the *Guru Granth*, therein.

The Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind built Akal Takhat, the Throne of the Immortal, and declared it as the centre of Sikh temporal authority.

The Seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai continued the mission of his predecessors and

appointed the Bhai families of Bagrian and Kaithal to look after the missionary work.

The Eighth Guru, Guru Har Kishan cured the victims of small-pox in Delhi and is remembered in the daily Sikh prayer as the one whose very sight dispels all miseries.

The Ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur set a unique example of religious freedom by sacrificing his life for the protection of Tilak, Janju the sacred marks of the Hindu religion. This is described by the *tenth Guru* "as a unique event in this age of Kaliyug". Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom proved to be a turning point in Sikh history.

In order to defend dharma, Guru Govind Singh, *the tenth and last* of the Sikh Gurus, created the order of the Khalsa. On the Baisakhi day of the year 1699, the Guru called an assembly of the Sikhs at Anandpur, in the Shivalik hills. While



Guru Nanak with the other nine Gurus of Sikhism depicted around him.

addressing a packed audience the Guru demanded the heads of five Sikhs. The five who offered themselves and were subsequently initiated into the Sikh faith are popularly remembered in the Sikh prayer as the *Panj Piare* or the five beloved ones. These five beloved ones came from different directions and belonged to different traditional Indian castes, three of them belonged to the so called low castes. After being renamed and each getting the surname of Singh, meaning Lion, they were enjoined to support the five symbols of the new order — unshorn hair, a comb, short breeches, a steel bracelet and a sword.

A significant development in the history of the Sikh faith was Guru Gobind Singh declaring the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book, as the Guru eternal for the Sikhs. Compiled by Guru Arjun Dev, the Sikh Holy Book is a unique example of ecumenical spirit of the Sikh faith. The Guru Granth contains 5,894 hymns, the largest number of them (2, 216) having been contributed by the fifth Guru himself. Apart from the hymns of the Sikh Gurus, the Guru Granth also contains the composition of the Muslim and Hindu saints some of them belonging to the so called lower caste of the Hindu society. Equal respect to all religions is best demonstrated when the devout bow before the Holy Book which contains the hymns of saints from different religious dominations.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Who among the following Gurus laid the foundation of the Holy City of Amritsar?
 - a) Guru Har Rai
 - b) Guru Ram Dass
 - c) Guru Teg Bahadur
 - d) Guru Govind Singh

- ii) Who compiled Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy book of the Sikh?
 - a) Guru Ram Dass
 - b) Guru Teg Bahadur
 - c) Guru Govind Singh
 - d) Guru Arjun Dev

- iii) Guru Granth contains the hymns composed by
 - a) Sikh Gurus exclusively
 - b) Sikh Gurus and the Hindu Saints only
 - c) Sikh Gurus and the Muslim Saints only
 - d) Sikh Gurus and the Hindu and the Muslim Saints.

23.4 SIKH WORSHIP AND RITUALS

The Sikhs, follow a distinct pattern of worship. The Sikh Community is centered around various rituals. In this section we shall discuss the distinct pattern of worship followed by the Sikhs and few of their life cycle rituals.

23.4.1 The Worship Pattern

Against the prevalent Hindu practice of worshipping the idols, The Sikh Guru advocated worship of *Akal* (Timeless God). The Sikh temple, called *Gurudwara*,

is not a mere place of worship but also serves as a shelter for the shelterless, iron-
 fort for the destitute and refuge for the helpless where all the visitors irrespective
 of their religious affiliations are served free food and given shelter and protection.
 In the centre of the Gurudwara, Guru Granth, the Holy Book, is installed on a high
 pedestal; the idea being that the holy book occupies a place higher than the followers
 who sit on the floor. Since complete equality is preached and practised, there is no
 special place marked for important persons in the Gurudwara.

There are Gurudwaras in different parts of India, which are historic because of
 their association with the Gurus. There are other Gurudwaras throughout the world
 wherever there are Sikhs. These are not historic but are built by the followers to
 serve as centres for their religious worship attended by large gatherings. The
 Nishan Sahib, huge yellow triangular flag, with Sikh symbol of *Khanda*, marks the
 Sikh religious place.

Visitors from all sections of society can enter the Gurudwara after removing their
 shoes and cleaning their feet and covering their head. Doors of the Gurudwara are
 open to all communities. It is significant to point out that the famous Golden Temple
 at Amritsar has four doors indicating that it is open to all people from all the four
 directions and its foundation-stone was laid by a Muslim divine named *Mia Mir*.

23.4.2 Life Cycle Rituals

There are several rituals in the Sikh social life. Let us discuss some of these rituals
 briefly.

i) Child Birth

Soon after a child is born a set of five verses from the *Adi Granth* is recited.
 Unlike Hindu society where women during post-natal period are considered impure
 to enter the kitchen for nearly six weeks, in Sikh society a woman can resume her
 normal work as soon as she feels physically fit. Significantly, Sikhism rejects the
 orthodox Hindu Concept of pollution in this regard. It is considered undesirable to
 treat the mother as polluted. Pre and post-natal Hindu practices are simply discarded
 in Sikh way of life.

ii) Ceremony of Child Naming

Following the birth of a child in the family there is a naming ceremony generally
 performed on the first of *Baisakh* (traditional Indian New Year and the day of birth
 of the Khalsa). This is arranged in the presence of the Holy Book and congregation
 either at home or in the *Gurudwara*. The priest opens the Holy Book at random
 and the very first letter of the page is picked up for naming the child. All males
 have Singh (lion) and all females *Kaur* (princess) after their names. It rejects the
 caste name that signifies hierarchy as found in Hinduism.

iii) Marriage Rituals

In the Sikh society marriages are generally arranged by the parents. In some cases
 boys or girls find their own partners. But in all cases Sikh marriages are solemnised
 strictly according to prescribed norms wherein the bridegroom and his party called
Barat go to the house of the bride. To begin with there is *Milni*, a ceremony where
 parents and relatives from both sides meet and embrace each other and token gifts
 are offered. Later all other friends and relatives are feasted and then all enter
 specially arranged Pandal or gurudwara where *Anand Karaj* (the marriage ceremony)
 is performed by the priest with Sikh musicians singing relevant hymns from the
 Guru Granth and the couple circumambulating the Holy Book four times in a clock
 wise direction. The *Lavan*, hymns of marriage, convey highest moral and spiritual

ideals to the couple. The ceremony being over, all join in lunch and then the bridegroom and the party return home along with the bride. Back home the bride is received with some ceremonies. There is a great emphasis on simplicity and dowry is not a precondition in Sikh marriages. Extra-marital love and sex are not allowed in Sikhism. "Do not cast your eyes on the beauty of another's wife. Treat other women as thy mothers, sisters and daughters" says Guru Nanak.

23.4.3 Baptism Among the Sikhs

From Guru Nanak to the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur there was a system of initiating the followers by giving them *Charan-amrit* (water touched by the Guru's toe) to drink. Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth and the last Guru, changed this to *Khande-da-Pahul* (water stirred with double edged sword) which he used when he baptised the five beloved ones (Panj Piare) on the Baisakhi of 1699 at Anandpur Sahib. When boys and girls attain puberty and are old enough to understand the obligations of their religion they are baptised. The ritual connected with this ceremony is the same as performed by Guru Gobind Singh while creating the Khalsa. While baptismal ritual can be performed any time of the year, Baisakhi, the day of the birth of the Khalsa, is considered most appropriate. It is performed before an assembled congregation. Five baptised Sikhs are chosen to initiate the new converts. *Amrit* (nectar) is prepared by mixing sugar in water and by stirring it with a *Khanda* (double-edged sword) to the recitation of selected passages of the scriptures including Guru Gobind Singh's composition. The initiates then take the vows of the Khalsa faith. Each vow is read out loudly before the Guru Granth Sahib. Palms full with amrit are splashed in the face of the newly initiated Khalsas with the Sikh salutation of *Bole so Nihal* and *Siri Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa Siri Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh*. Baptised Sikhs, both male and female, have to strictly adhere to the following symbols:

- a) **Keshas (Unshaven hair):** Sikhs are not supposed to trim, shave or cut any hair on any part of their body.
- b) **Kara (wrist-band or iron bangle):** All baptised Sikhs are strictly to wear Kara. Worn on the right wrist this is taken as a constant reminder that as a Sikh one has to follow the Sikh code of conduct and perform pious deeds.
- c) **Kirpan (sword):** This literally means "please protect me with thy sword". This was used as a ready weapon for self defence and for the protection of the meek and helpless.
- d) **Kangha (comb):** To keep the long hair neat and tidy. Sikhs are enjoined to keep Kangha always in their hair-knot.
- e) **Kachha (drawer-underwear)** was intended to keep the Khalsa always ready in the fighting dress and also, means a sign of chastity and strict morals.

Activity 1

You may be interacting with a number of your Sikh friends or neighbours. Based on your observation or experience write a one page note on the rituals the Sikhs as practised in your area. If possible, exchange your note with other students at the Study Centre.

23.5 SIKH CODE OF CONDUCT AND REFORM MOVEMENTS

There are significant codes of conduct for the Sikhs. Sikh society has also borne

witness to several reform movements. In this section we shall deal with these aspects briefly.

23.5.1 Code of Conduct

The behaviour patterns of the members of a society are broadly guided by the code of conduct regulating the behaviour of its followers. The Sikhs are supposed to follow the code of conduct called Rehat *Maryada* which has evolved over years. Among the few *don'ts* are eating *Halal* meat prepared in the Muslim way, removing hair from the body, smoking, use of alcohol and adultery.

As mentioned earlier Sikh Gurus condemned the traditional caste system and laid the foundations of an egalitarian society. Through the institution of *Sangat* and *Pangat* they tried to obliterate the distinctions between the so-called high and low castes as well as the rich and poor. By placing the hymns of the so-called low-caste weaver Kabir at par with the so-called high-caste Brahman Ramanand the Sikh Gurus set a unique example of equality and true spirit of ecumenism. However, because of the deep-rooted caste prejudices caste system has not fully disappeared from the Sikh society. While it is true that while sitting in the congregation or while partaking food from the community kitchen, (*Guru Ka Langar*), caste factors are not taken into consideration, caste still plays a domineering role in deciding matrimonial alliances and other social relationships. Apart from the broad caste divisions such as Jats, Khatri, Aroras and Ramgarhias, the converts from the so-called low-castes have not yet been fully assimilated in Sikh faith which does not recognise any caste system. The 'low-castes' remain 'low-castes' and have been given the separate label of Mahzabi Sikhs. When the Golden Temple and other Sikh shrines came under the control of the Udasi Mahants they fixed separate visiting hours for the Mahzabi Sikhs to offer their prayers in the sanctum sanctorum. They had to hire high-caste attendants to carry their Prasad to be offered in the temple. It was only during the Akali movements for Gurudwara reform that such restrictions were removed and control of the Gurudwaras passed on to democratically elected bodies. In spite of modernisation of the Sikh society inter-caste marriages are rare and rarer still are the examples of so-called high-caste Khatri marrying into the so-called Mahzabi Sikh family. Similarly there are divisions at religious and ideological levels. Some movements of religious reform among the Sikhs such as Nirankari, Namdhari and Akali, were started to purge Sikhism of unSikh-life practices.

23.5.2 Movements of Socio-Religious Reform

There have been several religious reform movements among the Sikhs to eradicate the above mentioned evils. These movements led to the development of various sects in Sikhism. In this section we shall be discussing only two to three socio-religious movements.

i) The Nirankari Movement

The first traces of differentiation of the Sikh faith were noticed during the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule in the Punjab. Baba Dayal, Founder of the Nirankari Movement, was the first among the Sikh religious reformers to have preached against the evils that had slowly crept into the Sikh social and religious life. He preached against idolatry, worship of graves, tombs and trees and belief in other complicated Brahmanical rites and ceremonies and exhorted his followers to worship one *Nirankar* (God). Though Baba Dayal was able to attract a number of followers known as, "*Nirankaris*" because of their belief in one Nirankar and who followed Sikh ceremonies in birth, death, marriage and other social usage, yet his movement could not make a very wide impact on the Sikh masses who still lacked educational awakening.

Sikhism developed in the Nirankari movement with one of the followers Baba Avtar Singh starting a parallel movement of his own known as Sant Nirankaris.

ii) The Namdhari Movement

The Namdhari Movement, is popularly known as *Kuka* movement. Started by Bhagat Jawaharmal and Baba Balak Singh, the movement became a powerful force of religio-political revival among the Sikhs under one of the latter's disciples, Baba Ram Singh. Baba Ram Singh particularly enjoined upon his followers the worship of one God through prayer and meditation. The Rehatnamas (moral codes) prepared and enforced by him exhorted all his followers to be engaged at all time in the worship of God. He also preached against social evils such as the caste system, infanticide, early marriage and barter of daughters in marriage and popularised simple and inexpensive Anand Marriage. The teachings of Baba Ram Singh seem to have had a wide appeal to the Sikh masses. Contemporary European officials viewed the growing popularity of Baba Ram Singh's mission with serious concern.

Box 2

Baba Ram Singh's mission was specially marked by teachings of righteousness, tolerance and mercy yet some of his followers got out of control and in a fit of religious frenzy committed certain excesses which resulted in a clash with the Government. Some of his more orthodox followers who were excited over the killing of the cows, murdered the butchers at Amritsar, Raikot and Malerkotla and were, as a punishment, blown off from the cannon's mouth. Though there is a difference of opinion among scholars as to whether the movement was religious or political, there is no denying the fact that the official action against the *Kukas* created great hatred for the British rulers in the minds of the people in the Punjab which helped prepare the ground for the subsequent religio-political struggle for the Akalis in the early twentieth century.

iii) Akali Movement

Historically Akalis are the members of the suicide squads of the Sikh armies which first appeared about 1690 AD when the execution of two predecessors and continued persecution by the Mughals forced the 10th Guru of the Sikh (Guru Gobind Singh) to resort to armed struggle against the rulers. The Akalis are also known as *Nihangs* who traditionally wear blue dresses. In 1920s the Akali movement was again revived as a semi para military volunteers raised to oppose the British government. The Akalis represented the Sikh community to regain their control over the Gurudwaras, in the agitation for an independent Punjabi speaking, Sikh majority state. Thus the state of Punjab was formed in 1966. The Shiromani Akali Dal is a major political party in Punjab (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1985 : 185).

23.5.3 Impact on Indian Society

With its emphasis on unity of God and brotherhood of mankind Sikh thought greatly influenced the Indian Society. Through their condemnation of the caste system the Sikh Gurus were able to make a major dent in the traditional hold of caste. By emphasising equality of all religions and by including hymns from the Hindu Bhaktas and the Muslim saints the Sikh Gurus set an example of true *ecumenism*. By reconciling two conflicting traditions — Hinduism and Islam the Sikh Gurus gave a positive direction by emphasising transcendental humanism and spiritual values. The Sikh Gurus perceived that there was a real lack of love among people and therefore they laid great emphasis upon spiritual practices and preached philosophy

of the God, the supreme reality. At a time when debate about superiority of one religion against another has again started the following hymns of the third Guru help to resolve the religious conflict:

“Of all the religions the best religion is to repeat God’s name and to do pious deeds.”

Check Your Progress 3

i) Mention few don’ts as observed by the Sikhs as their religious code of conduct.

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ii) Baba Dayal, the founder of the Nirankari movement preached against:

- a) idolatry
- b) worship of graves, tree, tombs etc.
- c) belief in Brahmanical rites
- d) all of the above

iii) The Namdhari Movement preached:

- a) to popularise simple marriage
- b) dowry marriage
- c) caste system
- d) early marriage

23.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed various aspects of Sikh religious belief and the development of Sikh society over the years. We started with the socio-cultural and the philosophical foundation of Sikhism. There we discussed the socio-cultural contexts in which Sikhism was born with the life and message of Guru Nanak. We also discussed the model of the Sikh society as established by Guru Nanak in his life time. Development of Sikhism and the appearance of the ten Gurus are discussed briefly in this unit. The worship pattern of the Sikh society, their life cycle rituals etc. were also discussed. Lastly we discussed the Sikh code of conduct and religious reform movements in Sikhism. Here we presented the Nirankari, Namdhari and the Akali movements as examples of the religious reform movements in Sikhism.

23.7 KEY WORDS

- Amrit** : Baptismal nectar.
- Kachha** : Drawer or big size underwear.
- Kango** : Comb

Kara	: Iron bangle
Keshas	: Unshorn hair
Khalsa	: The word Khalsa, literally meaning God's own is used for baptised Sikhs.
Kirpan	: Sword
Kirt Karni	: Honest Labour.
Langar	: Free meal served in the Gurudwara.
Nam Japna	: Meditation
Nishan Sahib	: Yellow colour Sikh flag.
Sangat	: Congregation
Wand Chhakna	: Sharing one's earnings with others.

23.8 FURTHER READINGS

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23.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) a)
- ii) Guru Nanak was engrossed in spiritual pursuits since his childhood. One morning when Nanak went for a dip in the river Bein he was absorbed in thoughts of God and in this stage he was into the divine presence. First words that he uttered after his enlightenment were "there is no Hindu, there is no Musalman".
- iii) The three principles are — always remembering God, earning one's livelihood through honest means, and sharing ones fruits of labour with others.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) b.
- ii) d.
- iii) d.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Among the few don'ts are eating Halal meat prepared in the Muslim way, removing hair from body, use of alcohol and adultery.
- ii) d.
- iii) a.

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UNIT 24 MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS I — BHAKTI AND SUFISM

Structure

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 The **Bhakti** Tradition
 - 24.2.1 Paths and Pillars of **Bhakti**
 - 24.2.2 The **Bhakti** Tradition : South
 - 24.2.3 The **Bhakti** Tradition : North
- 24.3 **Sufism**
 - 24.3.1 What is **Sufism** ?
 - 24.3.2 The Spread of **Sufism** in India
- 24.4 **Sufism and Bhakti** : A Comparison
 - 24.4.1 Growth of Medieval Mysticism
 - 24.4.2 **Sufi-Bhakti** Interaction
 - 24.4.3 **Bhakti-Sufi** Teachings
- 24.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.6 Key Words
- 24.7 Further Readings
- 24.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

24.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you will understand

- two religious movements that were found to prevail in India during the medieval period
- Hindism and its basic tenets in a very general way
- the **bhakti** and **Sufi** traditions and what they evoked
- the interaction and interchange between **Sufism** and the **Bhakti** tradition.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

We have examined various religions in the previous Block 5 in our units on religions pluralism. In these units we have also covered units on Hinduism (Unit 19) and Islam (Unit 22). These units form an essential backdrop to our present unit on **Bhakti** and **Sufism** which are medieval religious movements.

We begin by introducing the structure of the unit and describing the background of the development of **Bhakti** and **Sufism**. We then go on to examine the **Bhakti** Tradition, including the three paths of **Bhakti** and the two pillars of **Bhakti**. We then turn to the **bhakti** tradition in the South and then examine the **bhakti** tradition in the North. Our next section (24.4) compares **Sufism** and **Bhakti**.

This section includes the growth of medieval mysticism, **Sufi-bhakti** interaction and **Bhakti-Sufi** teachings. We therefore provide an adequate picture of the **bhakti** and **sufi** movements in medieval times.

Let us now also introduce the necessary background of these medieval religious movements. Thus **Bhakti** emphasizes a personal devotion for one god. It may be pointed out that the Alvar **bhakti** saints of South India composed their devotional

poetry between 5th and 9th century AD. They were worshippers of Krishna. They approached him with a love based on parental, filial, friendly and devotional attitudes. The **acharyas** who followed the **Alvars** had an intellectual approach treated dependence on god as logical rather than emotional.

Vallabha formed a sect based on Sri Krishna-Radha in the 16th century AD. Krishna-Bhakti was also given much attention by Sri Chaitanya (AD 1485-1533) who was a contemporary of Vallabha. However Sri Chaitanya's worship was of the ecstatic kind and popularization of the chanting of Hari (Sri Krishna), as a way to spiritual liberation. Namdeva (end of 14th century AD) and Ramananda were further important **Bhakti** Saints. The North Indian school was popularized by the disciples of Ramananda such as Kabir who used local language for preaching. Mirabai herself was initiated by Ravidas as disciple of Ramananda.

Let us now turn to **Sufism**, which is a discipline which aims at the personal experience of the unity of God. **Sufism** began around the 8th century with Saints such as Hadrat Habib Ajami (AD 738). Some scholars feel that **Sufism** is not against the Islami law. In fact the process of **Sufism** is closely interwoven in the Islami law. **Sufism** can be explained from the viewpoint of three basic religious attitudes found in the Quran. These are the attitudes of **Islam**, **Iman** and **Ihsan**.

The attitude of Islam is that of submission to the will of Allah and the teachings of the Quran. Iman designates a further penetration into the religion and strong faith in its teachings. Ihsan is the highest stage of spiritual ascent. These are the three stages of religiosity in Islam.

We may point out in our introduction that the Sufi and the Bhakti movements coalesce in various areas. Let us now turn first to the Bhakti tradition.

24.2 THE BHAKTI TRADITION

In medieval India it was caste structures that governed the lives of men and the networks of relations that they could enter into. The structure of social divisions that arose thus was, as mentioned, a rigid, inflexible and unequal one that created extremes of inequality, privileges and disprivileges between men and social groups. Although this was an extremely unfair system, little could be done or said against it as it was supported by Hindu religious ideology, particularly the notions of high and pure birth and occupation as against the low and impure. In other words, Hinduism was as much a social system as it was a religion, and provided an ideological framework on the basis of which Hindu society arose.

In other words. **Hinduism was both religion and social framework and governed the lives of Hindus.** To be a Hindu meant that one's life was governed by factors such as being born in a caste, being subject to one's actions or **karma**, to be a part of **Brahman** and aim at achieving **moksha** or Liberation of one's soul or salvation. Further, it must be remembered that Hinduism was not a revealed religion that had just a single text. With every phase in the development of Hinduism came new scriptures and texts. Thus we have the **Veda**, the **Upanishad**, the **Purana** and the **Bhagavad Gita**. Even though we have stressed that the caste system was a system that formed the basis of life in Hindu India and was rigid and unchangeable, there nevertheless occurred many anti-caste movements in the course of the development of the religion. We already mentioned in Block 5 (Unit 20 : ESO-05). Buddhism and Jainism in the 6th century B.C. that spoke up against caste divisions and social inequality. This struggle was carried forward and saw its culmination in the rise of the medieval movement of **bhakti** or 'selfless' devotion to a single God, with which this unit is primarily concerned.

Hinduism was greatly criticised and faced many movements against it (see Unit 19 on Hinduism in Block 5 of this course ESO-05 which will provide a background). Of these, the **bhakti** movement has great significance. This is so because even though the **bhakti** movement was against some of the tenets of Hinduism, much of what is a part of Hinduism in later ages developed as an outcome of the bhakti tradition. This tradition was widespread, in fact from North to South India. We will outline its development in the South and North separately.

24.2.1 Paths and Pillars of Bhakti

From a modern historical standpoint the development of **bhakti** is the coming together of considerably earlier theistic tendencies in three major religious traditions of ancient India:

- i) the sacrificial cult of the invading Aryans and the recitation of the Brahmana priests that become the foundation of the Vedas;
- ii) the practice of bodily mortification and groups known as Sramanas probably continuing traditions of earlier inhabitants of India but soon adapted by some of the Aryans; and
- iii) the pre Aryan cults of spirits and village goddesses inhabiting trees and rocks and protecting special people or special groups.

Those who worship Vishnu as the Supreme deity are known as **Vaishnavas**; likewise those who accord the Supreme place to Shiva are known as **Saivas**; and those who are devotees of the Goddess of Power are known as **Saktas**. Each sect is subdivided into lineages of teachers and teachings. The major forms of **bhakti** are divided according to the various mood of the devotees. Raw emotion or bhava is transformed in drama to a refined mood or **rasa**. Each combination of **bhava** or **rasa** uses a particular human relationship, or devotional stances such as servant to master or child to parent or friend to friend, parent to child and beloved to lover. While **bhakti** stresses passionate attachment it is in striking contrast with Yoga which stresses detachment. Yet many forms of **bhakti** do talk of detachment such as that taught in the **Bhagavad Gita**. The bhakti movements stand religiously between the extreme ascetic paths and popular Hindu religiosity. Bhakti generally shares the ascetic concern for **moksa** — release from finite existence and realization of transcendent beatitude. What is primary is communion with the lord.

A few **bhaktas** make the total commitment of time and style of life characteristic of Hindu 'renouncers' spending whole days in chanting and singing the praise of their Lord. **Bhakti** shares with popular Hinduism the basic ritual of **puja**, worship



Kabir Das a prominent Bhakti saint.

of the diety in image form with fruit, flower and vegetables which are returned after worship as **prasada** that is material substance filled with the Lord's grace. Such puja may take place in the home shrine or local temple. The worship could be for any spiritual or mundane purpose. There are also distinctive **bhakti** rituals — communal singing of hymns and chants, performance of dramas, dances and chants and recital of heroic deeds of Vishnu.

These three paths of **Bhakti** that Lord Krishna offered to Arjuna were:

- i) the path of knowledge or **jnana**;
- ii) the path of action or **karma** and
- iii) the path of devotion or **bhakti**

The Sanskrit term **bhakti** is most often translated as “devotion” and **bhaktimarg** as “path of devotion”. **Bhakti is the divine-human relationship as experienced from the human side.** There are at least three major forms of **bhakti** that is Vaisnavas, Saivas, and worshippers of the great power (Sakti). Each sect is divided into many subjects. Bhakti is between popular religion and asceticism. **Bhakti** shares the concern for **moksa**, that is release from the bondages of life on earth. The ritual of **puja** is very important. There are other rituals too — communal singing of hymns and chants; recitations of epics; recounting of sacred lore.

It is this last path of devotion that forms the basis of a religious tradition that survives and proliferates today even across international boundaries. The basic teaching of this tradition was the idea of ‘loving devotion’ by concentrating upon the image of a single God and without any thought for oneself, as being the way of liberation of ones soul. Any God could be the focus of one's devotion. This God was then seen as ones personal God or **ishta deva**. **Ishta deva** is a deity that the worshipper chooses as a personal diety and accords it personal devotion. The most often chosen God for ones devotion we find, has been Krishna and most of the bhakti tradition has evolved around him. It is particularly his character as the incarnation of Vishnu and his relationship to the Gopis and Radha in particular, which are of central importance here. Gopis is the name given to the ladies who were worshippers of Krishna and with whom he played many of his divine games (**lila**). In fact, the love that the Gopis had for Krishna has been regarded as the best example of the devotion of the individual for God. The idea of ‘self abandonment’ or the forgetting of everything in the presence of one's God, is also seen as an important part of the **bhakta** or devotee's devotion to God.

This particular form of relationship between the God and devotee has been called **viraha bhakti**. **Viraha bhakti** is the name given to exclusive personal devotion to Sri Krishna where feeling of separation or longing is felt for the deity by the devotee. The devotion to Krishna and the **bhakti** cult that arose around him became prominent in South India around the 8th century. We now turn to the pillars of **bhakti**.

The two main pillars of the bhakti tradition are ‘love’ and ‘meditation’. The ‘love’ is for God, and it is ecstatic in nature as well as symbolising a feeling of bliss or happiness that is unparalleled; and an intimacy or closeness with God like that with ones beloved. The idea that is being conveyed here is to be lost in the love of God as though He were a beloved. At the same time the relationship that arises here may be one of dependence upon the God. On the other hand, as far as the aspect of meditation is concerned, there are two kinds of meditation in **bhakti**. These are:

- i) **saguna bhakti**, where one meditates on God as a separate being, through disciplined practice;

- ii) **nirguna bhakti**, where God and self are merged into one and little distinction is made between self and God.

24.2.2 The Bhakti Tradition : South

The Krishna cult arose in South India around the 8th century. We now trace here, the development of the **bhakti** tradition in the South. The 8th century saw the rise, in the Tamil country, of persons who called themselves the Alvars .e. men who have intimate and intuitive knowledge of God. They claimed to have an intensely personal relationship with God. They rejected the caste system by recruiting saints to their movement, from all divisions of society and refusing to use Sanskrit as a language, as it was Brahmanic in nature. An important saint here was **Nam'alvar** who spoke of the oneness of God and the individual soul. He also stressed that unleashed passionate spirituality among people was the only way to show one's devotion to the **ishtadeva**. There were also other followers such as **Yamunacharya** and **Nathamuni**, through whose efforts, the bhakti movement spread and developed. Besides the Alvars, the Southern **bhakti** movement also found expression in the work of **Ramanuja** in the 13th century. He primarily made the contribution of stressing, devotion to a personal deity and saw the Bhagvad Gita as a major work in the **bhakti** of Krishna. He represented the **saguna** tradition.

Unit 25 on Veerashaivism deals with aspects of Veerashaivism and **Bhakti**. We would like to mention aspects of it in this unit. In all there were 12 Alvars and a



Lord Vishnu with adoring devotees.

major form of their contribution to the **Bhakti** tradition was in the hymns that focused on the divine lord as the recipient of one's devotion. Other than the rise of the **Krishna bhakti** in South India, we also find a major tradition arising around the worship of Siva as the main deity or **ishta deva**. It was in the 12th century that we find the rise of this tradition in the form of a left handed sect of Vira Saivas or Lingayats. The founder of this sect was **Basava**, a Brahmin prime minister of the principality of Kalyan. This tradition denounced both the caste system and image worship. Very interestingly, even though the founder was a Brahmin, this movement was anti-Brahmin. The Lingayats were identified by the wearing of an image of the **lingam**, enclosed in either silver or brass, around the neck. This **lingam** was worn by all Lingayats irrespective of sex, age or caste. The wearing of the **lingam** was symbolic of the oneness of all who worshipped Siva as the **ishta deva**. **This was a tradition that clearly rejected the idea of inequality that Hinduism professed between men.** It was open to all castes and social divisions and recognised all as equal in the worship of the Siva **lingam**. Once again, like the Alvars, much of this **bhakti** tradition was in the form of lyrics and hymns and 'sayings' or **vacana**, in the Kannada language. These were essentially **bhakti** poems of personal devotion to a God and clearly rejected the great tradition of Vedic religion. These mocked orthodox beliefs and recitations and questioned the classical belief systems, social customs, Vedic rituals and so on.

Activity 1

Talk to several Hindus from the North and the South of India about the **Bhakti Tradition**. Record what they say about the similarities and differences between the two types of Bhakti traditions. Write down your findings in two to five pages of your notebook and discuss them, if possible, with other students at the Study Centre.

To put it simply then, Veerashaivism or Lingayatism was a protest movement that through the method of **bhakti** and selfless abandonment, lashed out against the orthodox and polytheistic nature of Hinduism. It stressed the oneness not just of God and devotee, as in the Krishna cult but also of oneness of the devotee with the people. Thus we have the famous legend about a **Saiva** saint called Ghantakarna, who realising the supremacy of Siva as the sublime God, offered his body to Siva. This is the supreme sacrifice, to offer oneself in toto to a deity. That is to lay down one's life at his feet. Thus, the legend goes, Ghantakarna's body became the threshold of a temple to Siva, his limbs became the frames of the door, and his head, the bell of the temple. Such was the extent of a devout **bhakta's bhakti**. The main



A Hindu prayer room decorated with pictures of various deities on the wall.

reason for the popularity of this tradition of **bhakti** in the South was the social change it signified in terms of social upliftment of the low and poorer divisions of society in all spheres of life. Further, since central to the **bhakti** tradition in South India was the use of devotional songs in the language of the people, it reached out to a larger population and contributed to the unity of the people on various social and cultural levels.

24.2.3 The Bhakti Tradition : North

From the South of India we find that the **bhakti** tradition spread to Central and North India. Each added its own local traditional beliefs and devotional forms to both the Vaishnava and Saiva **bhakti** traditions. Thus we find in Central India, particularly in the Marathi belt, Krishna **bhakti** finding a stronghold. Its most famous saint here was Tukaram (1598-1649). He and his followers worshipped Krishna in the form of 'Vitobha' or 'Vithala'. The main theme here was that of seeking liberation within oneself, by becoming one or merging with the Lord. It was around the 15th century that a spiritual descendent of Alvars, Vallabhacharya (1479-1531) went further North and gave life to the Krishna cult in the Mathura region. This survives even today as probably the most vital centre of Krishna **bhakti**. The three major figures associated with **bhakti** in this period are Surdas (1485-1563) who spoke of losing oneself in Krishna; Mirabai (1500-1550) who abandoned her position as Queen of Mewar for her **bhakti** to Krishna as 'Girdhar Gopal'.

All of us are familiar with the **bhakti** of Mirabai. It is believed that such was the intensity of her devotion that Krishna absorbed her soul into his own. Finally we have the significant role played in this period by Chaitanya (1485-1533). Chaitanya played a major role in the establishment of Mathura as a **bhakti** centre. he professed that the highest knowledge of all was the knowledge of devotion to Krishna and the greatest of sorrows was separation or **viraha** from Krishna. Further, he taught that the longing that Radha and the Gopis had for Krishna should be duplicated in the soul of every devotee in his search for oneness with Krishna. Although the movement now was open to all social groups and castes it could not totally do away with the caste system.

Box 24.01

Chaitanya was born in 1485 in a Brahmin family in Bengal. When Bengal had been under Muslim control for almost 300 years. Hindu religion under Muslim retreated into an orthodox pattern of living and worship. Chaitanya learned Sanskrit as a matter of course in his childhood. When he grew up he became a schoolmaster and disapproved of **bhakti**. He was not interested in religion. However he could not ignore the fact that all his eight elder brothers and sisters had died before him. His meeting with the ascetic Isvara Puri also changed his life at the shrine in Gaya. He began having mystic visions that he could not fully describe in words. Isvara Puri initiated Chaitanya into a mantra and Chaitanya became a worshipper of Krishna.

Even so we find today in Mathura and specifically Virindaban, how the lives of the people are totally tied up to their worship of Krishna (at home and in the temple), as a child or as the young lover of the Gopis. In this small town near Mathura, the people wake when Krishna awakes in the temple, they eat when he eats, they sleep when he sleeps, and their every moment is devoted to thoughts of Krishna to the extent that they even greet each other with a "Radhe-Radhe". So totally enwrapped are their lives with that of God. It is this form of Northern **bhakti** that represents the best example of **Saguna bhakti**.

The **bhakti** movement reached further North-east from here and was carried to Assam in the 16th century where the Metheis, a local tribe, are Vaishnavites.

Besides the Vaishnava tradition coming North we also find that the Siva **bhakti** tradition also found a foothold in North India, particularly in Kashmir. Its greatest follower and proponent was Abhinavagupta and later one of the Kashmiri women saints, Lalla. Although Siva **bhakti** found many followers here, they found the renderings of the tradition difficult to follow, even so their numbers did not diminish and 'Shivaratri' is one of the most celebrated occasions in Kashmir. It may once again be noted, why the **bhakti** tradition became so popular in North India. Against the strict and orthodox character of Hinduism that stressed the inequality of men before God and thus did not allow all men and women equal access to the divine and to religion, the **bhakti** tradition offered an alternative. It was an alternative path of worship through devotion, open to all sections of society and offering all of them equality before God and in the access to the divine. Since it used local idioms, language and songs, it reached out to a far larger population and appealed to all sections of society. It celebrated the relationship of the individual to God, as a very personal relationship and rejected the Vedic form of worship through intermediaries. Moreover, its rejection of the caste system and the inequalities subscribed by it, were openings that a large section of society were looking for. **Bhakti** thus offered a way of relating to the divine that was personalised, unique and fulfilling.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What were the basic teachings of Hinduism that the **bhakti** tradition protested against? Answer in 5-10 lines.

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- 2) What is **bhakti**? How was it an alternative to the prevalent religious trend? Answer using 5-10 lines.

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3) Briefly describe the three types of bhakti: **viraha**, **saguna** and **nirguna**. Answer using 10 lines.

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24.3 SUFISM

Having examined the basic teachings of **bhakti** and how it created a new path for devotion or religious worship, we now proceed to consider the influence of Islam on the Indian subcontinent, and the consequence that it had for the **bhakti** tradition in particular. As an offshoot of this influence we have the role of the **Sufi** movement in India.

Islam as a world religion confronted Hinduism in full force rather than getting absorbed into it. Historically, we find that the beginning of the 10th century there were Muslim invasions. This is the time when Mahmud of Ghazni invaded the Indian subcontinent 17 times. In early 16th century, the Moghuls invaded India. It was in the later half of the 17 century that the Hindus launched a counter offensive. It was particularly in the struggle by the Maratha King Shivaji, that the moral power of Hinduism received impetus and the **bhakti** tradition resurged as a response to the impact of Islam. The Indian tradition tried to find a response within its own spiritual condition since the Muslim ruler discriminated against the Hindu who were their subjects. Further, with tis contact between the two different social and cultural traditions, interaction and synthesis began particularly on the level of social custom, tradition and practice of the Hindus and the Muslims. At the same time we find that the Islamic, mystic and ecstatic, tradition of Sufism greatly influenced the **bhakti** saints. To understand the nature of this influence let us briefly consider what **Sufism** was about.

24.3.1 What is Sufism?

In the beginning **Sufism** developed in Mesopotamia, Arabia, Iran and modern Afghanistan. It was formalized by the end of the 8th century. Right from the beginning there was a hiatus between the **ulemas** and the mystics. The latter claimed to be delving into the interior of religion, which depended on the heart. The **Sufi** and **bhakti** traditions are characterised by adherence to religious text, governmental authority and opposed to external ritualism of prayer. The **Sufis** aim for a direct relationship with God and thus their basic features incorporate strands from various sources including Hinduism.

Ritu Dewan has pointed out that as a consequence of the 12th century Mongal invasion many Sufis took shelter in India, especially in Multan, Punjab, and Sindh. One of the greatest Sufi mystics Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) was very influenced by Indian folklore and even wrote a poem dedicated to the

flute of Krishna. He founded the Maulavi Sufi order in which music and dance were spiritual methods. Soami ji Maharaj founder of the Radha Soami sect was much influenced by Rumi who he often quoted in his discourses. Guru Nanak too was inspired by Rumi. Rumi and Baba Farid's compositions (1173-1265) have been included in the Granth Sahib together with those of Kabir.

Guru Nanak was called guru of the Hindus and pir of the Mussalmans. By the end of the 16th century the **Bhakti** movement had covered the entire north India resulting in an intermingling of Hindu mysticism with Sufism. Kabir's following verse illustrates this:

The Mussalmans accept the Tarifat
The Hindus, the Vedas and Puranas
but for me the books of both religions are useless
(Kabir, 1440-1518).

Sufis were also against external ritualism in religion. Prayers and fasting were held to be inferior to works of charity. And Jihad not external war but a fight against the lower self of man. Some Sufis like Shah Abdul Latif and Sachal Sarmast called upon people to "strike the Mullahs".

In Bengal the influence of Chaitanya was felt on a popular level, specially on the Baul movement. Muslim Bauls followed the Sufi tradition and Hindu Bauls the Vaishnavite. Both of these traditions expressed themselves saying:

You have been to Gaya,
Bcnares and Vrindavan,
and have travelled through
many rivers and forests and
other places of pilgrimáge
But away have you seen in all
these anything of Him of Whom
you have heard?

Sufi literature of Rumi and Hafiz (d. 1389) influenced Raja RamMohan Roy and Devendranath Tagore, and Rabindranath Tagore. Sufi literature remains fresh today though long years have passed since it was first penned:

Is there one God in the **peepul** tree and
another in the **babool**?
If Islam was created by Allah
then who created Kufir
If Ka'ba be the House of God
Why find fault with the temple?
The same light burns bright
within the temple and the mosque.
(Sufi Bhai Dalpatram 1768-1842)

Thus we see that there was a commingling of the Bhakti and Sufi movements.

Sufism, specialises in the spiritual dimension of Islam. It believes in revelation as a source of contact with the sacred and attempts to get a personal experience of the unity of God. This leads to a realization that God alone is to be adored. This is basic to Sufism. While orthodox priests of Islam feel that this desire to merge in the unity of God is anti-Islam the Sufis do not feel this is so. In fact they feel it is closely related to Islamic doctrine. The two are interdependent. An analogy given to clarify the relationship is that of the kernel of the walnut and the shell. Neither can possibly do without the other.

Another example is that Islamic doctrine is like the circumference of a circle at the centre of the centre of which lies the ultimate Reality (Haququat). Sufism is a mediator between Islamic doctrine and Ultimate Reality.

Sufism can be explained through three basic religious attitudes of

- 1) **Islam**
- 2) **Iman**
- 3) **Ihsan**

Islam is the attitude of submission to the will of Allah.

Iman designates a firm faith in the teachings of the Islam.

Ihsan is to adore Allah though one may not see him. Sufism is the spiritual progress of a devotee from the initial stage of **Islam** to the ultimate stage of **Ihsan**.

As **Islam** in India, it came to enfold in its cloak, the system of monasticism and a defined way of community life. The **Sufi** mystic however was in no way forced to live a defined and organised life. By the 9th century, these **Sufis** who had come to form a brotherhood and a definite way of community life, also began wearing a particular kind of coarse woollen garment known as **sufi** and thus came to be called **sufis**. **Sufis**, though Muslim, are considered to be pantheistic mystics. This was a basic difference with orthodox Islam but in common with the bhakti school of the Hindus.

The **Sufis** followed the Quran, and sought to reveal their purpose in life through their sayings, actions and the path that they followed. This path was often shared by different mystics and came to be called **tariqah** or **sufism**. The path of 'unselfishness' through either renouncing the world and ones possessions and desires or by adopting an attitude of patience, humility and charity, towards God, were essential to being a **sufi**. The **sufis** also had a special method of their own for producing the state of mind in which they would have revelations. They called this **dhikr**.

Its simplest form is the continual repetition of the name of Allah with intense concentration on the thought of God, and losing one's individuality in this. If we examine these teachings closely we can see how the idea of **dhikr** which was central to Sufi thought is similar to the idea in **bhakti** tradition of concentrating on the **ishta deva**, in one's quest for liberation particularly in the **saguna** tradition. Thus, **Sufism** mainly professed mysticism and upon this the **Sufis** built the basic theological doctrines of their religious movement. A major practice devised by the **Sufis** for stimulating religious emotion was listening to music and song or **sama**. These songs are capable of sending one into a trance. The subject of the songs was love, which was often erotic. One could not clearly distinguish whether the love being talked about here was human love or the love for the deity. Once again this is similar to the love in the **bhakti** tradition between the **bhakta** and the God as was expressed for Krishna by the Gopis.

We find, many attempts were made to define the **Sufi** in different ways. *In general it was however agreed that the Sufi had metaphysical, social and philanthropic characteristics.* Further, the **Sufi** doctrine we find was moulded by different influences such as the developments in Muhammadan monotheistic ideas or the influence of Greek and Indian philosophies. Moreover, we can also include here, political, social and intellectual conditions that favoured the growth of mysticism. The **Sufis** were very strict about accepting disciples or **murid**. Slowly however, as

followers flocked to them, many Sufis became recognised as teachers of **Shaikhs** and **Pirs** and 'orders' arose within **Sufism**. The four major orders that arose were the (a) Qudiri (b) Suhrawardi (c) Chisti and (d) Naqshbandi. By the 13th century, **Sufism** had become a movement in its own right in India.

24.3.2 The Spread of Sufism in India

Sufism mainly flowed into Indian from Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Iran. We have accounts of the various saints of different orders spreading **Sufi** teachings in different parts of India: To name a few, we have the well-known Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti who had established himself in Ajmer and Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya whose teachings and followers spread all over India.

As far as the spread of **Sufism** in India is concerned, its character changed to adapt to the Hindu environment. Thus, the metaphysical aspect was avoided and personal instruction of disciples was undertaken. Not all Sufis however took disciples. Those who did were called **Shaikhs**. The **Shaikh** besides being a teacher was regarded as a protector, friend, companion and benefactor or **Wali**. The teacher was also believed to possess supernatural powers or **Karamah**. The **Shaikh** or **pir** was regarded as the spiritual guide of the disciple or **murid**. We find that most of the people who came to the Sufi saints, desired to use their spiritual powers to cure an illness or fulfil a wish. Even today we find that of the many devout who may visit the resting place of a **pir**, i.e. his **dargah**, come there to seek the fulfilment of a wish or a blessing.

There were as mentioned earlier four main orders among the Sufis. Each of these we find different from the other in the emphasis of its teachings and the extent to which it spread in India. All four orders however regarded the **Shariah** as the spiritual guide. All four believed that a **Sufi** should have no wordily possessions. Each order had over time found devout disciples who in turn had reached the stature of being capable of having their own disciples and were known as **Khalifahs**. These **Khalifahs** played imported roles in the spread of their order's teachings.

Of the four orders, the Suhrawardis, were the most orthodox and played a leading role in the spread of **Sufism** in the North-West of India. They believed that to be



Sufism is an eclectic faith and borrows ideas and ways of worship from both Hinduism and Islam; for example Sai Baba of

able to perform their functions better, they had to maintain good relations with the political authority of the time.

Of these orders, it is however the Chisti Sufis who are best known. They spread all over the country and their principal Shaikh Nizamuddin, settled in Delhi and gave the order its expansive character. The Chistis consistently maintained that the political authority was an influence to be avoided. By the time Nizamuddin died in 1325 and his successor Nasiruddin took over, in 1356, a spiritual empire had begun to form. It reached its peak in the personality of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya. By this time the Chisti order had spread to Bihar and Bengal and had an even older order in Rajasthan that began with Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti in Ajmer in the 1190s. The expansion of this order into the Deccan was carried out by Shaikh Gesu-daraz.

Box 24.02

Sufism is one of the creative manifestations of **Islam**. It is a mystic sect which developed out of Islam. **Sufism seeks mystical union**. Many **Sufi** saints who were responsible for developing **sufism** include **Hasan al-Basvi, Ibrahim Ibn Adham Rabiati Adawiyah, Dhu al nun al Misri**. Each of these saints developed **Sufism** in their own way. For example Al-Hallaj was initiated into **sufism** while still a teenager. He lived in relative seclusion (for twenty years) and was trained by many masters. His basic teaching was moral reforms and intense Union with the Beloved. In mystical ecstasy he cried out loud: "Ana-al-Hagg!" ("I am the Divine Truth"). Al-Hallaj was decapitated and burnt by his detractors but he died with dignity and grace believing it to be the will of God (Encyclopaedia of Religion).

It is imported to note that because of the presence of differences between the order and individualistic approach of many of the Shaikhs, a single Muslim unified community of disciples could not be formed. Instead, each order had its devout disciples who together formed a united brotherhood. Overtime, Sufism lost its spiritual intensity and became missionary in character. By the end of the 14th century, Hinduism had evoked a response in the Sufis. The devotional character of Hindi songs and the language, had brought the Sufis and Hindu closer. An intermixing of the two people on a cultural level had begun to take place. In fact we find that a common ground had opened up in which the mutual acceptance of the aesthetic values of the Hindus and Muslims had come to be accepted by each other. This interchange of cultures will be discussed in the following section that specifically deals with the meeting of Sufism and the bhakti tradition.

24.4 SUFISM AND BHAKTI : A COMPARISON

Having outlined what the tradition of **Sufism** entailed let us now consider the role of **Sufism** in the **bhakti** tradition. You may have already noticed that much of what the **Sufis** taught was very similar to the **bhakti** teaching of concentrating upon a God and the significance of sacred music and song. This interaction between the two (as mentioned earlier in sub-section 24.3.1) it is believed to have led to the creation of a medieval mysticism which was independent of sectarian or orthodox practices and **disclaimed particularly caste practices and atrocities**. The first **Sufi** teacher who came to India was, as mentioned earlier, Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti, who arrived in Delhi in 1193 and settled in Pushkar in Ajmer. He had both Hindu and Muslim followers. We are all familiar with the 'Urs' at his **dargah** in Ajmer, to which flocks of followers come, treating it as a major pilgrimage centre even today. *As mentioned, these Sufis, were Islamic mystics who sought the path of salvation through an ardent and passionate love for God.* The teachings of the **Sufis** greatly influenced not only followers but many saints of the **bhakti** tradition who came to combine in themselves, **sufi** and **bhakti** teachings. The two

most significant figures here from the 15th/16th century, were Kabir and Guru Nanak. We will briefly consider their role in the development of medieval mysticism.

24.4.1 Growth of Medieval Mysticism

An important role in the growth of medieval mysticism was played by Ramananda (1370-1440) who himself was a follower of Ramanuja. Ramananda challenged caste divisions, questioned traditional ceremonies and accepted the Hindu philosophy of divisions, questioned traditional ceremonies and accepted the Hindu philosophy of **jnana** or knowledge, meditation or **yoga** and devotion or **bhakti**. He had many disciples of which twelve were the more important and came from low castes. The most famous of these disciples was Kabir, the son of a Muslim weaver. It is believed that though, he early in his life abandoned the Muslim faith, he retained the strict monotheism of **Islam** and an aversion to the caste system. He saw religion as a personal concern and stressed relationship between man, God and his teacher or **guru**. He combined in him, elements of both the **Sufi** and **bhakti** traditions, claiming that both Allah and Rama were the same thing.

Since he was trying to reach out to the common people he used the dialect or its variant as the language of communication. He stressed the importance of both material and spiritual things in one's life. He had both Hindu and Muslim followers and was non-sectarian. It is possible however that his Hindu followers are greater in number. Much of Kabir's life and work is derived from reconstructing its course from the **dohas** or **sakhis** rendered by him. These were essentially rhymed poems, set to music. There is much debate however about how many of these **dohas** were written by Kabir himself and how many of his followers or the Kabir **panthis**. Thus, there is doubt about the legitimacy of some of the sayings that are attributed to Kabir. Many it is believed are those of his devotees. These **dohas**, it is believed were very often included by the **Sufi** saints into their **sama**.

Important among Kabir's followers was Dadu (1544-1608) who also belonged to a Muslim family. He made the important contribution of seeking a unification of faiths, and founded the **Brahma-Sampradaya** where God would be worshipped without ritual or orthodoxy. As a mystic he contributed to the idea of the beauty of the world to be discovered not by becoming a recluse or an ascetic but by living a full life and enjoying what it had to offer.

Activity 2

Find out from some of your Muslim friends about the **Sufi** orders and their belief patterns. Ascertain from them whether **Sufis** are non Muslims or a different type of Muslim. Who have been the famous **Sufis**? If possible try to visit one or more of their commemoration sites where their graves are. Write down your findings and experiences in two to five pages of your notebook and discuss the same if possible with fellow students in the Study Centre.

At the same time as Kabir we have, the contribution of Guru Nanak of Punjab (1469-1538). There is greater certainty about his dates and origins than those of Kabir. Like Kabir, he too was a monotheist and was greatly opposed to the caste system. His disciples, the Sikhs, were organised into a close knit community. His teachings and writings and those of the subsequent Gurus were compiled together by the fifth Guru, Arjun, into the sacred book of the Sikhs, the **Adi-Grantha**. The Sikhs represented a **bhakti** sect, where their **bhakti** was sung in the form of the **Gurbani**. Guru Nanak's religious renderings we find, also incorporated the best of **sufi** influence and much of his teachings reflect the union of **bhakti** and **sufi** practices.

24.4.2 Sufi-Bhakti Interaction

This interaction of the Sufi and bhakti traditions occurred to give to the lives of Kabir and Nanak a peculiar flavour. Kabir was linked to the **Sufis**, not just in terms of the mystical nature of his renderings but also on the level or organization of thought. In the **Khazinat al-asfiya**, by Ghulam Sarvar Lahori, we find that Kabir is identified, rightly or wrongly as a **Sufi** and related to the Chistis. Scholars have argued in recent times that this, however, presents a chronological error. In these writings, he is believed to have visited many **Sufi** centres and is even believed to have debated with **Sufi** saints. None however denies the significant position that his **dohas** had come to occupy. Guru Nanak too it is believed had encounters with **Sufi** teachers or **Shaikhs** of which a single encounter, with a **Shaikh** Ibrahim, of Pakpattan near Multan is considered authentic by scholars.

On most fronts, however, the available documentation on contact between **Sufi** mystics and the Hindu **sants** or saints, are contradicted. The most convincing field for the consideration of an inter-change between the **Sufis** and the **sants** can be found in the themes of their poetry and devotional songs particularly the attitude of the two traditions towards the “love relationship” between disciple, God and teacher which is central to both traditions. Thus, both traditions shared the nature of the pain and suffering of the devotees in their relationship to the divine. This suffering, which we earlier called **viraha**, in ones love for the God as beloved, is found in Kabir’s writings too. Scholars compare this **bhakti** notion of **viraha** to the **Sufi** notion of **ishq** which is expressed not through **viraha** but **dard**. It leads to an experience that is called **atish** which is similar to the experience of **agni** or burning of one’s soul in **viraha**. The ideas in Kabir’s **dohas** about love, separation and suffering are found revealed in the lyrics of **Sufi** poetry as well (see sub-section 24.3.1), as we can see. Both, Kabir’s **nirguna** bhakti and the **Sufi** tradition, also speak of the idea of how without Lord and devotee, there can be no devotion. There is in fact another sphere of the **bhakti** tradition where the **Sufi** influence is seen. This is in the context of hagiographic writing about the **bhakti** saints. Here the influence of the **Sufi** tradition is revealed in the style of writing. This tradition of biographic writing about the lives of saints had existed in the **Sufi** tradition from the 15th century and before.

24.4.3 Bhakti-Sufi Teachings

It is important to remember that the relationship between the **Sufi** and **bhakti** saints was reciprocal and the **Sufis** too were influenced by the **bhakti** tradition. Thus, besides this major similarity in terms of the method of devotion and its expression, we find that the **Sufi** tradition also produced its saints such as the Shah Karim and Shah Inayet from the 17th century in whose teachings little distinction was made between the divine as Allah or Rama or Hari, similar to what Kabir sought to say, and revealing the influence of the **bhakti** tradition.

In the section above, we have tried to point out how medieval mysticism revealed a certain sycretism between the Hindu and Muslim traditions of **bhakti** and **Sufism**. The two reveal a major similarity in the nature of devotion and openness to all sections of society which made both, relatively more egalitarian. The influence of **Sufi** thought on the lives of Kabir and Nanak is seen very clearly. Guru Nanak on many of his journeys is believed to have been wearing **Sufi** robes. In fact so significant was his attempt at bringing the **bhakti** of **gurbani** and **sufi** teachings together, that when he died, **his last rites were performed according to the customs of both the movements Sufi and Bhakti**; and two different religious structures mark his resting place. Kabir’s life was also devoted to teachings about salvation, liberation, true love and suffering in ones devotion to the Lord. We also saw how there were major similarities between Kabir’s or the **bhakti** traditions

notions of **viraha** and **agni** and the **Sufi** ideas of **ishq**, **dard** and **atish**. Further both **Kabir** and **Nanak** though mystical, were also concerned with the inequities represented by caste society and Hindu orthodoxy in general and spoke up against it.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What are the main teachings of **Sufism** ? State in 5-7 lines.

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2) Point out in 10 lines some similarities between the **Bhakti** and **Sufi** traditions, which would reveal interaction having taken place between them.

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24.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed **Bhakti** and **Sufism**. We began by examining the **Bhakti** tradition, both in the South (from where it began) and the North (to where it spread). We then focused on the **Sufi** tradition and explained what **Sufism** is, and described its spread in India. Finally we made a comparison between **Sufism** and **bhakti**, covering the growth of medieval mysticism, **sufi-bhakti** interaction and **Bhakti-Sufi** teaching. In this way we have clarified **Bhakti** and **Sufism**.

24.6 KEY WORDS

Bhakti : means an act of devotion where one forgets everything except one's worship of the **ishta deva**.

Ecstatic : that which makes one feel joyous and may even send one into a trance.

Hagiography	: refers to the writing of a saint's life.
Incarnation	: means to give concrete or visible form to a spiritual notion. It is believed that Vishnu had 10 incarnations each of which appeared at a moment of social crisis. Of these Krishna was one. Some of the others include Varaha, Mohini, Parashurama. The Hindi word for incarnation is avatar .
Ishta Deva	: a personal God to whom one dedicates ones worship in search of salvation.
Lingam	: is the idolic representation of Siva that we find in temples. This Siva lingam is made very small and then kept in a metal container that the Lingayats were around their neck.
Mystic	: that which deals with things of spiritual significance. A person who lives the life of a mystic, seeks to obtain unity with the divine or God through contemplation and selfless devotion.
Polytheistic	: essentially refers to belief in more than one God.
Salvation	: means the saving of the soul or a belief that one can be delivered of one's sins, and reach heaven. It is a religious notion used extensively in Christianity as well.
Selfless	: without thinking of oneself. So 'selfless' devotion' would be devotion where one thinks only of the God and not of oneself and what one will get out of such devotion.
Sufi	: refers to the mystic saints that are a sect in the Islamic tradition.
Syncreticism	: the unification of different schools of thought or sects or beliefs.
Tenets	: refers to basic doctrine, dogmas or principles of a religion.

24.7 FURTHER READINGS

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Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The basic teaching against which the **bhakti** tradition protested was the Hindu belief in society being divided into many social groups that were unequal in nature and gave rise to the caste system. This inequality meant that these men were unequal even in the eyes of God and were not allowed to worship God as others could. It also lashed out against the orthodox and polytheistic nature of Hinduism.
- 2) **Bhakti** is a reference to the act of devotion or worship of a particular deity without consideration for oneself or any other deity. One is believed to become totally involved in one's worship to a chosen deity. It developed as a movement in the medieval period in India. Lord Krishna and Shiva have been the main deity's around whom the **bhakti** tradition arose. The movement offered an alternative to the orthodox nature of Hinduism. It particularly stressed the idea of the equality of all men in the eyes of God and rejected the unfair nature of the caste system.
- 3) The three types of **bhakti** can be described as follows:
 - i) **Viraha** : The word viraha means separation. The main aspect therefore of **viraha bhakti** is the devotion of the devotee to the God, in the absence of the deity or, the feeling of loss that arises when the God goes away and the devotion that arises out of this. It is called **viraha bhakti** as it is a particular form of deep devotion that arises in the absence of someone.
 - ii) **Saguna** : This is **bhakti** where through disciplined practice the devotee comes to worship God as an entity separate from the devotee and above him. This is possible through the worshipping of a personal deity or **ishta deva**. This form is mostly found in the South of India.
 - iii) **Nirguna** : This is **bhakti** where the aim is to seek union or fusion with the deity whom one is worshipping. This is once again possible only through worship and years of devotion. It is believed that the deity through such devotion becomes so pleased that he absorbs his devotee into his own body. As for example, the texts tell us that Mirabai was absorbed by Lord Krishna into his body. This form of **bhakti** is found mostly in North India.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Sufism is a mystic movement. The **Sufis** are mystic teachers and for centuries have had disciples. **Sufis** follow the Quran and believe in a life of unselfishness and renouncement of worldly possessions. They also believe in an attitude of patience, humility and charity. The basic teachings include the devotion to God or Allah through a concentration on his being and by repeating his name. This is known as **dhikr**. It encourages the listening of music and song to create religious emotion. This is called **sama**.
- 2) If we closely look at the nature of **bhakti** and **Sufi** traditions we find many similarities between them. To begin with in both traditions there is an emphasis on concentrating attention upon a single deity. In **Sufism**, this is called **dhikr** and **ishq** in **bhakti**, it is the idea of the **ishta deva**. Secondly, the notion of **viraha** in **bhakti** can be compared to what the **Sufis** call **dard**. Just as **viraha** leads to experiencing **agni** (fire in the soul) **dard** leads to **atish**. Finally, both the traditions as we see talk about a love between the devotee and the deity and in both cases this lover for the deity resembles the love that one feels for one's beloved and the nature of pain and suffering of the devotee in his relationship to the divine, are found in both traditions. Thus, we can say that these similarities do point to the two traditions having interacted with each other.

UNIT 25 MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS I — VEERASHAIVISM

Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 What is Veerashaivism ?
- 25.3 Socio-Historical Background of Veerashaivism
 - 25.3.1 Origin of Veerashaivism
 - 25.3.2 Social Conditions Prevailing in Medieval Times
 - 25.3.3 Emergence of Veerashaivism
 - 25.3.4 Bhakti Movement and Veerashaivism
- 25.4 Essential Features of Veerashaivism
 - 25.4.1 Worship of the Linga
 - 25.4.2 Anti-ritualism
 - 25.4.3 Anti-pollution Ideology
 - 25.4.4 Shatsthala, Astavarana and Panchachara
 - 25.4.5 Kayaka
- 25.5 Organisational Framework
 - 25.5.1 Jangana
 - 25.5.2 Mathas
- 26.6 Subsequent Developments and Contemporary Status
 - 25.6.1 Dilemmas and Divisions
 - 25.6.2 Contemporary Status
- 25.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.8 Key Words
- 25.9 Further Readings
- 25.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

25.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to

- define the social movement of the Veerashaivas of the 12th century A.D
- describe the socio-historical background of Veerashaivism list and elaborate the basic features of Veerashaivism
- point out the dilemmas and contemporary developments within Veerashaivism.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit (Unit 24) you looked at the **Sufi** and **Bhakti** movements. In this unit we are going to describe the social movement of the Veerashaivas. We will begin section 25.2 with a simple description of what the movement is all about. This will be followed by section 25.3 which traces some important aspects of the socio-historical background of Veerashaivism. In the next section (25.4) we will list out and elaborate the essential features of Veerashaivism. The organisational framework of the movement will be described in section 25.5. This will be followed by a brief observation on developments within the movement and a note on the contemporary status of Veerashaivism.

25.2 WHAT IS VEERASHAIVISM ?

Veerashaivism was a socio-religious movement which emerged around the middle of

the 12th century in north Karnataka. This movement of the Veerashaivas (meaning heroic Shaivas) challenged certain traditional Hindu beliefs and practices relating to caste, ritual pollution, and status of women. The movement projected for its followers a new social order which was based on ritual equality (in terms of worship and belief), sanctity of all work, and universal ritual purity i.e. purity of all followers irrespective of sex, age and occupation. This movement utilised Kannada, the spoken language of the masses, to communicate its ideas. The movement is closely linked with the name of Basaveswara (1105-1167) who is identified by many as the founding father of the movement. He was instrumental in popularising it in the Kannada speaking region of south India. Veerashaivas are also popularly known by another name, the Lingayats. Lingayats means bearers of the “Linga”, the symbol of Lord Shiva. The Veerashaivas or Lingayats worship only Lord Shiva in the form of a **Linga**. Veerashaivism holds that all Linga worshippers were equal and gained equal access to salvation. Salvation according to the Lingayats, came through hard work and dedication to remove social evils. In the following sections of the unit we will elaborate these aspects in a more detailed manner.

25.3 SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF VEERASHAIVISM

In the previous section we described Veerashaivism in a nutshell. In this section we will describe the origin and social conditions and factors associated with the emergence of this social movement. We will also point out the common grounds covered by Veerashaivism and the **Bhakti** movement.

25.3.1 Origin of Veerashaivism

Veerashaivism claims to have an ancient origin. It is believed to have emerged from Shaivism which centres around the worship of **Lord Shiva**. There is uncertain information about Veerashaivism until about the 12th century A.D. when Basava entered the scene. Many believe that it was he who propounded the ideas and practice of Veerashaivism as distinct from Shaivism, and other religious systems. It was since his time that Veerashaivism also came to be known as Lingayatism because the most important component of the faith was the **Ishtalinga** (phallic image of Shiva worn on the body). Veerashaivites were also called Lingayats since the 12th century, as every Veerashaivite wore a **Linga**, the image of Lord Shiva on his/her body.

Box 25.01

Some claim that Veerashaivism is much older than Basava. They insist that Basava was only reviver of the faith. They claim that Lingayat traditions were founded by five ascetics — **Ekorama, Panditaradhya, Revana, Marula** and **Viswaradhya** — who were held to have sprung from the head of Lord Shiva. Since there is little information about Veerashaivism as a broad social movement until about the 12th century, we can, for all practical purposes, say that Veerashaivism emerged around the 12th century during Basava's time. Since the 12th century, the terms Veerashaivism and Lingayatism became interchangeable. In the next sub-section we will look into the condition and factors which helped this movement to emerge in a big way.

25.3.2 Social Conditions Prevailing in Medieval Times

Hinduism was the dominant religion in the Deccan Plateau (which included Karnataka) in medieval times. The Hindu religion had its own distinctive characteristics in every area of life and experience. Worship of numerous Gods and

Goddesses, idol worship, complex religious rituals, visits to temples and pilgrim centres, and an elaborate system of life-cycle rituals were an important part of Hindu social life.

A caste system that was based on unequal rights, status, duties privileges and obligations prevailed. The high castes exercised authority over the low castes. Magico religious practices perpetuated by Brahmin priests helped in building up a system of exploitation of groups and individuals who were placed in low status and esteem. Brahmins by and large had access to both material resources and spiritual knowledge.

In the Brahmanical caste system, the ritual status of caste and individuals within the caste depended on a host of criteria. One of the most important criteria was the maintenance of ritual purity, as opposed to 'ritual pollution'. The 'pure' and the 'impure' status of individuals and groups were clearly and rigidly defined. Life crises such as birth and death were considered polluting, hence the need for purification. Castes were graded in terms of purity with the upper twice born castes graded as ritually higher in status than other castes. Large groups of people termed as Shudras were assigned low ritual status and denied access to many things. Women were also considered ritually impure as compared to men, especially due to the pollution arising from menstruation and childbirth. Women were assigned a very low status in society and could not participate in many activities that men could.

Hereditary specialisation of occupations were also noticeable. Some occupations were graded as ritually higher than others. Differential power, prestige and esteem were assigned on that basis. For instance priesthood, ministerial assignments in the kings court were high status occupations. Barbers and sweepers, on the other hand were assigned very low status in society. Reciprocal interactions between members were also dictated by notions of purity and pollution. Interaction between castes was highly restricted and a clearly defined network of rules prevailed, which inhibited interaction and intermarriage between castes. On the whole we can say that inequality — social, religious and economic — prevailed during this time. Exploitation and oppression of high castes over the low castes were witnessed in many areas of life.

25.5.3 Emergence of Veerashaivism

It is not merely in the existence of these social conditions like the inequality created by the caste system, that gave rise to this social movement. A host of inter-related factors aided the emergence of Veerashaivism as an important social movement. Prof. C.N. Venugopal outlines these factors to be i) royal patronage combined with the missionary zeal of the activists ii) the spread of vernacular Lingayat religious literature iii) the enthusiastic response from the low castes to the new life conditions offered by the movement.

Let us examine these factors one by one.

i) Royal patronage

From the 2nd century A.D. to 12th century A.D. Jainism was another major religio-political force in Karnataka apart from Hinduism. Successive Hindu kings had fostered Jain trade religion and architecture. But by the 12th A.D. due to internal conflicts and external aggression in the political area in Karnataka, the Jains lost their political royal patronage at this point of time. Vigorous and effective propagation by the leaders of this movement drew the attention of the royalty which began to give material and moral support and patronage to the leaders. The trading castes in Karnataka also began supporting the movement. Basaveswara (popularly known as Basava) held a key position in the kingdom of Bijjala. Political office backed by

royal support was helpful in promoting the ideology of the movement. Several rules of Karnataka like the King of Vijayanagar, Mysore, the royal family and rajas of Coorg put material and morality to the movement that was emerging.

ii) **Leadership combined with the missionary zeal of the activists.**

As mentioned earlier, the emergence of Veerashaivism as a powerful social movement is mainly ascribed to the leadership provided by Basava. He with a band of loyal followers like Allamma Prabhu, Cennabasava, Siddharama and others gave shape and vigour to the movement. At this point, it is essential that we look in greater detail at what Basaveswara or Basava did for this movement.

Basava was born in 1125 A.D. in a Brahmin family in Karnataka. Right from his early age he was critical of the beliefs and practices perpetuated by high caste Hindus in society. He saw beyond his times. He began articulating the ideology to protest and reform from an early age. He wanted to restructure the social order on an egalitarian basis.

Box 25.02

The Veerashaivite movement seems to have begun in Kalyana in north Karnataka. Basava proclaimed that Lord Shiva was the Supreme Being and all those who worshipped him are equal irrespective of sex, age or caste. In order to become a member of this movement Basava insisted, that everyone must wear a 'linga' on his/her body and worship it daily. Also he said that everyone must give up their caste, sex and community based status differences. Basava also greatly emphasized the devotional element of the faith he was trying to establish. He said everyone was equal in the eyes of God and there must be free interaction in every sphere between all members who believed in Veerashaivism.

One of the most important steps taken by Basava to popularise this movement was the establishment of the Anubhava Mantapa (Hall of Discussion of Experience) at Kalyana. Members drawn from various social and economic backgrounds met here and discussed many things, mainly the various aspects of Veerashaivism. The discussion was carried on under the guidance of leaders and conducted in Kannada, the local language of the people. The ideological format of Veerashaivism was drawn from these discussions held at the Anubhava Mantapa.

Basava's teachings were simple and easily understandable. He wrote, in simple verse form known as **Vachanas** which could be easily memorised. He was assisted by a band of devoted followers like Allamma Prabhu, Cennabasava, Siddharama and others Basava personally initiated newcomers into the movement.

The leaders converted many people to **Linga** worship. They advocated and allowed open recruitment to their movement. Most of the energies of the leaders were spent on clarifying and outlining the ideology of protest and reform. They emphasised on Bhakti or personal devotion and insisted that all are equal and pure in the eyes of Shiva. Such as emphasis on equality in worship, equality of salvation, and work, was highly attractive specially to the lower castes. The fact that the leaders spread the message of their faith in Kannada greatly helped in stimulating a positive response from the masses.

iii) **The spread of vernacular lingayat religious literature**

The leaders of the movement wrote and spoke their ideas and beliefs in Kannada. They preferred to write in the prose medium. Even before the emergence of

Veerashaivite literature the Jains had contributed to the development of Kannada language and literature. Basava and his contemporaries brought into existence Veerashaiva literature in simple prose. It was in a language that could be easily understood even by the common man. This greatly helped in popularising the movement. There emerged innumerable writers and many women among them. One of the popular women writers was Akkamahadevi. The composition of the verses in Kannada put vigour and support to the movement. The simple prose lines consisting of not more than three or four lines could be easily memorised by the people. Many of **Vachanas** are collected in the book "**Sanya Sampadava**". They form guides to human conduct from the time the **Vachanas** have emerged till today. Lingayats pay homage to thinkers and saints especially women saints and thinkers by reciting their work during festive and ceremonial occasions.

iv) **Enthusiasm of the low castes for taking to Veerashaivism**

As mentioned earlier, Veerashaivism opened its gates to all. It held no barriers of castes, class, age or sex. The movement waged a fierce battle against those beliefs and practices that discriminated one man from another and a woman from a man. Basava and his followers emphasised that both manual and mental work was equal in status and one must be devoted to work.

The movement attracted and secured many adherents among low castes who were by profession potters, barbers, or washermen. Conversion to this faith did not require that these castes should give up their previous occupation. People from the farmers harding and trading occupations were also drawn towards this movement. The social groups in which the movement was anchored exhibited predominantly lower caste social status. For instance some of the members who were active Veerashaivites were Chennaiya who was a scavenger by profession and **Appanna** who was a barber by professions Basavas three close associates were untouchables. The untiring efforts of activists and the appeal of the new faith which promised a life without restrictions or inequality was instrumental in promoting Veerashaivism in a big way among many groups of people spread across Karnataka and its neighbouring places.

Activity 1

Visit a Hindu matha nearest to the place where you live and compare it with the mathas of Veerashaivism. If you do not have a matha near your place, visit a gurudwara or church or a mosque and list out its activities. Compare them with the activities of the Lingayat mathas. What similarities do you find ?

25.3.4 Bhakti Movement and Veerashaivism

In the context of our discussion of the socio-historical background of **Veerashaivism** it is pertinent to mention a few lines about the **Bhakti** movement. The **Bhakti** movement had come into prominence. It provided a kind of spiritual forum for people from different socio-economic background. The main features of the **Bhakti** movement were (i) cultivation of personal devotion of God (ii) the emphasis on rituals (iii) monotheism and (iv) participation as a collectivity with a feeling of brotherhood and equality. In the previous unit we have described in greater detail the **Bhakti** movement. The movement provided a macro-land link for the Hindus and non-Hindu masses scattered over towns and villages. The **Bhakti** movement also linked the elite and the masses at many levels i.e. intellectual, literary, religious and so on.

Veerashaivism too shared some of these characteristics. It emphasized the element of bhakti to one God, Shiva. It repeats ritualism. Both leaders and followers were

linked together in an equal relationship with God. The social background of the devotees to Lord Shiva also varied. It included men, women rulers, ministers, trading groups, barbers, potters, scavengers and so on. **The emphasis was on dignity of labour and equality was promised to all significant changes in a society which was rooted in inequality and exploitation.**

Now we will turn our attention to the essential features of Veerashaivism in the next section.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Veerashaivism emerged in the 12th century in
 - a) Tamil Nadu
 - b) West Bengal
 - c) Karnataka
 - d) Assam
- 2) Veerashaivites are also popularly known as
 - a) Lingayats
 - b) Nayanars
 - c) Vaishnavites
 - d) Alvars
- 3) The emergence of Veerashaivism as a social movement is associated with the name of
 - a) Nayak
 - b) Meera
 - c) Surdas
 - d) Basava
- 4) What are the four factors which aided the emergence of the movement ? Your answer must be within 8 lines.

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25.4 ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF VEERASHAIVISM

To re-emphasise what we have said before, **Veerashaivism was a social movement of protest and reform.** It protested against the beliefs and practices upheld by Brahminical Hinduism. It wanted to reform Hindu society of its social evils like exploitation of the upper castes by the lower castes, of the unjust treatment meted

out to women and so on. It projected a society where all were considered equal in all spheres of life.

The essential features of Veerashaivism are:

- i) rejection of the worship of multitude of Gods and Goddesses;
- ii) anti-ritualism;
- iii) anti pollution ideology;
- iv) **Shasthala ashtavaranas and panchacharas;**
- v) **Kayaka.**

Let us now describe the features.

25.4.1 Worship of the Linga

Veerashaivism did not advocate the worship of idols, and the worship of a multitude of Gods and Goddesses. It emphasised the worship of only one God namely Lord Shiva. Shiva was the only Supreme Being to be worshipped in the form of a **Linga**. Every man or woman who became a Veerashaivite became a Lingayat or a bearer of Lord Shiva. He or she had to wear the image of Shiva on his/her body and worship it daily. This one of the most important features of Veerashaivism consists in the wearing of the personal **lingam** or **Ishtalinga**, the emblem of the God Shiva on the body of member of the faith. This applied to both men and women to all age groups irrespective of their social status.

The utterance of "**Namah Shivaya**" was the most important simple form of salutation to Lord Shiva. The **Ishta Linga** or the personal Lingam was an inseparable part of Veerashaivites life and remained with the devotee till death. For the woman, it was her spiritual husband and for the man his spiritual consort. The Linga was the source and goal of all things. The Linga helped to grant all objects desired and ward off the undesirable.

This emphasis on the **Ishtalinga** can be noted as a symbol of equality of membership in the community. Since both men and women, young and old were required to wear a personal **Lingam**, there was sense of equality of sexes and age groups. Anyone who wore the **Ishtalinga**, irrespective of his occupational subgrouping was regarded an equal. **Linga** was the ultimate reality to one and all in the Veerashaivite community.

25.4.2 Anti-ritualism

Veerashaivism also protested against many of the rituals perpetuated by Brahmanical Hinduism. It was against temple worship sacrifices and pilgrimages. Veerashaivites were forbidden to visit temples where a statue **Linga** had been installed. They were discouraged from participating or undertaking sacrificial ceremonies which involved slaughter, and elaborate offerings to Gods and Goddesses. Endowment to temples were also forbidden because Veerashaivism believed that such acts as these encouraged inequality between one devotee and another. Veerashaivism also discouraged visiting holy places as, such visits did not ensure inner purity according to them. Visiting holy places did not have any ritual significance for the Veerashaivite. To this day, Lingayats as a group do not participate in the Kumbha Mela festivals which are an important attraction to several Shaivite groups in Hindu society. Veerashaivism discouraged its followers from praying to idols of village deities. Meat eating and drinking of liquor was tabooed. Listening to oracles, believing in



Lord Shiva with characteristic trident and snake. Note that there is a variety of Shiva-lingas all around Shiva.

the efficacy of village exorcists and participating in the rites to witchcraft were also forbidden.

The anti-ritualistic nature of Veerashaivism was seen in the simple codes of conduct it laid down for its members. Every Lingayat by offering his daily prayers to Istalinga was expected to find peace and liberation without the help of a priest temple, or sacrifice. Veerashaivism advocated vegetarianism and whatever little rituals it adopted in the course of time which were similar for both men and women belonging to any caste or professing any occupation. All **Linga** wearers were equal free and pure from the taints of birth and death. This point leads us to the next important feature namely the antipollution ideology of Veerashaivism.

25.4.3 Anti-pollution Ideology

The Veerashaivism doctrine enjoined upon its members to desist from observing the "**Pancha Sutakas**" or Five Pollutions namely the pollution arising from (i) birth (ii) death (iii) menstruation (iv) spittle and (v) caste contact i.e. contact with the so-called inferior castes. These five pollutions were an important part of the belief systems and practices of Brahmanical Hinduism. All Hindus have definite obligations to observe during birth and death which includes the performance of purificatory rites. The childbirth of a Lingayat woman however, is free from the pollution of birth; so is the mother who has delivered the child. Death, according to Veerashaivism was considered as a merger with Lord Shiva. It was an event to be rejoiced not

to be mourned, an event which needed no purification for a Veerashaivite who wore the **Linga** on his body was mentally and physically pure. The dead are buried and not burnt among the Lingayat till this date.

The observation of menstrual pollution was looked upon by Veerashaivism as a hinderance to the daily worship of Lord Shiva which was obligatory for every Lingayat woman, child and man. Among many orthodox Hindu groups, women were deined access to God and participation in many social activities during their monthly menstrual period. **Veerashaivism did not advocate the observance of segregation of women from religious and other social activities during menstruation.**

The observance of spittle pollution (pollution arising from touch or contact with the spit especially observed by Brahmins) was again looked upon as unessential by Veerashaivism. All were equal in the eyes of Shiva hence one man could not pollute another man in any way. Thus caste contact, pollution, and orthodox beleif and practice was also totally rejected by Veerashaivism.

Veerashaivism believed in mental purity which was essential for the attainment of personal salvation. This mental purity, according to Veerashaivism, was not based on any ritual purity as orthodox Hinduism demanded.

Box 25.03

Many of the **Vachanas** of Basava and his followers point out the limitations placed on the human mind and body by the observation of these five ritual pollutions. For instance, the elaborate purificatory rites related to birth and death observed by the high castes were very expensive and often led to a great degree of economic stress. This economic strain was felt specially by poor and middle class families. The core of the Veerashaiva teachings is their refusal to recognize the concept of ritual pollution basic to Brahmanical Hinduism. The **Ishtalinga** worn by a Lingayat ensured ritual purity. These aspects of Veerashaivism are consistent and fundamental to the faith, and deemed essential for salvation.

25.4.4 Shatsthala, Astavarana and Panchachara

So far, while describing the essential features of Veerashaivism we have focused mainly on those aspects of Brahmanical Hinduism that Veerashaivism criticised and tried to reform. Now let us look at some of the important components of its belief systems from the viewpoint of the individual.

The three most important were **Shatsthala**, **Astavarana** and **Panchachara**. The **Shatsthala** consisted of six steps which an individual had to take in order to attain a merger of his self with Lord Shiva. The **Astavarana** serve as covers which protected an individual from dangers which came in the way of his spiritual pursuits. The eight covers were the:

- i) **Linga** — The emblem of the Supreme i.e. Lord Shiva which was not only an object of worship but also that which had to reside in the body of the devotee for ever.
- ii) **Guru** — the spiritual perceptor who initiated a new comer into the spiritual knowledge of Veerashaivism. Lingayat men, women and children wore Linga through initiation by a Guru. This initiation ceremony whereby an individual took a spiritual birth in the Guru's hands was extremely significant in that the individual was freed from the clutches of caste and entered a society where he was equal to all and inferior to none.

- iii) **Jangama** — devoted person who was endowed with excellent knowledge and he moved from place to place preaching the doctrines of Veerashaivism. The **Jangama** guided the devotee in his spiritual activities.
- iv) **Padodaka** — This meant 'thirtha' or holy water which served to integrate the devotee and the preceptor. The holy water "purified" the devotee who partook of it.
- v) **Prasada** or the returned offerings indicated that those objects offered to God during worship become sacred. The **Padodaka** and **Prasada** were taken with great devotion in same place by devotees coming from different social backgrounds. The distinctions of caste, sex, creed or colour ceased to exist and a sense of fraternity among fellow faith members was promoted.
- vi) **Vibhuti** was the sacred ash that was applied on the forehead of the devotee.
- vii) **Rudraksha** referred to the sacred chain worn around the neck of the Veerashaivite, and
- viii) **Mantra** — the simple form of salutation to Lord Shiva through the utterance of the mantra "Namah Shivya".

Box 25.04

The **Panchachara** were five religious stances or postures which a Veerashaivite had to take in order to protect the faith from disintegration. The five positions were the **Lingachara**, **Sadachara**, **Shivachara**, **Ganachara** and **Brityachara**. The **Lingachara** was the acknowledgement of the absolute equality of all Lingawearers. The **Sadachara** was the adoption of **Kayaka** (toil with a sense of duty, devotion and service) as the guarding principle of life. **Shivachara** was the pursuit of the tenets of Veerashaivism with a pure heart while **Ganachara** was the adoption of militancy to fight off any threats to the integrity of the religious community. **Brityachara** was the implementation of 'dasoha' to sustain the religious community. **Dasoha** implied community sharing of one's labour i.e. an individual rendered service to his community by donating generously from his resources. The service to others was based partly on the income derived from his toil.

All these three components reflected the principle and practice of equity of worship and salvation that Veerashaivism was trying to promote. The beliefs and practices were/are applicable to all **Linga** wearing men, women and children. Veerashaivism insisted on the sanctity of all work, mental and manual emphasised equal opportunities for all in society to pursue their goals. This was keeping in mind the good of the society. The belief in equality of worship and salvation was also seen in the emphasis on **Kayaka** or toil.

25.4.5 Kayaka

Veerashaivism considered all work as equal and important. **To toil, with a sense of duty and dedication was considered essential for the livelihood and good of the individual and the welfare of the community.** Lingayatism made no hierarchical discrimination between occupations. The social consequences of this ideology relating to toil was a promotion of an affirmative attitude and constructive approach to the problems of work and labour in society. It preached a worldly rational and liberal attitude to work as compared to the attitude promoted by Brahmanical Hinduism. Brahmanical Hinduism did not uphold the pursuit of worldly activities. Veerashaivism advocated that one can attain salvation by finding Heaven in one's work and by devotion to work. No occupation was to be looked down upon and an individual could change his occupation whenever he wanted. By working hard, he could earn wealth, improve his standard of living, and at the same time he

had to contribute some of his earnings to the service of the community. Today there are many educational institutions, and charitable trusts started by the Lingayats for the welfare of both Lingayats and non-Lingayats.

The principle of **Kayaka** was implemented as early as Basava's time. In the **Anubhava Mantapa** built by **Basava** *there was absolutely no distinction between persons holding high office and those earning lower income.* The engagement of **Kayaka** was conceived in two ways. (i) if a person was already gainfully employed he was advised to send physical and social help to support the communal services such as feeding and sheltering needy people (ii) If there was an unemployed person he was encouraged to take up a job.

Thus we can see that Veerashaivism tried to integrate the personal and social aspects of an individual life on the principle of religious and social equality. People from different castes and occupations were attracted towards this movement. The beliefs and practice it stood for served as guides for day to day behaviour. For women, Veerashaivism offered liberation and equality with men. Veerashaivism advocated widow remarriage, discouraged child marriage and encouraged women to be the active participants in the promotional activities relating to the faith. Since both men and women were required to wear a personal **Lingam** and worship it daily, a sense of equality of sexes in the religious sphere was created.

Now we move on to another aspect of Veerashaivism, the organisational framework developed by it in order to propagate uphold and sustain its doctrines.

Check Your Progress 2

1) List out the essential features of Veerashaivism.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

2) Select the correct answer:

Personal **Lingam** is to be worn by

- a) only men
- b) only women
- c) only priests
- d) men, women and children

3) Select the right answer.

All **Linga** wearers were free from the pollution caused by

- a) birth, death and menstruation
- b) birth, death, menstruation, spittle and caste contact
- c) birth and death only
- d) interaction with inferior castes

4) What are the three most important components of the Lingayat religious ideological structure ? Answer in less than 5 lines.

lineage. It was this process of splitting into two divisions that mainly laid the foundations of caste like groupings, within the **Lingayat** community. What is important to remember is that the **Jangama** was not a hereditary priest who enjoyed high status because he was born in a caste that enjoyed high ritual status. He performed both religious and secular tasks and could be drawn from any social and economic background.

25.5.2 Mathas

Mathas or religious centres have always been an important of Hindu religious organisation. Since **Veerashaivism** did not believe or encourage in temple worship, **mathas** served as institutional alternatives to temples. **Veerashaivism** established large **mathas** which had small branches all over Karnataka and neighbouring regions. The heads of the larger **mathas** were celibate and commanded respect among the people. In all matters relating to the **mathas** the people in that area were invited to participate in decision making. This practice of involving people from diverse backgrounds to discuss religious as well as secular matters can be traced to Basava. In his **Anubhava Mantapa** (Hall of Discussion) people from different backgrounds met to discuss ideas relating to **Veerashaivism**.

The notable activities that the **mathas** have been following are, propagation of **Lingayat** doctrine, sheltering and feeding the needy and educating the laity in secular subjects. While propagating the ideas of **Lingayatism** the **mathas** did not specifically recommend celibacy or asceticism (giving up worldly desires and possessions). They emphasised the purity of heart, cultivation of piety and engagement of good deeds as the right steps to reach God. There was supposed to be no show or glamour attached to the heads and members of the **mathas**. The hierarchy within a **matha** was to be kept at a minimum and the succession in the headship of a **matha** was done by nomination or by seniority.

Activity 2

In your own family or neighbourhood or community, look out for those individuals who have departed from traditional caste rules and expectations. To what extent have they succeeded in being a deviant — an outcaste — a rebel ? Keeping in view the dilemma faced by newcomers in **Veerashaivism**, list out the dilemmas faced by the individuals you have observed.

The **Lingayat mathas** all over Karnataka became a source of help to people in despair. While grants were often received from the patronage of rulers and local chieftains, there were also voluntary donations made by the public. The resident guru of a **matha**, known as the **ayya** (elder) not only provided shelter and food but also maintained discipline in the local community. Those who were attached to **mathas** had to follow his instructions. The **mathas** provided help not only to **Lingayat** groups but also to **non-Lingayats** on different occasions. They were closely associated with the political processes in Karnataka right from the 12th century.

Especially during turbulent times, the **mathas** were used as sounding boards for assessing public opinion. This was so particularly between 15-18 centuries A.D.

In the next sections we will focus on some of the dilemmas and lapses which developed within the **Veerashaivites** community in the subsequent periods after its emergence. We will also outline the contemporary status of **Veerashaivism**.

25.6 SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CONTEMPORARY STATUS

We now turn to developments which have taken place since medieval times in Veerashaivism.

25.6.1 Dilemmas and Divisions within the Veerashaivite Community

From the 12th century to the 16th century, Veerashaivism grew as a powerful social movement in Karnataka, winning numerous followers. The quick conversions, it brought about gave rise to frequent lapses amongst its members. New converts found it difficult to give up their old ways of thinking and acting specially relating to caste and worship. They were caught between the old and the new values. Within a single household some converted to Veerashaivism while other did not do so. This led to interpersonal fractions within a family. At a larger level, Veerashaivism faced strong opposition from orthodox sections of Hinduism, specially the Brahmins whose position and power came to be challenged by the new faith. In spite of these pressures, due to the writing efforts of the activists and the appeal of its ideas and practices, Lingayatism became a force to reckon with in Karnataka. According to Professor Venugopal the greatest numerical expansion of the **Lingayats** was in the 15th and 16th centuries. Many feudal chieftains of Karnataka specially south Karnataka converted to the **Lingayat** path. This feudal patronage while adding prestige and economic strength to the faith also introduced divisions within it.

After the 16th century **Veerashaivism** slowed down its conversion activities. The closing the boundaries to outsiders began and rifts within the community emerged. Hereditary status groups of washermen, barbers, artisans and traders began to develop and these groups became endogamous. Their loyalties were given to different **mathas**. The device to acquire power and control over the vast resources accumulated over the years, led to divisions within the **Veerashaivite** community.

Many departures from the ideals and practices propounded by **Veerashaivism** began to be seen. For instance, there was no provision for a priestly group as found in Brahmanical Hinduism, among the Lingayats. The **Lingachara** was the acknowledgement of equality of all **Linga wearers**. But in course of time the Guru and the Jangama order among the Lingayats began to assume hereditary class characteristics which was not foreseen by the early Lingayats. The growing number of **mathas** provided a convenient place for recruiting the desired members into the **Guru** or **Tangama** order. Control over monasteries, properties attached to them such as buildings and educational trusts created by the charities of the public, became an important source of hereditary succession. The existence of a priestly group not only created inequality among worshippers but also led to a neglect of the principle of **kayaka**.

As mentioned earlier in sub-section 25.5.1 **mathas** were divided into **Guru** and **Virakta mathas**, and each **Lingayat** had its own set of followers. The **Guru** order claimed that their traditions were much older than the 12th century **Lingayat** creed. This order blamed Basava and his followers for hastily converting low castes into **Lingayatism** and thereby **weakening** its discipline. The **Virakta** followers claimed that Basava and Allama Prabhu were of divine origin. They claimed that the **Guru matha** were encouraging Brahmanical traditions which led to the oppression of castes and priestly dominance. By the 17th century the Guru and Jangama amity felt apart in the struggle for power and control. Though these internal divisions did weaken the community strength, Lingayats became a powerful community in Karnataka's political, social and economic life.

25.6.2 Contemporary Status

Keeping in view the belief and respect **Lingayats** had for the principle of **Kayaka**, we find that till about the first quarter of the twentieth century, **Lingayat** groups did not make any drastic change in their occupations. In the 1970's the Miller Committee set up by the King of old Mysore classified **Lingayats** as backward in some respects and recommended reservations for them in education, government service, and other professions. The **Lingayats** made use of these opportunities and today we find them in many high-status positions in the Karnataka government. The Miller Committee did not consider them economically backward as capital was available to the community for many occupations like agriculture and trading. There was a concern for the political future of the **Lingayats** and till today old and new occupations exist side by side within the community as there is little inferiority attached to occupations.

After Independence in 1947, there was a movement to reorganise Indian States on a linguistic basis. Even before Independence, the **Lingayat mathas** of north Karnataka were actively involved in Kannada speaking districts. In 1956 when the Kannada speaking districts were incorporated into the State Karnataka, the **Lingayats** took great initiative in the political integration of the State. Till date the **mathas** play an active role in State politics. **Lingayats** have become chief ministers in Karnataka and the resources of the **mathas** are used during elections.

Today **Lingayats**, according to Professor Venugopal are a weakly knit aggregate of status groups and individuals. A number of **Lingayat** writings point out the discontinuities and contradictions within the community. The writings, conferences and the **Sabhas** organised by the **Lingayats** appeal at reform of the contradictions within the sect. The Liberal approach of the leaders, has appeal both to **Lingayat** and non-**Lingayat** men and women.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What are the two important elements in the **Veerashaivite** organisational framework ? Answer in 2 lines.

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- 2) Select the right answer:

The **Tangamas** could be recruited

- a) only from the Brahman priestly caste
- b) from any socio-economic background but they should be converted to **Lingayatism**
- c) only from low castes
- d) only from the royalty.

- 3) What are the two important weakening factors in the development of **Veerashaivism** ? Answer in about 8 lines.

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25.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the socio-religious movement of the Veerashaivas which emerged in Karnataka during the medieval period. We first defined it in terms of “where, what and who” components of the movement, then we described the socio-historical background of the movement in terms of origin, social conditions and factors associated with its emergence. We also pointed out the common grounds **Veerashaivism** covered with the **Bhakti** movement. The bulk of our discussion was then shifted to the essential features of **Veerashaivism**. This was followed by a description of its organisational framework. We concluded the unit by outlining the subsequent developments within **Veerashaivism** since its emergence and its contemporary status.

25.8 KEY WORDS

- Ishtalinga** : the phallic image of Lord *Shiva* worn on the body of the *Lingayat*.
- Vachana** : a saying in simple verse form.
- Shatsthala** : the six steps which helped the individual to progress towards the attainment of merger of his soul with Lord **Shiva**.
- Astavaranas** : the eight protections or covers essential to **Veerashaivites**.
- Panchachara** : the five postures or stances adopted by every **Veerashaivite** to protect the disintegration of the faith.
- Ideology** : a system of beliefs.
- Kayaka** : toil with a sense of dedication, devotion and service.
- Tangama** : a person who spreads and consolidates the tenets of **Veerashaivism**. As a collective term it refers to the priestly order among the **Veerashaivite**.
- Mathas** : religious centres or monastic centres.

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25.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) c.
- 2) a.
- 3) d.
- 4) The four factors which aided the emergence of the movement were royal patronage, charismatic and committed leaders, spread of Kannada religious literature and the enthusiastic response from low castes.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The essential features are
 - a) Rejection of worship of numerous Gods and Goddesses and worship of **Linga**
 - b) anti-ritualism
 - c) anti-pollution ideology
 - d) **Shatsthala, astavarana and Panchachara**
 - e) **Kayaka**
- 2) d.
- 3) b.
- 4) The most important components of the **Lingayat** ideological structure are **Shatsthala, Astavarana and Panchachara**.
- 5) **Kayaka** meant hard work or toil in **Veerashaivism**. A person who is gainfully

employed was expected to serve others also with the fruits of his labour. Idleness was not encouraged by **Veerashaivism**. Devotion to work was emphasised.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The two most important elements are **the Jangama and the mathas.**
- 2) b.
- 3) The two most important weakening factors are
 - 1) inability of the individual to accept the new faith totally when he is still under the group of old values and practices.
 - 2) internal divisions and feuds within the mathas and members of the faith.

UNIT 26 MODERN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS II — ARYA SAMAJ

Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Need for Reform
- 26.3 Foundation of the Arya Samaj
 - 26.3.1 Organisation of Arya Samaj
 - 26.3.2 Rules of the Arya Samaj
 - 26.3.3 Members of the Arya Samaj
 - 26.3.4 Publications of **Vedabhashya**
- 26.4 Arya Samaj Movement and Reform
 - 26.4.1 Three Challenges to Hinduism
 - 26.4.2 Arya Samaj and Emancipation of Women
 - 26.4.3 Politics and the Arya Samaj
- 26.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.6 Key Words
- 26.7 Further Readings
- 26.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

26.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this unit, you should be able to understand

- socio-economic conditions that needed reforms
- foundation, organisation and rules of Arya Samaj
- teaching of Arya Samaj
- major contributions of Arya Samaj
- Arya Samaj Movement and Modern India

26.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we point out the need for reform in Indian society that was noticed and acted upon by the Arya Samaj. We start with the founding of the Arya Samaj, the rules of the Arya Samaj, and who were the first members. We then go on to the Arya Samaj movement with respect to reform. This is with reference to the challenges to Hinduism, the emancipation of women, and the role of Arya Samaj in politics. The material for this unit is derived from the books given in **Further Reading** at the end of the unit.

26.2 NEED FOR REFORM

Swami Dayanand the founder of the Arya Samaj was born in 1824, when India was ruled by the British. Dayanand was the son of a Brahmin father and mother. His education started at the age of five and in his 8th year he was invested with the sacred thread. Dayanand's religious transformation occurred when at the age of 14 he was asked to observe the fast of Shivaratri. Dayanand and his father went to a temple for the prayer and chanting mantras. As Dayanand watched a mosque climbed the statue of Shiva and then began eating the offerings. This set Dayanand off on his religious quest. He realised that the idol itself could not be the god himself. It was an age when means of transportation and communication were relatively primitive. There were few printing press or good news papers. The initial

fear of the British government was that press and modern education would create an atmosphere ripe for sedition.

During that period the Britishers adopted the policy of producing economically cheap English educated clerks on a mass scale to run the British administration in India. The basic motive behind this policy was to de-culturise and de-humanise English educated persons.

The important problems of those days was the problems created by British rule, and a host of other evils that branched out from colonial oppression of India. These included the threat of mass level conversion of the Indians to Christianity, the custom of untouchability that condemns Shudras to a sub-human existence, the low status of women, the purdah system, child marriage, illiteracy and also the most unfortunate Sati-system. These problems made Dayanand restless and uneasy. Further there was the problem of the growing pauperisation of masses as a result of the policy to reduce India to an agricultural colony of industrialised England.

Box 26.01

Dayanand's education was Vedic and his father was one of his teachers. His education began with the Yajur Veda (one of the four Vedas) and continued in Sanskrit learning the rules of grammar and their application. Logic, philosophy, law, and ethics etc. were also taught. But Dayanand was more than a student. He was a seeker after enlightenment. He brooded over the problem of life and death.

To help him get over his brooding a marriage was fixed for him, but a week before his marriage he ran away from home at the age of 21. He became a **sadhu** and never regretted it. For 15 years (1845-1860 A.D.), Dayanand wandered all over India, quenching his thirst for knowledge, by meeting scores of other **sadhus** and pandits. Dayanand completed his education when he met Swami Virjanand Saraswati. Swami Virjanand charged Swami Dayanand to purge Hinduism of all the evils that existed in it. He told Dayanand that he must enter the world as an independent teacher. He took a pledge from Swami Dayanand that he would devote his life to the dissemination of truth. Thereafter Dayanand spent his life honouring the pledge he had given to his **guru**.

The idea was that India would only produce raw materials for British factories, and serve as the captive market for their machine made goods. This was made possible due to India's backwardness, superstitions, multiplicity of sects, gurus and sub-faiths, each running down the other. Finally there was the predominance of the Brahmin priests who made other movements like **Bhakti** initially difficult to follow by their reprobation. This plethora of problems started Dayanand straight in the face, and he felt that he must do something about it.

For a proper understanding of the emergence of Arya Samaj we have to transport ourselves mentally to the period when colonisation was at its zenith.

India was governed by foreigners for more than ten centuries. Such a prolonged spell of domination demanded the spirit of India and weakened her. This whole period was of decadence and anaemic activity with an exception of bright patches such as the rise of Marathas, Peshwas and Rajputs, in the south, and the rise of Chalukyas, Cholas and Maharaja Ranjeet Singh in the Punjab. Foreign rule led to a great degree of dependence among Indians. The Brahmin priests were the final authority for all matters, including rituals and customs. The householder could not do anything without consulting them. The Brahmin was often very educated, but he carried his "**patra**" or "**panchang**", and nobody could question either his book or

his authority. The Brahmin priest pontificated in all ceremonies from birth to death. He had to be well fed, paid handsomely and kept in good humour. Ignorance, superstition and blind faith in all rituals of the past held supreme sway. However it must be pointed out that not all Indians were under the blind rule of Brahmins and also that movements such as **Bhakti**, **Sufism** and **Veerashaivism** had grown and flourished during the period.

Untouchability held away among the Hindus who did not touch millions of their own brothers — the Shudras for fear of pollution. If they did, they had to take a cleansing bath. There was a question of interdinning with them. The Hindu world was divided into a large number of sects and subsects, each with their own Guru and their main scripture. Questioning and enquiry was not their method; whatever was written in their sacred books and interpreted by their Guru became their creed. The scriptures were graded as sacrosanct, however any clever pandit could add his own invention to promote his own group-vested interests or special privileges in the name of the “Rishi” who was the original author. Such interpolations, though few in number, distorted the meanings of the original text and created total confusion in the interpretation of such texts. Swami Dayanand sought to unite all Hindus under the banner of the Vedas. He felt that so far as the Vedas were concerned interpolations were impossible.

Box 26.02

Dayanand preached his own vision of Hinduism. He entered into many debates with learned Pandits. He travelled far and wide in Northern India. In 1872 a meeting with Brahma Samaj leaders made him change his mode of address from Sanskrit to Hindi and was thus able to get a better response from the middle classes of the Hindu community. He founded schools and periodicals with the help of the Hindi speaking middle classes. Numerous books and pamphlets were also published. In 1875 the Arya Samaj was founded in Bombay (See 26.3 of this unit). This continued to exist but it was North India that really welcomed Dayanand's message.

26.3 FOUNDATION OF ARYA SAMAJ

Swami Dayanand took an important and far reaching decision during his tour to Bombay in 1875. This decision was regarding the foundation of “Arya Samaj”. This organisation was founded to plant his message and bring reform firmly to the soil of north India. It went on to have an enormous impact on the development of Hinduism and of Indian nationalism.

The idea of an organisation had been in Dayanand's mind for some time. He had tried several times earlier to form a society. Once in Arrah in 1872 and again at Banaras in 1874, but both attempts had been short lived. On January 16, 1875 he set up the Arya Samaj at Rajkot but it did not flourish. Again in January 1875 he set up another Arya Samaj at Ahmedabad, but this attempt too failed. But on April 10, 1875 he set up the Arya Samaj at Bombay. It proved very successful. In Bombay a combination of factors created the right atmosphere for his renewed attempts to spread the influence of Arya Samaj. It may also be considered that by now Dayanand had a better preparation for setting up an organisation than earlier times. His ideas on reform had by now fully matured. There was his book the *Satyarth Prakash* in which he starts with his philosophy of education. He stresses that it is parental duty to make their children educated and of high moral character. He proposed that from the age of five children should learn Sanskrit and Hindi and foreign languages as well. His was thus a three language formula. He was also for parents disciplining their children and socializing them properly. Dayanand was for rigorous education from the age 8 years for both girls and boys, but was not for

co-educational institutions. All students are required to observe Bhramacharya. Dayanand was however for equality of men and women through education. He vehemently opposed child marriage and said that marriage should not be before the age 16 for girls and before the age 25 for boys.

One of the most important and unconventional steps that Dayanand took was to offer to "reclaim" Hindus who had changed their religion to Islam, Christianity and so on. This was often done *en masse* in what was known as the "Suddhi" ceremony or ceremony of purification.

The establishment of Arya Samaj raises a number of important questions. How did Dayanand conceive the role of the Samaj in society, and how did he see his own function in the Samaj? Who were the people interested in joining this organisation, and what were the reasons behind it? What kind of institution emerged (Arya Samaj) and what were its models? We will turn to these questions now.

It may be considered that Dayanand wanted to bring together all Hindus who agreed on a couple of very broad issues: (i) a dedication to religious and social reforms and (ii) a conviction in Hinduism that reform was to come through a revival of Vedic religion. Being organised as a body, these people would be more effective in helping one another in influencing the whole society. Swami Dayanand was not interested in creating a body of followers to propagate his ideas. He held the opinion that reform had to come from the people themselves. It is the task of the people to work for their personal improvement and for the upliftment of society. Dayanand would always be available to the people for advice—either in person or through his publications, but he would not be their leader. He had recognised the limitations of his own knowledge and refused to become the Guru of a group of devotees not even of a single individual.

On the basis of several statements of his we can conclude that from the very beginning Dayanand conceived his own role in the Samaj as anything but a dominant one. It was not his idea that the Samaj should become the esoteric heaven of a selected few, but rather that it should be a broad based and open association that could unite all Hindus of goodwill, around the unifying centre of their religion namely the Vedas. These fundamental attitudes of Dayanand towards the Samaj gradually became stronger as the organisation itself grew in later years.

The meeting and discussions that led to the establishment of the Samaj did not take much of Dayanand's time, which was mostly devoted to his usual work that is preaching, teaching, writing books and establishing Arya Samajis all over India. The public lecture had become the main instruments of his teaching. He had mainly concentrated on the positive side of his message—the history of Aryan people, Vedic revelation, the doctrines of God and soul, ethics and the upliftment of the nation. He had always been reluctant to let the flow of his lectures be interrupted or to have long question and answer sessions after the lectures.

26.3.1 Organisation of Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj had an effective organisational structure. Every branch of the Arya Samaj is a unit in itself, and these are located in villages, towns and cities.

- i) Membership involved acceptance of the ten principles or rules (See Section 26.3.2 for a description of these), the payment of one per cent of monthly or yearly income to help the cause and general cooperation and participation in meetings etc. Such weekly meetings comprised of the *homa* ritual, bhajans and prayers. A lay person regardless of caste conducts these meetings.
- ii) The Executive Committee governed the affairs of the Arya Samaj. The office

bearers were five in number and additional members all elected by the members themselves. The officers are (a) President, (b) Vice-President, (c) Secretary, (d) Accountant, (e) Librarian. These members are supposed to actively participate in the activities of the Samaj.

These members as said are elected annually by ballot, and re-election is permissible.

- iii) Next there is the Provincial Assembly where representatives of the Samaj play an important part. Each Arya Samaj is to give 10 per cent of its gross income to the assembly. The assembly could raise funds of its own.
- iv) The apex body however is the All-India assembly. This is formed by representations from all provinces and links them together.
- v) There are young men's Arya Samajis which are liberal in admitting members who believe in god and pay a nominal monthly subscription for membership.
- vi) It may be pointed out that the Samaj has its meeting places anywhere it can organise them, whether they are their own building or any other place which will suffice and is available.

26.3.2 Rules of the Arya Samaj

The Bombay Arya Samaj started with 28 rules which touch religious, social, educational and organisational matters. Some of these rules are as follows: The Arya Samaj is necessary for the good of all the people. Each province shall have a principal Samaj with branches at as many places as possible. Once a week there shall be a meeting of the Samaj where Sam Veda Mantra shall be sung. There may be lectures and songs in praise of god with the accompaniment of instrumental music. The Samaj shall maintain a library of Sanskrit and Hindi books; shall maintain accounts (member to pay 1% of their earnings), publish a paper, run Arya schools separately for boys and girls (at the girl's school only women staff shall be appointed). Learned men would be sent about to preach truth at other places. Members should love other members as they love themselves. All ceremonies (including marriages and funerals) shall be performed according to the Vedas. Any dishonest and wicked member could be expelled, but not through prejudice or partisanship. Apart from the President and the Secretary, there would be an executive. There would be recognition and reward for outstanding work. The Samaj would work for the reformation of the country—both spiritual and material. For a job in Arya Samaj institutions, an Arya



Dayanand

Samajist would be given preference. When a donation is to be made at the time of marriage, it should go to the Arya Samaj. The prime religious rule was that Vedas are supreme and have self evident authority; other books from the teachings of the Rishis have secondary authority. Formless God is to be worshipped.

The 28 rules are exhaustive and detailed; also these were numerous and could not be remembered. Hence their number was cut down to ten at Lahore. June 24, 1877 was an important day in the history of Arya Samaj since it was on this day that the foundation of Arya Samaj was laid down in Lahore.

This was not an affiliate of the Bombay Arya Samaj. The Lahore Samaj was a new chapter in its history — it meant almost a transformation of the old Samaj. For instance the 28 (**niyamas**) rules accepted at Bombay were carefully revised, reworded and educated to a manageable “Ten Principles”. It was as if the Arya Samaj had got a New Constitution. The number of founding members of Lahore Arya Samaj was about a hundred. This number went up to about 500 by the end of July.

The ten rules were adopted on July 24, 1877. These are the fundamental tenets of Arya Samaj and all Aryas are expected to conform to them. The first two are related to God and the third to the Vedas. God and the Vedas are the bases of Arya Samaj. The rest are a guide to the conduct of a moral man. These ten rules are as under:

- i) **God is the primordial root (source) of all true knowledge** and of all things that can be known through knowledge.
- ii) **God is all Truth, All knowledge, All Bliss.** He is Bodyless (Formless), Almighty, Just, Merciful, Unborn, Infinite, Unchangeable, Beginningless, Incomparable, Support and Lord of all, All pervading, knower and controller of all form within, Imperishable, Immortal, Fearless, Eternal, Holy and the creator of the whole universe. He alone is worthy of worship.
- iii) **Vedas are the books of all true knowledge.** It is the prime duty of all Aryas to study and propagate the Veda, to hear and preach it.

After God, the Veda is the most important constituent of Dayanand's ideology. His call “Back to the Vedas” means that we are to reject all changes that may be found in the scriptures, that may be at variance with the teachings of the Vedas. The Veda is God's own word, revealed to mankind through the Rishis (sages). They are thus of non-human authorship.

- iv) We should always be ready to **accept Truth and reject untruth.**

This is an important dictum. We should not stick to any opinion, merely because it has the sanction of time. If it is untrue, we should have no hesitation in abandoning it.

- v) **All actions should be performed according to Dharma** and after considering the right and wrong of each. Do the right, shun the wrong that is the formula.
- vi) The principal of this Samaj is **to do good to the world** — physical, social and spiritual.

This means that Arya Samaj is no sectarian or parochial institution working for the good of only its own members, as some of closed societies claim to be. The Samaj is created for the good of the whole world. This is a far cry from the old Hindu approach of extreme individualism, where each aspirant sought only his own “**Mukti**” or salvation. In fact it was the early goal of young Dayanand

too, before Swamy Virjananda widened his horizon and commanded him to work for the good of the country and the whole world.

vii) **We should deal with people with love, righteousness and consideration of their merit.**

The basis of our behaviour with all fellow beings should be of love, and goodwill, not snobbery, hate, ill will or jealousy. A society based on universal love will bring the kingdom of heaven on earth. Also a person of superior merit would receive superior regards.

This is the character of human dignity, but it does not preach blind equality, irrespective of a persons virtues or vice, genius or mediocrity, worth or otherwise. This is Vedic socialism.

viii) **We should work for the liquidation of ignorance and promotion of knowledge.**

Illiteracy, ignorance and superstitions are the mother of all ills and evils, while knowledge brings joy and all round welfare. The preachings at myriad Arya Samaj platforms and the network of D.A.V. and Gurukul institutions are translating this rule into practice.

ix) **No one should be content with his own upliftment but should feel his own good in the good of all.**

This means that all human beings, being the image of God are one entity. The whole emphasis is from selfish to altruistic good. No man or group can be happy if all round people are starving or miserable, as they would only bring down the whole social structure. To do good to others is no favour but enlightened self interest.

x) **All men are obliged (unfree) in having to obey the social laws that have been framed for the good of all; but everyone is free to work for his own welfare.**

For instance, one is not free to break the traffic laws or commit theft or murder, for all such laws are there, for the good of all. **But in all personal matters, concerning one's individual good, one has freedom. That means one has freedom of action but not at the cost of the well being of others.**

Check Your Progress 1

i) **What kind of role did Dayanand conceive for himself in the Arya Samaj ? Answer in about two to three sentences.**

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.....
.....

ii) **How many rules did the Lahore Arya Samaj conceive for its members ? Enumerate any five of them.**

a)
b)
c)
d)
e)

To conclude we can say these ten rules are the principles for a noble and happy society as conceived of by Swami Dayanand. These rules would apply to people in all countries and all ages. Except for rule 3 which gives primacy to Vedas.

Activity 1

Make a list of the ten principles of the Arya Samaj in Lahore (1877). Ask any Arya Samajis you know what they can summarize about them. Write down their comments in your notebook and discuss with other students in the study centre, if possible.

26.3.3 Members of the Arya Samaj

Accordingly a committee of 22 was elected and the list is very impressive one. Half of the members have a university degree : five M.As; three doctors, one lawyer and two B.As. By 1877 not more than a dozen Punjabis could have gained that degree. It means that nearly half of that number were on the Samaj Committee. If half of the committee could boast of a university degree, the presumption is that many other Aryas had matriculation and higher degrees. **Thus we can conclude that Lahore Arya Samaj Committee was indeed representative of the cream of educated Punjabis.**

Of the twenty-two committee members, only one was a Brahmin, whereas probably over eighty per cent were Khattris. That was in sharp contrast to **the educational qualification** of Bombay Arya Samaj membership. Swami Dayanand was lucky in bringing in such intellectual stalwarts as had the capacity to greatly elevate the Samaj and its programmes to a very high standard. Lahore proved to be a take off stage for the Samaj in every way.

Box 26.03

The social ideals of the Arya Samaj were meant to reflect the ideals of the Vedas and these were:

- i) Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man
- ii) The equality of the sexes
- iii) Justice and fairplay between peoples and between nations
- iv) Equal opportunity to all according to their merit
- v) Love and charity towards all.

26.3.4 Publication of Vedabhashya

Swami Dayanand always swore by the Vedas, but whenever some one quoted any mantra from the Vedas giving traditional meaning to it, Dayanand always put his own interpretation on it. On persuasion of some of his friends Dayanand started working on his “Vedabhashya” (commentary on Vedas) with enthusiasm. He said that most of the Vedic mantras had a triple meaning:

- i) one relating to sacrifices and rituals (traditional interpretation of Sayana etc.);
- ii) spiritual and philosophical meaning (Dayanand’s contribution); and
- iii) scientific meaning (again his innovation).

Swami Dayanand devoted some of the last years of his life to the activities that

involved him and his Samaj with the wider world of Hinduism. His public notice at Hardwar has clearly stated the policy; consensus not controversy was to be the guiding motto. The Arya Samaj which was already showing some leanings towards sectarianism, had to become the rallying point of all Hindus of goodwill and had to be accepted by Hindus as such. The collaboration with the theosophists was promoted by these intentions and so was the composition of the board of trustees of the “Paropkarini” sabha. But the most significant move in that direction was the involvement of the Aryas in the following three successive agitations i.e. for

- i) Indramani case (for violating Samaj’s conduct);
- ii) Cow protection; and
- iii) popularization of Hindi.

Each of these causes brought many Hindus together across the barriers of caste, sect and provincialism. By its enthusiastic participation the Arya Samaj could project the image of being the protagonist of broad Hindu nationalism. In fact these movements or agitations were not originally launched by Dayanand, but he came to the assistance of these movements that were well launched and to which a large number of Hindus were deeply committed. Thus Dayanand steered his Samaj towards closer cooperation with orthodox and sectarian Hindus, and anticipated the movement of “Sangathan” consolidation and integration of the whole Hindu community.

Activity 2

Visit an Arya Samaj Centre in your town and ask the members to explain you the contemporary role of Arya Samaj.

Another important indication of the widening of Dayanand’s outlook is that in the last year of his life, for the first time he paid attention to South India. To him “Aryavarta” has always meant the region—north of the Vindhya range. But with the passage of time his concern broadened and acquired national and political dimensions and he turned towards the south of India. But this all-India dream was shattered by Dayanand’s untimely death.

26.4 ARYA SAMAJ MOVEMENT AND REFORM

The Arya Samaj opened a vast number of educational institutions for boys and girls all over north India. Orphanages were opened and thus Christian missionaries were prevented from converting people to Christianity. Arya Samaj’s worked on earthquake relief. In 1923 when the Moplas of Malabar forcibly converted Hindus to Islam it was the Arya Samaj’s who reconverted them to Hinduism. Before Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause of untouchables it was the Arya Samaj’s who had tried to get them recognised as equal members of Hindu Society. They also carried on a ceaseless effort to remove their superstitions and teach them the fundamental doctrines of religion.

Dayanand formed many Gurukuls as part of the Arya Samaj educational programme. The first D.A.V. (Dayanand Anglo-Vedic) College was founded in Lahore to commensurate Dayanand’s memory after his death in Ajmer in 1883. This institution became a focal point of national education in the country. The idea of the Founders of Lahore College was to induce the scientific temperament in the students without uprooting them from their spiritual, cultural, religious moorings. Till then only the British Government or foreign Christian missionaries had established such English medium colleges. However, some followers of Dayanand e.g. Swami Shardhanand did not agree with the medium of instruction and set up a parallel institution called

Gurukul in Kangri, near Hardwar in U.P. which also flourished. It was based on the ancient ideal of a residential school where teachers and students lived as a family. Today Gurukuls in India number over 50, most of them in Haryana. There was a dispute between both parties (DAV and Gurukul) as each claimed to be the genuine followers of Dayanand. The educational centres were completely free of Government control and considered to be anti-British. Again it was the politically moderate wing of the Arya Samaj represented by the D.A.V. College movement which made a greater impact on the educated middle class. This middle class was at the vanguard of the Indian Renaissance in the 19th century. **The Arya Samaj's educational policy was thus totally at variance with that of Lord William Bentinck (policy of 1834) and that of the Christian missionaries which was to make either clerks for administration or converts into Christianity.**

26.4.1 Three Challenges to Hinduism

The Hindu religion grew and flourished and had the capacity to absorb any new religious force and its perpetuity was taken for granted. But thrice in recorded history, it had faced decisive challenges — once from Buddhism and Jainism, later from Islam and lastly from Christianity.

Arya Samaj has performed an important social mission during the third and latest crisis in Hinduism which came with the British rule. Arya Samaj successfully stopped the tide of mass conversions to Christianity. In defending Hinduism Arya Samaj had played a significant role.

26.4.2 Arya Samaj and Emancipation of Women

Women, like Harijans have been called 'Slaves of the slaves'. In the British era men were the slaves of the British and women were the slaves of these enslaved men. Women had few rights, little freedom and were rarely considered as equals to men.

Dayanand, the founder of Arya Samaj was among the pioneers of women's rights and equality in modern times. He advocated the equality of sexes. **Dayanand encouraged women to study the Vedas — a revolutionary step at that time.** They were allowed to recite "Gayatree" mantra while tradition did not permit them this privilege. Dayanand forcefully put forward the argument that women "rishis" account for 200 mantras in the Rig-Veda alone.

He also carried on a crusade against child marriage. Dayanand ordained that no girl should be married till she was 16 and boys should marry at 25 or above. Thus he confronted the so called 'Shastric' injunction that, if a girl had her menses in her father's house, the father and brother would go to hell. This idea was ridiculed by Dayanand. His argument was why should anyone go to hell because of a natural function.

Dayanand's stand was that men or women should marry only once. For a young widow, his prescription was for 'Niyoga', rather than widow marriage. To him "Niyoga" meant temporary union with the dead husband's brother or other kin to get a child or two but not more than two. But his concept of Niyoga was not accepted by the Aryas; Dayanand in a true democratic spirit did not press his point. In fact, Arya Samaj in the Punjab advertised for and arranged some widow remarriages and Dayanand acquiesced.

Arya Samaj took up the cause of and improved education in general and women's education in an impressive way. As mentioned earlier it has organised a network of schools and colleges in the country both for boys and girls where education was imparted in the mother-tongue. Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (D.A.V.) colleges were

founded. Some of the Conservative Arya Samajis were of the opinion that education imported in these colleges were not sufficiently Vedic in character, therefore in the leadership of Munshi Ram they started Gurukul at Hardwar, where education in its method and content was given in the ancient Vedic manner. Being the pioneer in opening women's schools, colleges and Gurukuls, Arya Samaj founded the first Kanya Mahavidyalaya in Jallunder in 1896.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write a note on the educational qualifications of the members of the Lahore Arya Samaj. Use about 3-5 lines for your answer.

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- 2) Elaborate the role of Arya Samaj for the emancipation of women. Use 5-7 lines for your answer.

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26.4.3 Politics and the Arya Samaj

Dayanand was not just a social and religious reformer. He was also a forerunner in the national and political awakening of India. The Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 a decade before the Indian National Congress. Dayanand had prepared the ground and declared that foreign government is no substitute for self-rule. **Lala Lajpat Rai has mentioned that the British had always viewed the Arya Samaj with suspicion. This often took the form of deportations prosecutions etc. of its members.** The Arya Samaj was considered a seditious body. Members were dismissed from civil and military service solely on the grounds that they were members of the Arya Samaj. The open declaration of the desire for political freedom at a time when jailing was common for such utterances showed a great deal of moral courage from its members. The Arya Samaj however always mentioned it was a religious, social and cultural organisation.

In bringing about the transition of the loyalist character of the Indian National Congress to a mass political movement (moderate to radical approach) by Mahatma Gandhi, Arya Samaj Movement played a significant role as admitted by Dr. Rajendra Prasad the first President of India. The Congress also took over most of the social reforms as advocated by the Arya Samaj as part of the National Movement.

The Arya Samaj stand on political freedom and socio-cultural changes was indicated when the Congress adopted the removal of untouchability, the emancipation of women, and other reforms. A large number of the members of Arya Samaj became

active supporters of Mahatma Gandhi. However the Arya Samaj remains away from power politics and is a social reform movement. It is a non-political organisation.

According to D. Vable, the post independence scenario saw the inroads of power politics into the Arya Samaj. While in 1915 it was on the rise subsequently from 1920 onwards, as the Congress became popular under Gandhi, and it began to decline. The political resurgence of the pre-independence days much reduced its influence. Further the influence of Hinduism also threatened its very identity. At present 65 years or so after the warning given by Lala Lajpat Rai the Arya Samaj faces its own erasure by Hinduism, which it once purported to defend. The Arya Samaj in fact would do well to think of its own identity, rather than defend the Hindus.

Swami Dayanand and Arya Samaj movement have contributed in the National movement in the following ways:

- 1) support of the Hindi language
- 2) Swadeshi and Khadi were supported
- 3) opposition to salt taxes, was agreed upon and supported.

Some critics have dubbed Swami Dayanand as a reactionary, looking back towards the dead past because he gave the call "Back to Vedas". Yet Dayanand ushered in modern action in India just as Gandhiji did half a century later.

26.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we described the Arya Samaj as a social movement. We began with the need for reform in the 19th Century and went on to the founding of the Arya Samaj, its organisation, principles/rules, early members and the publication of *Vedabyasa*. In the next section we discussed the Arya Samaj movement and reform. This includes the Samaj's response to the challenges to Hinduism, emancipation of women and its role in politics. We have therefore provided a clear picture of Arya Samaj as a modern religious movement.

26.6 KEY WORDS

Arya Samaj	: literally the "Society of Aryans" it came to existence in 1875 under the aegis of Swami Dayanand.
Gurukul	: a teaching institution based on the ideals of Arya Samaj.
Interpolations	: interpretations and extensions of a holy text (in this case, the Vedas).
Mantras	: sacred words, chants, spells.
Monotheistic	: a belief in one God only.
Nyamas	: rules and regulations.
Niyoga	: where a widow is allowed to get children by her brother-in-law.
Mukti	: spiritual liberation.

Orthodox	: traditional views often without substance.
Panchang	: Hindu calendar of auspicious and inauspicious dates.
Parochial	: narrow and partisan views.
Suddhi	: Rites of reconversion of Hindus back from the religion of their conversion.

26.7 FURTHER READINGS

Arya, K.S.R., 1987. Shastri, P.D. *Swami Dayanand Saraswati: A Study of his Life and Work*, Manohar: Delhi.

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Siv Dayalu., 1966. *Dayanand Versus Orthodoxy*. Arya Pratinidhi Sabha U.P.: Lucknow.

26.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Dayanand conceived of himself as a guiding light of the Arya Samaj. He did not think of himself as a leader or a guru to be followed.
- 2) The Lahore Arya Samaj simplified the original 28 rules to simply ten. Five of these rules for members were:
 - i) God is the source of all true knowledge.
 - ii) God is Truth, Knowledge, and Bliss.
 - iii) Vedas are the books of all true knowledge.
 - iv) Accept Truth, reject untruth.
 - v) Each man should follow his **Dharma**.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The members of the original Lahore Arya Samaj were highly educated and had among them lawyers, doctors, B.As and M.As. Thus the members of the Samaj were highly educated.
- 2) Women in Colonial India were 'Slaves of slaves'. Dayanand fought against this slavery. He fought against child marriage and reintroduced Niyoga, and countered many deep entrenched superstitions. He arranged widow remarriages. For women's education Dayanand's followers started womens educational institutions called "Gurukuls".

UNIT 27 MODERN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS II : RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Founding of Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.2.1 Beginnings
 - 27.2.2 Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi
 - 27.2.3 Swami Vivekananda
- 27.3 Ideology of the Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.3.1 Ideology and Objects
 - 27.3.2 Activities of the Mission
- 27.4 Organisational Structure of Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.4.1 Math and Mission
 - 27.4.2 Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission
 - 27.4.3 The Governing Body
- 27.5 Financial Support and Activities
 - 27.5.1 Financing the Activities
 - 27.5.2 Social Welfare Activities
 - 27.5.3 Participation of People
 - 27.5.4 Cultural Activities
- 27.6 Birthday Celebrations
 - 27.6.1 Concept of Trinity
 - 27.6.2 Birthday Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna
 - 27.6.3 Birthday Celebration of Sri Sarada Devi
 - 27.6.4 Birthday Celebration of Swami Vivekananda
 - 27.6.5 How are the Birthdays Celebrated ?
- 27.7 Other Activities of Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.7.1 Other Celebrations
 - 27.7.2 Bhak a Sammelan
 - 27.7.3 Challenges that Confront the Mission
- 27.8 Ramakrishna Mission as a Modern Movement
 - 27.8.1 History of the Mission
 - 27.8.2 The Present Position
- 27.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.10 Key Words
- 27.11 Further Readings
- 27.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

27.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have gone through this unit we hope you will be able to

- get a clear idea of how the Ramakrishna Mission began
- identify the prominent personalities who contributed to the development of the Ramakrishna Mission
- form a general idea of The Ramakrishna Mission's various socio-religious-cultural activities
- know clearly about the organisational structure of the Ramakrishna Mission — its headquarters organisation and sub-organisations
- see the utility of such organisations for the betterment of the living conditions of our people and the suffering humanity of the world

- get an awareness of the challenges that confront this religious organisation; and its problems and prospects as a religious movement of the modern times in our strife torn world.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we are going to discuss the Ramakrishna Mission — a modern religious movement. Its inspirer Sri Ramakrishna was unique, so was its founder Swami Vivekananda.

From your study of the earlier units (17, 23, 24, 25, 26) we hope you are aware of the nature of religious pluralism, and the rise of religious movements in India. After a study of the religious movements in the medieval age, you would have grasped the essence of the medieval movements of Bhaktism and Sufism.

You would have also been able to grasp how the religious movements came to develop under various organisations, as medieval religious movements, like, Veerashaivism in the Karnataka region of the South; and Sikhism in Punjab in the North; and the modern religious movements like the Arya Samaj in the Punjab in the North, and the Ramakrishna Mission in Bengal in the East. By and by, these modern religious movements spread far and wide, and covered various parts of India and the world.

In this unit we will deal with the Ramakrishna Mission: the founding of the Mission, its ideology and organisational structure; and the various activities of Ramakrishna Mission. We also deal with the symbolic significance of birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Finally we touch upon Bhakti Sammelan and other sundry activities. It is pointed out here that the unit is based on the further reading listed at the end.

27.2 FOUNDING OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

You will be interested to know how and when the Ramakrishna Mission was founded; by whom it was founded, and how it gradually spread.

27.2.1 Beginnings

Sri Ramakrishna, a householder saint of Bengal was born at Kamarpukur in 1836. He died in the early hours of August 16, 1886.

Shortly after he had left his mortal frame, a monastic order bearing the name of Sri Ramakrishna was organised in 1886, at the Math, Baranagore, about three kilometers North of Calcutta. This monastic order was organised by his Sannyasin disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda. In fact, no one really “founded” this order. It was the master Ramakrishna himself who brought it into being during his illness. He instructed Swami Vivekananda as to how this order was to be organised and conducted.

27.2.2 Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi

The spiritual inspiration of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna was a great inspiration behind the Math and the Mission.

In 1899, the Math was transferred to its present home at Belur across the Ganga, about six kilometers north of Calcutta.

27.2.3 Swami Vivekananda

However, the year 1897, the month of May, will go down in the history of modern religious movements in India as the year when the Ramakrishna Mission was started by Swami Vivekananda and his handful of associates. It was registered on the 4th of May in 1909 under Act XXI of 1860, with registration no. S/1917 of 1909-10 in the name of Ramakrishna Mission. For the link between Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna, see Box 27.01.

Box 27.01

By 180 Sri Ramakrishna had a few followers. He himself, initially the priest of Dakshineswar Temple, went far beyond the priestly role and indicated the attributes of a yogi and sanyasi. Although married to Sarada Devi, the marriage was never consummated. For Ramakrishna, the God of every religion was the same, but could be worshipped in different ways, as prescribed by the religions themselves.

Sri Ramakrishna's message was that God can be realized only by renunciation of "women and God". Ramakrishna monism reduced all other views and paths into the experience of the unity of truth. Sri Ramakrishna converted Swami Vivekananda to his views by giving him many experiences of truth.

27.3 IDEOLOGY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

The Ramakrishna Mission was established with some basic ideas which are now discussed.

27.3.1 Ideology and Objects

The ideology and objectives of the Ramakrishna Mission were:

- i) **to impart and promote the study of the Vedanta** and its principles as propounded by Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life, and of comparative ideology in its widest form. Vedanta is a Hindu philosophy which teaches that there is Oneness of all Truth. That all evolves from Truth and returns to Truth. Thus all appearances are deceptive, unless apprehended through the Truth.



Shri Sarada ma the consort of Sri Ramakrishna.

- ii) to impart and promote the study of the arts, science and industries;
- iii) to train teachers in all the branches of knowledge mentioned above and enable them to reach the masses;
- iv) to carry on educational work among the masses;
- v) to establish, maintain, carry on and assist schools, colleges, universities, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the infirm, the invalid, and the afflicted, famine relief works, and other educational and/or charitable works and institutions of a like nature;
- vi) to print and publish and to sell or distribute, gratuitously or otherwise, journals, periodicals, books or leaflets that the Association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects;
- vii) to carry on any other work which may seem to the Association capable of being conveniently carried on, in connection with the calculated and directly or indirectly to promote any of the before mentioned objects.

You may put these ideas of the Ramakrishna Mission under the following heads:

- i) **Ideal** : Freedom of the self and service of mankind.
- ii) **Aim** : Preaching and practice of **Sanatana Dharma**, the eternal religion as embodied in the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.
- iii) **Motto** : Renunciation and Service; Harmony of all religion.
- iv) **Method** : Work and worship.

27.3.2 Activities of the Mission

By providing an idea of the practices which the Mission is engaged in we hope to indicate its wide range of activities.

- i) **Worship**: This includes specialized training of monastic aspirants and religious preachings.
- ii) **General and technical education with an ethical and spiritual background; other general services include:**
- iii) **medical service;**
- iv) **famine and distress relief work;**
- v) **rural upliftment;**
- vi) **work among the toiling and emerging people of all classes; and**
- vii) **other cultural activities.**

Now that we have listed the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission, you would be curious to know how these various activities of the Mission are being organised. This list makes it clear that the Mission has a comprehensive plan of activities ranging from the transcendental to the practical.

Box 27.02

This box indicates that it was a holy man (Sri Ramakrishna) and his followers who were responsible for creating the Mission. Ramakrishna inspired the movement for a Mission and Vivekananda and his fellow disciples founded it and spread its teachings.

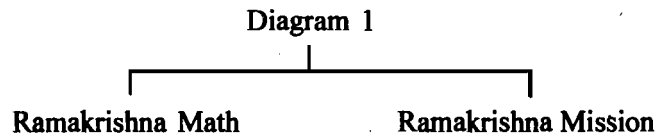
Sri Ramakrishna died in 1886 after appointing Vivekananda as his successor. **Bhakti** had been the main ritual during the lifetime of Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna puja was added to Kalipuja. The **bhaktas** were therefore dedicated to guru and kali. Vivekananda did not approve of this and a split developed between him and most of the disciples. The principles upon which Vivekananda rested his faith were **monism, monasticism, universalism, toleration, liberalism, humanitarianism, progressiveness, and the scientific world view**. Vivekananda believed vedanta was the only scientific religion and that it was completely compatible with science.

27.4 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

There is an elaborate organisational structure to organise and regulate the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

27.4.1 Math and Mission

Let us now turn to a description of this. The following diagram will illustrate the organizational structure:



It should be understood that the Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are closely connected in the following ways:

- i) both have their headquarters at Belur Math in Calcutta.
- ii) the Governing Body of the Mission is made up of the Trustees of the Math.
- iii) the administrative work of the Mission is carried on by the monks of the Ramakrishna Math.

Yet, Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are distinct legal entities having their own branches.

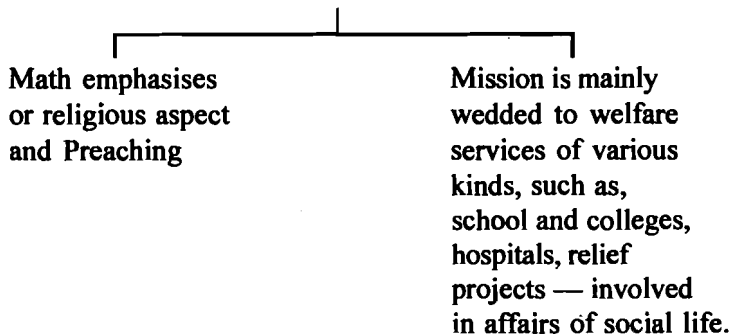
You may like to know how the Mission and the Math are distinct entities. As a matter of fact, the Math and Mission are distinct entities in the following manner:

- i) The Math organisation is Constituted under a Trust with well-defined rules of procedure.

The Mission on the other hand is a registered society.

- ii) While both the Math and the Mission take up charitable and philanthropic activities, the Math lays emphasis on religious aspect and preaching, while the Mission is wedded mainly to the welfare services of numerous types.

Diagram 2
Activities of Math and Mission
(Charitable and Philanthropic)



To distinguish the Math from the Mission, Christopher Isherwood very aptly used the terms '**Contemplative Math**', and '**Socially Active Mission**'. The Math is oriented to religion and preaching through contemplation, while the Mission is oriented to various types of social welfare activities.

We hope you will bear this point of distinction in mind although people often loosely associate Ramakrishna Mission with Math activities also.

It is equally necessary for you to bear in mind that the appropriation of the name of Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda by any institution does not imply that it is affiliated to either Ramakrishna Math or Ramakrishna Mission which have their headquarters at the Belur Math.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Name the three main inspirations for the founding of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
- 2) Mention the objects of the Ramakrishna Mission.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)

27.4.2 Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission

As in the case of other religious organisations, there is a new tendency of divisiveness in the Ramakrishna Mission. Owing to some ideological differences in the main Ramakrishna Mission, a breakaway group known as Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission emerged, laying its main emphasis on ideals as contained in the following words of Swami Vivekananda:

“Ye, I be born again and again and suffer a thousand miseries, if I can worship the only God I dream of, my God the afflicted and my God, the poor of all Races, of all Nations”.

Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission inspired by the ideals of '**Serve God in Man**' and '**Work and Worship**' came to emerge as a separate organisation and was registered, under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961, with registration

No. 5/18606 of 1976-1977, with its headquarters at 7, Riverside Road, Barrackpore, District 24-Parganas in West Bengal, about 25 kms North from Calcutta city, and 24 kms North-West of Calcutta Airport. Its Governing Body was made up of 14 members with Swami Nityananda as its founder-Secretary. There are several such institutions in India and abroad appropriating the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Activity 1

Go to the Ramakrishna Mission closest to your residence and ask the people the difference between 'Math' and 'Mission'. Write a note in your notebook outlining your findings.

These Missions are not to be confused with Ramakrishna Mission having its headquarters at Belur Math. Even these organisations, particularly the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission of Barrackpore, having its own branches in various places, are dedicated to numerous types of Welfare services, particularly in areas of general education, non-formal education, vocational training, rural development work, medical services etc. for the poor, underprivileged, destitute children and women in distress irrespective of their caste or religion.

Like Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, they have established Vivekananda Math and Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission which are inseparably connected. While the Vivekananda Math provided the field for spiritual preparation, the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission created the venue for "liberation from bondage through selfless service to the suffering humanity irrespective of any distinction in their caste, creed, religion and region".

The Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission is a philanthropic public charitable organisation registered on 1st November, 1976 under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961. It is both legally and constitutionally different from the main organisation, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at Belur on the one hand, and Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission at Dakshineswar on the other.

27.4.3 The Governing Body

The Ramakrishna Mission which was registered as an Association on the 4th of May 1909, under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1909 had its headquarters at Belur. Apart from the headquarters organisation at Belur, Ramakrishna Mission has now more than 127 branches in all, spread over the whole world, in countries like, India, Argentina (South America), Bangladesh, Canada, England, Fiji, France, Japan, Mauritius, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, United States of America, etc.

It is an international organisation having 127 branches (as on 31 March, 1989), with 96 centres in India and 31 centres outside India. Out of these 127 Branches, 54 are Ramakrishna Mission Centres, 50 are Ramakrishna Math Centres, and 23 are both Mission and Math centres.

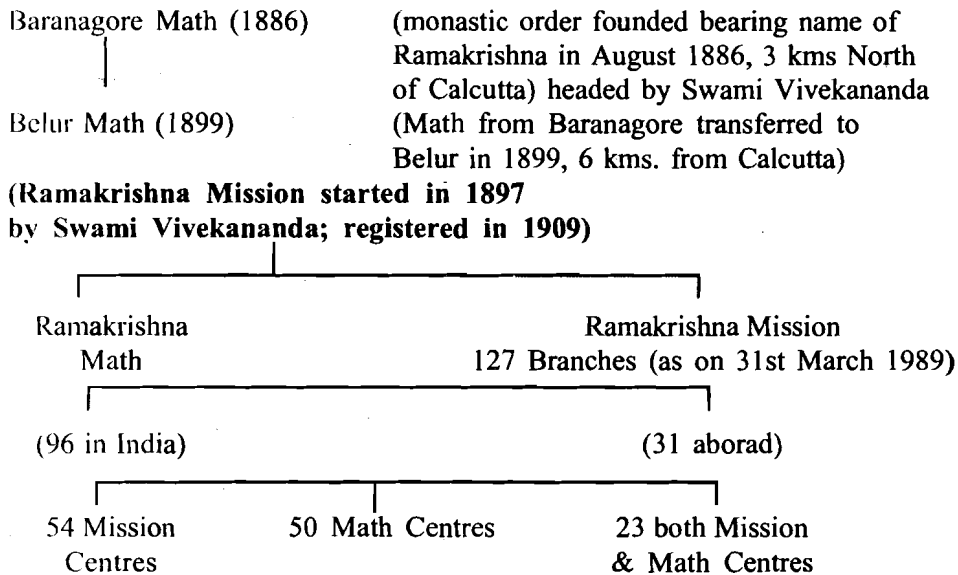
In India, these centres are spread far and wide over the various regions of Andhra Pradesh; Arunachal Pradesh; Assam; Bihar; Delhi; Gujarat; Haryana and Punjab; Karnataka; Kerala; Madhya Pradesh; Maharashtra; Meghalaya; Orissa; Rajasthan; Tamil Nadu; Tripura; Uttar Pradesh; and West Bengal.

West Bengal alone has over two and a half dozen centres. Almost all important metropolitan cities in India, like Hyderabad, Bangalore, Bombay, Madras, Kanpur, Lucknow, Calcutta, Jaipur, Chandigarh etc. have been covered by the branches of Ramakrishna Mission.

An illustrative organisational chart may help you to understand the elaborate organisational structure of the Ramakrishna Mission. It will also help to give you

a precise view of the impact of the Ramakrishna Mission as a religious movement of modern times.

Diagram 3
**Organisational Structure of
Ramakrishna Mission**



Note: As diagram 3 shows that initially the Baranagore Math was founded in 1886 bearing the name of Sri Ramakrishna by his disciples including Swami Vivekananda.

About 12 years later this was moved to Belur Math about 6 kms from Calcutta. On the other hand Ramakrishna Mission started in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda and registered in 1909.

As of 1989 Ramakrishna Mission and Math had 127 branches of which 96 were in India and 31 abroad of these there were 54 mission centres, 50 math centres and 23 both Mission and math centres. This information can be seen at a glance from diagram 3.

27.5 FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND ACTIVITIES

After discussing the organisational structure, we now show how the various social welfare activities of Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are financed.

27.5.1 Financing the Activities

Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math have their own separate funds and keep their separate accounts. Their accounts are audited by qualified auditors.

To organise their various social welfare activities both Ramakrishna Mission and Math receive grants-in-aid from three sources, viz.,

- i) Central Government,
- ii) State Governments, and
- iii) Public Bodies

The other activities of the Math are financed from:

- iv) offerings, and
- v) sale of publications etc.

The Mission is also supported by

- vi) fees from the students, and
- vii) public donations etc.

As can be seen the Mission and Math do not depend totally on Central government, State government and public bodies for their finance. They are also financed by individuals who offer donations, fees from students sale of publications etc.

27.5.2 Social Welfare Activities

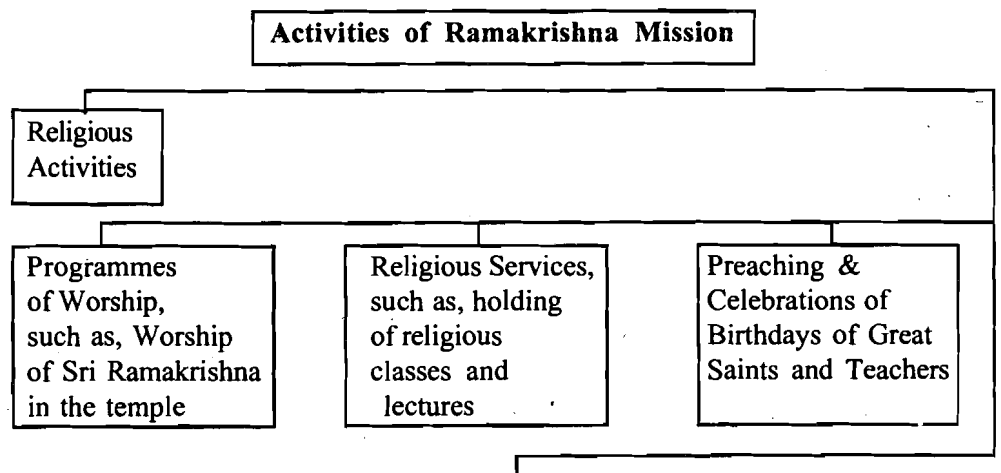
We hope you are aware of the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission related to the social welfare services. Many of you may also be associated with some of them. The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission maintain a number of Ashrams and temples with their programmes of worship, religious services, and preachings. They are also running several schools, colleges, libraries, students' homes, sevashrams (Hospitals) with indoor facilities, clinics, dispensaries, invalid homes etc.

Apart from creating a religious revival based on the principles of Vedanta as preached by Swami Vivekananda, the Ramakrishna movement has contributed a great deal for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Many of you we hope, are quite familiar with its services particularly in the field of education, running of hospitals, and undertaking relief work in the hour of need. If you take an over-all view, you will find that the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission may be classified into two broad categories, viz.,

- i) those related to the various types of religious services, such as, regular worship, preachings etc., and
- ii) those related to the various types of social welfare activities, particularly in the fields of education, health etc.

For a quick grasp and understanding you may also illustrate these various types of activities through the following diagram :

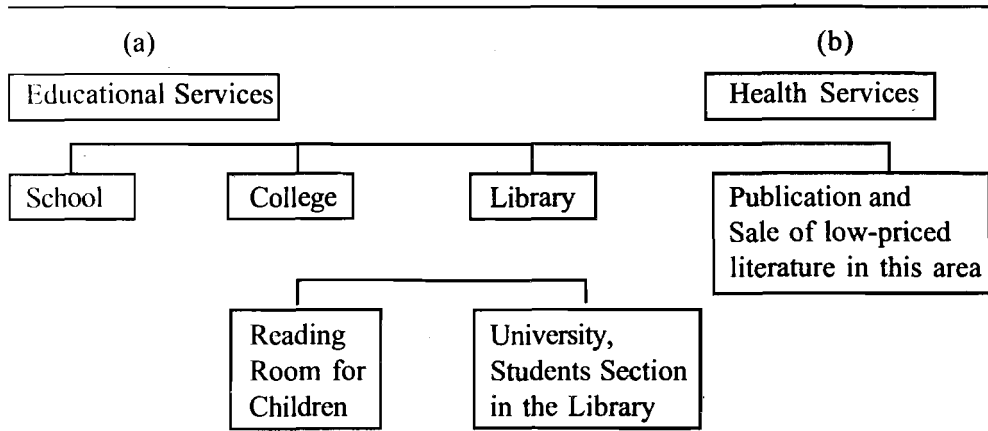
Diagram 4
(I)



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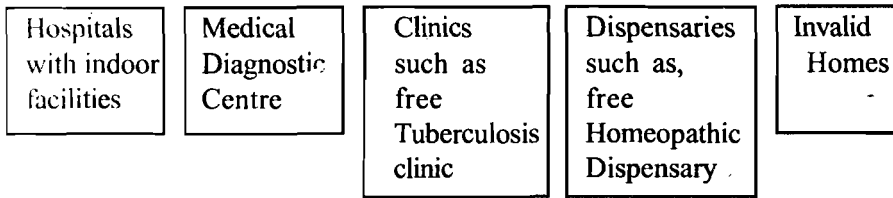
(II)

Social Welfare Services



(III)

Health Services



Check Your Progress 2

1) Write 5-7 lines on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Mission.

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2) Mention some of the Activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

27.5.3 Participation of People

Any movement can sustain itself only through the participation of the people. The Ramakrishna Mission is spreading their life-giving ideas of vedanta, and the inspiring

messages of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda through regular discourses and occasional lectures which stimulate the spiritual aspirations of the people through their participation in the celebrations of Birthdays of the Great Teachers, bhajans, worship, Ramanama Sankritanam or Ekadasi days, and weekly discourses on Ramcharit Manas in Hindi, and on Vivekachudamani in Bengali and occasionally on Vedanta in English.

In all religious programmes, people of various walks of life, students, teachers, government servants, businessmen, politicians, doctors, professionals and common people, rich and poor, all participate.

Of educational and health services, people of all types are the beneficiaries. Let us enumerate a few of these services.

- a) To fight the scourge of tuberculosis in an organised way, the Ramakrishna Mission has provided some free tuberculosis centres in some areas. These clinics have the following functions:
 - i) to diagnose individual cases;
 - ii) to treat cases fit for treatment at the clinic;
 - iii) to get admitted in other hospitals, cases which require prolonged hospitalisation or special surgical treatment;
 - iv) to treat patients at home under the Domiciliary Service Scheme, prior to admission and after discharge from hospitals; and
 - v) to examine contacts of patients with a view to detecting early cases as a preventive measure.

The Tuberculosis clinic run by the Ramakrishna Mission in Delhi is a clinic fully equipped with facilities for diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis. Various medicines like anti-T.B. drugs, antibiotics, vitamins are supplied free to all patients except those covered by the Central Government Health Scheme.

The clinic is well equipped with physician, medical officer, paramedical staff, nursing staff, dispenser, laboratory assistants etc.

- b) The Domiciliary Service Scheme has the Domiciliary Service Unit having staff members deputed from the Delhi Municipal Corporation in pursuance of their tuberculosis control programme. Under this scheme, a close liaison between the patient and the institution is maintained whereby the patients and their contacts are advised on matters of isolation and disinfection at home; and they are also brought to the clinic for necessary examination, advice and treatment if necessary.
- c) The Medical Diagnostic Centre renders service to the community particularly the poor and needy, in pursuance of the spirit and ideal of the Mission.
- d) The clinical wing is in the shape of a Polyclinic providing facilities and health services of numerous types.
- e) The free Homeopathic dispensary is run by the Ramakrishna Mission to serve the people, particularly the poorer section, in the neighborhood.
- f) Special Educational Services

Free library and reading room facilities, provided by the Ramakrishna Mission in its premises in Delhi are utilized by hundreds and thousands of people every year. Facilities of reading room and separate lending section, and a separate section for the children exist in the library for use by the people.

University Students' Section Library maintained with the financial assistance from the University of Delhi which only the students of Delhi University are eligible to use, on becoming its member, is also run by the Ramakrishna Mission in its premises in Delhi.

27.5.4 Cultural Activities

The Ramakrishna Mission also organises regular discourses and exposition of scriptures and deliberations on various other allied topics. The monks of the Math and Mission are important men of the public conduct them.

Discourses are conducted in Hindi on Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, on Sri Ramcharit Manas. Classes are held in Bengali on Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, and Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasang; in English on Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, on Srimad Bhagavad Gita; on Vivek Chudamani; and on the Patanjala Yoga Sutras.

27.6 BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

While dealing with the various types of social welfare services rendered by the Mission, there is an underlying concept of Trinity which guides the whole philosophy and activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

27.6.1 Concept of Trinity

I. Sri Ramakrishna	The teacher The Preceptor the Guide	Who as father leads and illumines the path
II. Sri Sarada Devi	Holy Mother	Symbol of Motherhood Divine purity Virtue, ethereal Love and source of divine energy
III. Swami Vivekananda	The Disciple The Soul inspired and awakened	Symbol of Messenger of Love & Service Divine through the message of universal brotherhood.

The trinity is at once symbolic of the Divine and the Human. The three Great personalities inspired the spirit and ideal of this modern religious movement called the Ramakrishna Mission. Sri Ramakrishna as the Preceptor; Sri Sarada Devi as the inspirer (Holy mother); and Swami Vivekananda as the founder and messenger — lit a beacon light of Divinity, Humanity and Service through the currents of a modern religious movement led by the Ramakrishna Mission with its dedicated bands of disciples and followers — the leaders and the led.

The Birthday celebrations of the three great personalities are important occasions in the religious order of the Ramakrishna Mission. This is a tradition which is handed down from generation to generation inspiring the ideals of Divinity, Humanity and Service.

27.6.2 Birthday Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna

The 156th Birthday Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna was held on the 27th of February 1991. He was born before the day-break of February 18, 1836 in a remote village named Kamarpukur in the District of Hooghly in Bengal. On this day there is much worship, prayer and celebration. He was named Sri Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya.

Since childhood, on several occasions, he gave clear evidence of Divine inspiration in his thoughts and activities. These come strongly to worshippers as also his blessings. He had an inner urge to know if the Divine Power really exists and manifests itself through everything of this creation. He practised penance and ultimately realized that God exists. Birthday worship is specially auspicious. *He followed instructions of different religious faith at different stages of his life and realised that all religions are but different paths leading to the same goal, the God.* Ramakrishna's birthday creates purity and auspiciousness for worshippers.

27.6.3 Birthday Celebration of Sri Sarada Devi

The 139th Birthday of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother was to be celebrated in December 1991. Her birthday celebrations gives strength to worshippers. She was born on December 22, 1853 at Jayrambati — a remote village of Bankura District in West Bengal. Sri Sarada Devi is an ideal of womankind who served her husband with her very life and renounced the world rather than renounce her husband. There is much joy and happiness among worshippers on her birthday. She was married to Sri Ramakrishna at the young age of six years, and ultimately became the source of strength and inspiration to Swami Vivekananda and other young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in establishing and running the Great organisation — Ramakrishna Mission. The essence of her teachings is contained in these lines:

“If you like to be happy in life do not find fault with others”.

“Remember, whatever you do and wherever you go you are always protected by God — Father in Heaven”.

Activity 2

In what way do the Birthday celebrations of Ramakrishna Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda differ from a regular birthday celebration ? Study the text and your own observations to write a note in your notebook and discuss your written views with other students at the Study Centre closest to you.

27.6.4 Birthday Celebration of Swami Vivekananda

You are perhaps aware that the 128th Birthday celebrations of Swami Vivekananda was observed as the National Youth Day. Swami Vivekananda, the most prominent disciple and messenger of Sri Ramakrishna, the carrier of the message of Vedanta, the harbinger of the links between the East and the West, was the founder of a new monastic order.

He was the towering leader of the modern religious movement — the Ramakrishna Mission. It was on January 12, 1863, that he was born in Calcutta. At the very first sight (1881) Sri Ramakrishna discovered in him a spiritual giant. It was after his historic speech at Chicago in the Assembly of World Religions in the year 1893 that he became highly famous. **He dedicated himself to the service of the suffering humanity, and for all his life tried to raise the dignity of man.** He reconciled beautifully the ideal of Bhakti with the knowledge of Vedanta. Worshipers during Vivekananda's birthday celebrations experience the power of devotion and love just as Vivekananda felt towards Sri Ramakrishna.

His ideals of service are contained in these words:

“You can please God more by taking care of His Children than by offering thousand tonnes of flowers and fruits at His Holy Feet”.

“Who loves all beings —

Check Your Progress 3

1) Indicate the birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna in 5-7 lines.

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2) Elaborate the Concept of the Trinity.

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He was a harbinger of a new chapter of relationship between the East and the West. It could be a relationship based on fair exchange and mutuality. The West should come out with its scientific and technological development, and affluence, and material prosperity to help and support the poor, depressed and suffering humanity of the East, so that they could come out of this condition of stark poverty; and in exchange, the East should provide spiritual sustenance and guide through their ancient Vedantic wisdom and knowledge to the West. **The miseries of the East arise from poverty; the miseries of the West arise from affluence. Both need each other.** The West can provide material support to the East; and the East can provide spiritual sustenance to the West. Thus, they need to move together and help each other to help the suffering humanity. For one the cause of suffering is poverty, for the other the cause of suffering is affluence.

27.6.5 How are the Birthdays Celebrated ?

You all know there are many ways of celebrating birthdays in India. The birthdays of Great Personalities bring their own flavour.

These Birthday celebrations take place in the premises of the Ramakrishna Mission and also outside, in numerous public places and institutions.

These celebrations involve two aspects viz., (i) the socio-religious and (ii) social services.

The religious component of celebration is usually marked by

- i) janmatithi Puja,

- ii) mangalarati,
- iii) meditation,
- iv) vedic chanting,
- v) reading from the lives of these great men
- vi) bhajan,
- vii) special puja and haven.

The monks, the disciples, the followers and also other people participate in these.

The social component of these celebrations is marked by

- i) public meetings,
- ii) programme of service to the lepers called Narayan Seva,
- iii) service of the poor and the destitutes by distributing food, cloth etc.
- iv) various types of competitions in schools and colleges, particularly on the eve of Swami Vivekananda's birthday celebrations as National Youth Day.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India often provides funds as grant-in-aid to cover the expenditure in these celebrations by the Ramakrishna Mission.

For example, you may like to know that during 1989-90, the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India, paid a sum of Rs. 48,000/- as grant-in-aid to cover the expenditure incurred in connection with the 125th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

27.7 OTHER ACTIVITIES OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

We now turn to some other activities and celebrations.

27.7.1 Other Celebrations

The Ramakrishna Mission observes a number of other celebrations as well. These include:

- i) Guru Purnima,
- ii) Shri Krishna Janmashtami,
- iii) Shri Durga Ashtami,
- iv) Shri Kali Puja,
- v) Maha Sivaratri, and
- vi) Christmas Eve, etc.

with due solemnity, special puja, bhajan, and reading from the scriptures.

27.7.2 Bhakta Sannam

While studying the Ramakrishna Mission as a modern religious movement it is of interest to you to know that sometimes the Mission organises religious conferences known as **Bhakta Sannam**. For example, one such **Sannam** was organised on 31st December 1989 in the premise of Ramakrishna Mission in Delhi in which 336 delegates participated.

Apart from being a spiritual retreat, this sort of **Sannam** provides an opportunity to the monks and the householder devotees to come together and practise spiritual discipline to reflect on the Ramakrishna movement, and give sustenance and strength to it to keep the movement going in the right direction. The role of the householder devotees is particularly important to keep the movement going as a source of spiritual strength to this strife torn age, and as a means of service to the suffering humanity, the downtrodden, the destitute, the leper, the women and children in need of care, the victims of riots, and natural calamities. If it could help the values to prevail in wider social, professional and organisational life in India our problems would be greatly lessened.

As a religious movement of the modern age, the Ramakrishna Mission is faced with challenges of poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, disease, ignorance, and corruption suffered by the teeming millions at the national level; challenges of war clouds degradation of environment, over-powering greed of materialism, loss of peace to the suffering humanity at the global level.

27.7.3 Challenges that Confront the Mission

The real challenge lies in how the modern religious movement (started through the Ramakrishna Mission by its founder Swami Vivekananda) will be able to meet the crisis to the suffering humanity. *This will mean a reawakening and revival of the values of Divinity, Humanity and Service through the wisdom and knowledge of Vedanta.*

The *Katopanishad* says,

“**Uttishthat, Jagat, Prapya; Varannibodhat**”. That is to say: Arise, Awake, Achieve, that wisdom at the holy feet of the Great man by which material and spiritual sufferings of the humanity of the East and the West might go; revive the Divinity in man through service of the suffering humanity.

It is a question more of practice and not merely preaching. The Ramakrishna Mission as a religious movement brings much of preaching and practice together. Various religions are but different paths to the same Divinity, and the Divinity becomes glorified through service to humanity.

27.8 RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AS A MODERN MOVEMENT

We will now finally turn to an important aspect of our analysis — i.e. why should the Ramakrishna movement aspire to be called a **modern** religious movement? Let us see why this happens to be a fact.

27.8.1 History of the Mission

While examining this question you should bear the following points in mind :

- i) First, the history of the Ramakrishna Mission runs into the span of this century and the last quarter of the last century which is not even a hundred years old now

- ii) In such a short span, the Mission has spread its branches globally, far and wide, and covered a large part of the materially and spiritually suffering humanity of the world.
- iii) In the religious sphere it has brought about a revival in worship and faith through the approach that all religions lead to the same Divine Force, the same God. God exists in man, man must try to realise God through service to the suffering humanity. These sufferings are physical-material; and non-physical-emotional-mental-spiritual. These sufferings afflict humanity irrespective of their narrow framework of caste, colour, creed, religion, region and ethnicity. The Ramakrishna Mission as movement is advancing to provide a succour of hope.
- iv) The Ramakrishna Mission adopted a number of activities related to social services for the poor, the downtrodden, the destitute, the women and children in need of care, and those afflicted by natural calamities.
- v) At the national level, through service oriented programmes of activities in the fields of education and health etc., the Ramakrishna Mission is trying to integrate the various people and groups through its spiritual force and faith in Divinity, service and humanity.
- vi) At the international level, the Mission is trying to bring together the multi-national, multi-religious communities through spiritual force, through service to the suffering mankind, through message of peace and service to all sections irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and region.
- vii) The Ramakrishna Mission has the strength of a well-knit organisational structure fed by both the Math and the Mission from the headquarters level to the regional and local levels. It is fed by such ideal, ideology, objective, motto which are inspired by Divinity and service to humanity. It is supported by activities which take care of the physical-material, and religious-spiritual. The force of the Trinity consists of

Sri Ramakrishna — the preceptor

Sri Sarada Devi — The Holy Mother, inspirer

Swami Vivekananda — The founder, humanist inspired by Vedantic wisdom.

27.8.2 The Present Position

The Ramakrishna movement continues to the movement through the leadership of its bands of monks, and the following of its householder disciples and devotees of all religions and regions.

The method of work and worship continues to fill it with inspiration and life-giving force.

Shri Ramakrishna was inspired by 'Bhakti' and 'renunciation'. No great thing can be done without sacrifice. The spirit of sacrifice that sustained the fiery young souls of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda (Rakhal), Balaram, Surendera, Mahendra and Chuni etc. (who all became monks of the order) in those early days of desolation, must continue to sustain the monks, devotees and followers of the Ramakrishna Mission in the present hours of material and spiritual crisis facing the suffering humanity today.

The spirit of renunciation that illumined the heart of Sri Ramakrishna, the spirit of sacrifice that welled up into the minds of Swami Vivekananda and his associate young monks in the beginning, the divine virtue that awakened Sri Sarada Devi; the

same spirit must continue to stir the minds and hearts of the men and women who have joined this religious movement under the Ramakrishna Mission. It is to be hoped that the spiritual lamp that was lit by Paramhans Sri Ramakrishna a century ago will always illumine and show the path to human beings.

27.9 LET US SUM UP

We started this unit indicating the beginning of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission under the aegis of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. We then went on to outline the ideology of the Mission, the objects and activities of the Mission. We then described the organisational structure of the Math, Mission and governing body. We turned finally to the financial support structure of the math and the mission. This includes the funding of social welfare and cultural activities. We have therefore dealt with the topic adequately.

27.10 KEY WORDS

Belur Math	: Headquarters of Ramakrishna Mission.
Holy Mother	: Sri Sarada Devi
Math	: Contemplative order
Mission	: Socially active order
Sanyasin	: one who renounces the world and turns of God
Sanatan Dharma	: The Eternal Religion
Vedanta	: A philosophy of Hinduism preaching monistic. Unity of all phenomena with Godhead.

27.11 FURTHER READINGS

Swami Gambhirananda, 1957. *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, (with a foreword by Christopher Isherwood) Advaita Ashram, Calcutta.

Ramakrishna Mission, 1990. *Ramakrishna Mission*, New Delhi.

John Yale, 1961. *A Yankee and the Swamis*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London.

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, translated by Swami Nikhilananda with a foreword by Aldous Huxley (in two volumes). Ramakrishna Math, Calcutta.

27.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) Sri Ramakrishna
b) Sri Sarada Devi
c) Swami Vivekananda
- 2) a) Freedom of self, service of mankind.
b) Preaching and practice of Sanatana Dharma as exemplified in the Lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

- c) Renunciation, service and harmony of all religions should be strained towards.
- d) Work and worship should be treated at par and done with utmost seriousness.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Ramakrishna — Vivekananda Mission is a breakaway group from the main Ramakrishna Mission. It emphasized Swami Vivekananda's desire to be born repeatedly among the poor of all races and nations. This mission came to be in 1961 when it was registered and has its headquarters in Barrackpore some 25 km. North of Calcutta city.
- 2) a) Religious activities like worship, religious services; preaching and celebration of birthdays of great saints.
b) Social Welfare Services like educational and health services like hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres, dispensaries and invalid homes.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna falls on 18 February, 1836. On this day there is much worship, prayer and celebration. Ramakrishna's thoughts and blessings are said to accrue to all worshippers.
- 2) The Ramakrishna Mission philosophy sees the Trinity as comprising Sri Ramakrishna the Father, the teacher-preceptor-guide. He illumines the path, Sri Sarada Devi is the Holy Mother a Symbol of love and purity and source of divine energy. Finally Swami Vivekananda is seen as the disciple of the awakened soul — a messenger of love and divine service.

The Trinity is held to be at once Divine and human.

UNIT 28 LIFE CYCLE RITUALS-I : BIRTH AND MARRIAGE

Structure

- 28.0 Objectives
- 28.1 Introduction
- 28.2 Aspects of Ritual
- 28.3 Functions of Ritual
- 28.4 Birth and Related Rites
 - 28.4.1 Hindu Birth Rites
 - 28.4.2 Syrian Christian Birth Rites
 - 28.4.3 Sikh Rites of Birth
 - 28.4.4 Korku Birth Rites
- 28.5 Marriage Rites
 - 28.5.1 Marriage Rites Among Hindus
 - 28.5.2 Marriage Rites Among Syrian Christians
 - 28.5.3 Marriage Rites Among Sikhs
 - 28.5.4 Marriage Rites Among the Korkus
- 28.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 28.7 Further Readings
- 28.8 Key Words
- 28.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

28.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have read the unit you should be able to

- describe a typology of religion
- explain religion in tribal societies
- discuss a classification of ritual
- describe rites of birth of the given communities
- explain marriage rites of the given communities.

28.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we begin with an introduction to ritual. We then discuss Saraswati's functions of ritual (Saraswati : 1984). Having done this we describe and analyse birth and related rites among Hindus, Syrian Christians, Sikhs and the Korku tribe. We also describe and analyse marriage rites among the same groups.

28.2 ASPECTS OF RITUAL

The word 'ritual' can only be understood in terms of a background of who is using it. For a clergyman all ritual takes place within a church in keeping with various relations. For a doctor however it may refer to some habits of a patient(s). For Durkheim rites are the modes of behaviour which delineate how a man should conduct himself in the presence of sacred objects (Durkheim : 1915). A recent publication edited by Daniel de Coppet (1992) states that **ritual is a special kind of performance which is both an act and a statement**. Rituals create and maintain — or transform — a society's cultural identity and social relations. Thus ritual while putting on a performance also communicates. That is to say human beings actions in the ritual context communicate. In attempting to understand ritual we are trying to discover the rules of grammar and syntax of an unknown language.

Finally life-crisis rituals have an effect on society of rejuvenating its 'sentiments' as Radcliffe-Brown (1966) puts it and make it cohere. Van Gennep found (1966) that these ceremonies which he called rites of passage, were to be found in all societies. He felt that three types of major phases could be distinguished:

- i) separation
- ii) transition
- iii) incorporation

These phases can be found in birth, marriage and death. With respect to our topic we find that the ideas of separation transition and incorporation are all indicating the tension or liminality which accompanies these rituals. Thus rituals of life cycle whether birth and marriage or death have to have within them an in-built mechanism of tension management. The same ideas have been expressed in terms of the facts of preliminality, liminality and postliminality. 'Lumen' means threshold, and each life crisis or life-cycle ritual goes through this feeling of tension or liminality while crossing the threshold. We will mention these categories in the examples we give later on.

Tension arises at childbirth, marriage, and death because these events call for very careful handling. In death specially there is a fear imminent. So also in the others. However, an important observation, made by Van Gennep, is that the three major phases of separation, transition and incorporation are not developed to the same extent by all societies or in every set of ceremonies. Thus rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies. Rites of incorporation are prominent in marriage ceremonies. Transition rites play an important part in pregnancy, and initiation rites.

28.3 FUNCTIONS OF RITUALS

We now turn to functions of rituals since these functions form an important part of any life cycle ritual. These functions are present usually in a combined way in these life-cycle rituals which we will now discuss. Saraswati (1984 : 98-104) has stated that ritual is the core component of all religions. The rules of ritual are transmitted either orally or through the written text. And as Saraswati points out through "ritual action flows the well being not only of the performer but also of the performing society" (*ibid*). He points out that ritual is by definition "an obligatory social behaviour prescribed for occasions that have reference to belief system". Ritual also holds the ritual participants together both as a community in belief and action. It provides a system of meaning to both the social and the cosmic world. The sharing of ritual experience creates a deeper bond. Religious behaviour and ritual, is different from secular ritual. However the former maintains social order from one point of view, and the latter from another.

Saraswati has provided the societal functions of ritual. These societal functions of ritual which Saraswati provides indicate to us as we have noted earlier that ritual has a specific role of play. This role includes as Radcliffe Brown (*ibid*) has said, to make the society cohere and to rejuvenate all the values and ideals society is comprised of. It involves a socializing aspect too. Ritual is thus a teaching device and as Saraswati notes its performance includes apart from socialization, social control, as merit and status, rites of identification and so on. We discuss these below and suggest the student try to identify these in the rituals, we describe later.

- i) **Ritual as Socialization:** In all societies there are life cycle rituals, or *samskara*. These rituals are of two types i.e. the rites from conception to cremation, and the other deals with daily and seasonal sacrifices.

- ii) **Ritual as Social Control:** Ritual has integrative values and puts the social order together. It is linked with other worldly rewards and retributions. It is an integral part of the normative system. Thus the maintenance or ritual order also brings about social order and the spiritual order.
- iii) **Ritual as merit and status:** Ritual leads to religious merit and it is itself performed for merit and status. The performer gets social prestige and spiritual merit.
- iv) **Ritual as identification:** The imitation rite is essential for every member without which membership cannot be gained. Ritual mutilation, circumcision, perforation of ear lobe are all rites of identification.
- v) **Ritual as Spiritual Advancement:** Prayer, pilgrimage workshop and esoteric rites all aim at spiritual advancement.
- vi) **Ritual as Nonverbal Communication:** Ritual has a variety of esoteric and exoteric communication. The use of words and space is such that it often follows archetypal patterns. Esoteric communication has a hidden and specialized meaning available only to experts, such as priests. Exoteric communication is available to all concerned.
- vii) **Ritual and Cultivation of Excellence:** People's sense of enjoying beauty and sense of aesthetics are reflected very well in ritual objects and motifs. Ritual leads to excellence here. It may be dance, painting or handicraft which achieves this. As Saraswati (*ibid*) notes 'No Brahmanic ritual is devoid of aesthetic value.
- viii) **Ritual as Therapy:** Rituals of witchcraft and sorcery are such that they are used in many societies to heal affliction. This is as true of simple religions as that of complex and mixed forms.
- ix) **Ritual as Occupation:** Ritual specialists exist in all societies and enjoy extra privileges and economic benefits. In Hindu places of pilgrimage such ritual occupation can be very lucrative.
- x) **Ritual as Way of Life:** A religious being lives within the ambit of ritual. There are rituals for daily observance, annual ceremonies and some festivals.

Thus we may say that the above scheme covers the broad scope of ritual or of functions of ritual as viewed by Saraswati.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) List Van Gennep's three types of rites of passage.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
- ii) List four types of rituals from among those which are presented by Saraswati.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)

28.4 BIRTH AND RELATED RITES

These according to Saraswati are rites of socialization. When we turn to life-cycle rituals we find, that they are the core of religion. Again, life-cycle rites refer more to the cycle of life: birth, marriage and death. Nevertheless the ritual itself may not follow such a linear path. That is to say that between birth and death a man or woman may have one or more divorces and marriages. This is an almost universal fact. Moreover, another facet of our problems is that a study of a life cycle ritual often begins at conception, goes on through various rituals during the period of pregnancy until child-birth. It then goes on to initiation etc. right upto marriage or suitability to marriage. This happens with regularity not just among the Hindus but also in tribal religions and is almost a universal phenomenon. As such in our descriptions "birth" would mean the rituals surrounding birth. This is so also for marriage and death.

28.4.1 Hindu Birth Rites

Before we can immediately study birth and marriage in Hinduism it would be good to restudy Unit 15, in Block 4, in ESO-02. This unit studies Hindu Social organisation and indicates that Hinduism has a vast backdrop of ideology to its rituals. In his book "*Hindu Sanskaras*" (1976) Raj Bali Pandey has pointed out the following scheme.

- i) pre-natal rituals
- ii) rituals of childhood
- iii) educational rituals
- iv) marriage rituals
- v) funeral rituals

In our treatment we will deal with pre-natal rituals and some of the rituals of childhood.

All this description is meaningless until related to a sociological perspective on life cycle rituals. The first of the pre-natal rites is at conception. This is called '*Garbhandhana*'. It is this rite through which a man places his seed in a woman. The time for this rite was from the fourth to the sixteenth day right after the monthly courses of his wife. The second prenatal rite was '*Pumsavana*' or quickening a male child. This rite was observed in the fourth month of pregnancy. The woman fasted on that day and put on new clothes after bathing. The sprouts of the banyan were pounded and their juice put in her right nostril with verses extolling virile sons. The main factor of this ritual was that it was held to fight off abortion and to produce a male child.

The '*Simantonayana*', or 'hair-parting' is the third of the prenatal rites. In this rite the hair of the woman were parted. This was to keep evil demons away from her, and also to keep her in good cheer. It was done in the fifth month of pregnancy. All these rites are clearly preliminal rites or rites of separation. They are rites which occur before the transition of birth itself. To a greater or lesser extent the tension of coming to the threshold or liminal point is increasingly built up from *Garbhadana*, through *Pumsavana* and *Simantonayana* which is done in the fifth month of pregnancy.

We now turn to the '*Jatkarma*' or the birth ceremonies. These are the rituals of childhood. The *Jatkarma ceremony* was performed before cutting the naval cord. The moment of birth was recorded for astrological purposes. These are the liminal

rites and there is a quick and obvious reduction in tension and these rituals manage the tension levels right up to the *Medha-Janana* and *Ayusa* which are now described.

The ceremony of "*Medha-janana*" is done first with the fore finger of the right hand. The father holding an instrument of gold gave to the child, honey and ghee or ghee alone. The substances that the father gave to the child were considered to be good for mental growth. They also produced beauty, good digestion and talent. Next we have the "*Ayusa*" or rite for ensuring a long life. The father whispered appropriate mantras into the child's ear. Five Brahmans are asked to blow their breath on him. The breath, it is believed, produces a long life. This ceremony, therefore, was to strengthen the breath of the child and provide a long life for the new born. The next rite is supposed to harness 'strength'. The father recited appropriate verses for the same.

The navel-cord is cut, the child thoroughly washed and put to the mother's breast. The next ritual is that of '*Namkarana*' or name-giving. **This is a ceremony which is not strictly recommended nor spelled out in the *grihasutras* but delineated in the *paddatis* or booklets.** First of all, the composition of the name was decided. It is prescribed that boys should have an even number of syllables and girls an uneven number of syllables. It is felt that the social status of the family is reflected in the name. The names given, fall into four categories. These are based upon the asterism under which the child was born; the deity of the month; the family deity and the popular calling.

Namkarana is usually, though not always, done on the 10th or 12th day after the birth of the child. *Namkarana* is a post liminal rite. It is a rite of incorporation by which the child on the 10th or 12th day acquires a name through a ritual and hence gains an identity. We can also see here some of the functions of ritual which we have described earlier (see Section 28.3) such as socialization, religious merit and so on. This is because mother and child, according to belief, suffer ceremonial impurity. When this period expires the house is washed and purified. Mother and child are bathed, and the ceremony continues. Today when the child is born in rural Kumaon after the period of impurity is over, a detailed *Namkarana* ceremony follows. Even the Doms have a Dom Pandit to *pontificate*, (Kapur 1988). It is also usual to make the following ceremonies part of the '*Namkarana*' itself. These ceremonies are the '*Miskramana*', in which the mother goes around on the some spot and touches the child's foot on the ground. This ceremony is actually meant to be done during the fourth month.

The next ceremony takes place after this by touching some food to the child's mouth. This ceremony is supposed to take place six to seven months after naming. The significance of this ritual is actually to begin weaning away the child. The *Chudakarana* is the tonsure and its done only after the fifth month. Fittingly it is often done in the ceremonies before marriage. Also the *Kamavedha* or ear-piercing is done by the twelfth month. In the field as distinct from the textual view (Kapur : 1988) we find that the rituals are in fact often conducted in a group and without reference to the time aspect stressed by the textual view. Thus *Namkarana* and *Miskramana* and so on often take place at approximately the same time, during the same ritual performance. These ceremonies observed show there is a concern for the auspicious and always a desire to earn spiritual merit and related esteem through ritual. These rituals can be seen as rituals for socialization as well as rituals for spiritual advancement. Also there are rituals of incorporation. But in the Hindu scheme they are mainly rituals of merit and status and those of social control, excellence, therapy, way of life and occupation. Hindu birth rites thus begin at the time when conception takes place. Thereafter, there are rites which are performed in order to be blessed with a boy. Evil souls are also kept away through a ritual in which the hair is parted. Only then do the birth rituals *perse* begin. Thus the *Iatkarma* ceremony takes place before the navel-cord is cut. Thus there are rituals

for ensuring good intellectual growth and long life. These rituals all indicate the Hindu view of life which considers the ecological environment and spiritual beliefs as being equally important for welfare of a person. Thus the rites of incorporation in Hinduism are very elaborate.

28.4.2 Syrian Christian Birth Rites

These birth rites are also mainly those of incorporation into society and to earn spiritual merit and status. Unit 17 of Block 4, in ESO-02 gives a good background of Syrian Christians social structure. The first child of a couple is born usually in the mother's house. The daughter goes to her parents a few months before delivery. In earlier times it was customary to bring the pregnant woman to her mother's place with the help of seven ladies including the mother. The rituals and customs before the bride comes to her mother's house right up to the moment of childbirth are rites of separation/preliminality. The child is born with the help of married women of the household and the aid of a midwife. The birth of a boy gives great joy and a loud whistling sound is made. As soon as the child is born the exact time is noted so that the horoscope can be accurately cast. This practice is taken from the Hindus, and much faith is put on the forecasts. Initially the horoscopes are cast on dried palmyra palm leaf parchment. This is made into strips joined together with strings. Initially the horoscopes are cast on dried palmyra palm leaf parchment. This is made into strips joined together with strings. Initially the horoscopes are cast on dried palmyra palm leaf parchment. This is made into strips joined together with strings. The strings are kept fixed by wooden blocks to act as the cover of a book. The writing on the parchment is done by a steel stylus in beautiful letters. Sometimes this is accompanied by floral designs. Next the child is bathed and a priest or an elder relative whispers in the child's ear "*Moron Yesu Masiha*" or "*Jesus Crist is Lord*". As soon as the child is born a horoscope is cast. From this point on the rituals pass the 'threshold' (the liminal point) and enter into incorporation/postliminality.

The child is also given a few drops of honey to drink in which gold is mixed. This is done by the grandmother or a presiding lady by rubbing a gold ornament on a stone on which some honey has been smeared. This custom shared by the Nambudpuris is to ensure prosperity.

After seven days, the husband's family visit the baby. Care is taken that the party consists of an odd number of people. This is because of the belief that even numbers of people on such occasions bring bad luck. On seeing the child the husband's mother places some gold in the hands of the child.

Activity 1

Read Section 28.4 on birth and related rites. Read also the subsections till section 28.4.4. What are the similarities and differences in birth rites of various communities? Write down a note on this and compare it with other students, if possible at the Study Centre.

The baptism can now take place along with the service in the chapel. After an interval of two months or more from the date of birth of the child, the wife returns to her husband's house with gifts of jewellery, clothes and household equipment. These are customs which are associated with postliminality. Their function is socialisation of the society, its rejuvenation and bringing it closer together by virtue of having faced the life crisis together.

The formal education of the child begins at 3 or 4 after a "thread" ceremony somewhat like that of the Hindus. The priest sits next to the child with a brass tray in which 'paddy' is heaped. Taking the child's forefinger the priest traces '*Yesu*' in the heap of paddy. A short prayer is offered followed by a feast. It is considered

that the child has been initiated into learning and can begin his schooling. For girls in their 7th or 8th year the ears are pierced so that they can wear ornaments, it is clear from the previous descriptions that the rites of incorporation as signified by birth are elaborate. When a daughter goes to her mother's place three months before giving birth it is a ritual act. But it is not accompanied by ritual activities *per se*. Earlier seven ladies brought the pregnant women to the house. These and other rituals indicate that Syrian Christianity is ritually quite different from Hinduism. Some rituals are similar at times especially when gold and honey are given to the child to ensure prosperity. But they display every bit the desire to placate supernatural forces. **As is clear in Hinduism, rituals are primarily of socialization, merit and status, identification and cultivation of excellence.**

28.4.3 Sikh Rites of Birth

It would be necessary for us to first describe the social organization of the Sikhs. This has been done in Unit 18, Block 4, ESO-02, where the origin of the Sikhs, their ideology, their five emblems and so on are presented. So we can go straight to the rites of birth. The rites of Sikhs too like those of the Hindus and Syrian Christians reflect a similar aspect of the rites of passage. That is preliminal rites or rites of separation *before* birth; liminal or transitional rites at or just around birth when the tension is at the highest; and finally the naming rites which are rites of incorporation or postliminality.

The birth of a child whether boy or girl is equally welcome. When the mother has recovered, there is a visit to the *gurdwara* for giving thanks. A certain amount of cash is given to buy *Karah Prasad*. In villages women prepare the *Karah Prasad* themselves and take it to the *gurdwara*. A 'romalla' or piece of silk or brocade about one square meter is given to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. At the *gurdwara* thanks giving *sabads* (hymns) are read. Devout families ask that the child be given 'amrit' or nectar which is made by dissolving *patashas* (sugar crystals).

The *granthi* (priest) stirs the water with a *khanda* (short two-edged sword) and describes the first five verse of the *Japji*. The *amrit* is put on the *kirpan* and touched on the child's tongue with it. The mother drinks the rest. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is now opened at random and the first word of the left hand page will be read out to the parents. The name is decided by using the initial of the word and announced. The *granthi* says 'Jo *bhole so nihal*' and the congregation approves by saying 'Sat sri akal' Prayers follow.

Box 28.01

A Sikh must take an early morning bath in fresh water. Next he must recite the *Japji*, the *Jap* of Guru Gobind Singh and his *Swayyas*, before or after breakfast. Before beginning the daily work he must sing the *gurbani* in the *gurdwara*. The thought of God should not leave his mind as he works. He should then recite the *Rahiras* (the Holy Path) at dusk and the *Sohilla* before sleeping.

There are social customs as well. In a joint family the baby is born in the husband's home. The wife's parents visit her bringing gifts for her and the mother-in-law and a turban for the husband and father-in-law. Sometimes a *langer* or free feast could be arranged for the poor and gifts given to widows as charity. The Sikh birth rites too are rites of incorporation. Besides going to the *gurdwara* and visiting the bride's mother and father, they are also rites of social interaction. They also show ritual as occupation in the form of the *granthi*. Spiritual merit and spiritual advancement is also seen. Socialization behaviours are also clearly present.

However Sikhism is essentially an open and modern religion. The martial aspect of

the religion surfaces forcefully in the *amrit* ceremony where *patashas* are dissolved in water by a short two edged sword. The *amrit* is then given to the child on his lips and tongue with that *Khanda*. Also the way of naming is very random but based again on the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

28.4.4 Korku Birth Rites

Korkus are a tribe which live in the Vindhala hills. They are spread out in many parts of these hills and number many different groupings of the same tribe. Let us now turn to their rituals of birth.

Stephen Fuchs points out that (Fuchs, 1988 : 219-236) Korku girls begin menstruating between 11-13 years. According to Korku belief a woman is ritually unclean as long as the menstruation lasts.

The Korku never relax their strictness regarding these rules. The Korkus believe that a woman becomes pregnant only when a soul enters her womb. This is the soul of a Korku that had died one generation earlier. This is always so. Pregnancy is a happy occasion. Every pregnant woman observes certain rules and taboos. For example she must abstain from pork. A pregnant woman should not pass under a mango tree because that is believed to impair her fertility. She must also avoid menstruating women, and those who have given birth recently. To avoid miscarriage she is advised not to lift heavy weights.

Korkus women carry on their field work and household duties till the very last moment of labour pains. A midwife is sent for, who is often a Nahal woman. The Nahal women are of a lower caste. No Korku midwife, it is worth noting, will attend a Nahal woman in labour.

The birth takes place in a corner of the verandah far removed from the entrance or kitchen. This is because a birth is ritually impure and pollutes the food. It must be far from the entrance to keep out people with an evil eye. The woman sits or lies on the ground and the midwife massages her from the hips downwards. In case of a difficult childbirth a thread is unravelled before the woman's eyes or a magician is called in. He makes a potion with water which the woman is to drink. If even this fails, the magician goes into a trance. His patron deity tells him the course of things. Offerings are prescribed sometimes those of a goat. A 'magic' string is tied on her. The offerings are made after the birth. The student should note that we have repeatedly pointed out that both Van Gennep's scheme for rites of passage and Saraswati's scheme for functions of ritual are unveiled before us in each case.

The student should be in a position to locate the three types of situation regarding Van Gennep. He or she should also locate some of the functions of the rituals with regard to Korkus also.

After the birth, the midwife ties the umbilical cord with a cloth and cuts it with a knife or bamboo splint. Turmeric is applied on the wound. The placenta is buried in a corner of the verandah, the mother and child are put up behind sheets in a corner of the house. This is to avoid the evil eye. The mother doesn't eat solid food for about five days. She is served a thin gruel. The newborn child is suckled only on the third day. During the first two days, the lips of the new-born baby are touched with butter milk. Mother and child are ritually impure for about 12 days. A bath is taken to purify her. It is clear here again that the rituals are those of incorporation. They socialize the child. In this brief description of childbirth among the Korkus we can clearly see the influence of Hinduism over their ritual. The concept of pollution as the child is born and then the purification are both clearly a Hindu concept. However, the originality of the tribal view remains. This is brought out by the twisted thread being unravelled in front of a woman having a difficult

delivery. Moreover, the menstrual period is one of avoidance of women. These rituals are rituals of incorporation. They have all the elements of ritual as non-verbal communication and therapy and a way of life.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) List some of the Hindu birth rites ?
- a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
- ii) List some of the Syrian Christian customs/rites during the birth of a child.
- a)
 - b)
 - c)

28.5 MARRIAGE RITES

Marriage reflects the social life of a society. Saraswati (1977) points out that birth, death, and marriage are considered as predestined in Hindu society. He points out that for Hindus marriage is not a social contract but a religious ritual. Marriage is one of the duties of being householder (*grihastha*). Marriage helps a 'twice born' man to fulfill his religious duties and responsibilities. Marriage is an essential sacrament for a woman.

28.5.1 Marriage Rites Among Hindus

Saraswati (1977) writes that a boy should marry a girl of equal status. Marriage should take place within the caste. There are considered to be eight forms of marriage: *Brahma*, *Daiva*, *Arsa*, *Prajapatya*, *Asura*, *Gandharva*, *Raksasa*, and *Paisacha*. The first four of these methods are *Prasasta* or approved; the last four are *Aprasasta* or disapproved (Pandey : 1976). These forms of marriage have been discussed in Unit 15, Block-4, ESO-02.

We now turn to the marriage rites and their symbolism. You will note as we describe the rituals that Van Gennep's classification of separation, transition and incorporation is found to be present. In marriage of the Hindus often there is a shifting of the residence also and this adds to the liminality or transition element of the ritual. Saraswati notes that there are two kinds of rituals in Bhramanic marriage, that is, *Sastrachar* and *Lokacharya*. The *Sastrachar* are performed according to the textual canons of the *shastras*. The orally transmitted rituals are *Lokachar* or *Striachar*. Even in forms of marriage such as *Gandharva* or *Paisacha* where consummation precedes the wedding, *Sastric* rites are used to legalize the marriage. However the *Lokacharya* rites have also to be performed by the women and the villagers. Saraswati (*ibid*) points out that there are various customs in different regions and villages, which are observed at the wedding.

The main points of the *sastrachar* are that there is use of written text, scriptural authority and that the male priest pontificates. Mantras are essential and clarified butter is used. Again, there are mainly purificatory/benedictory rites. Auspicious time is very important for rites. Then the applicability of rules is wider than of *Lokacharya*. The textual tradition is upheld and followed both at the groom's and

bride's places. These rites are also essential for legitimizing marriage and consequently children therein.

Now what of the *Lokacharya*? Here oral knowledge is used. Women exercise the authority and lead the ceremonies. There are songs and incantations but no sacrifices. Again the rites leave a magical element. Further the rites are performed in the sequence. The women desire rules as based in memory and mainly localized. The oral tradition of *Lokacharya* is different for the groom and for the bride. Oral rites are not compulsory or essential but have a profound meaning and emotion. Rites of marriage which appeared in the *Paddhatis* and *Prayogagranthas* are now given below (Saraswati, *ibid*).

- i) The oral giving away of the bride to the bridegroom.
- ii) A formal selection of the bride.
- iii) The nuptial canopy is made.
- iv) Fixing the time for the marriage ceremony.
- v) Fetching earth for growing sprouts a few days before the wedding.
- vi) Putting on turmeric paste.
- vii) Worship of Ganesh (Ganesh Puja).
- viii) Establishing a waterclock on the day of the marriage.
- ix) Ancestor and Goddess worship.
- x) Worship by the father-in-law of the bride who worships the goddess Gauri.
- xi) Worship of the wife of India : sachi.
- xii) Announcement of ancestors of bride and bridegroom with *gotra* and *pravara*. Then there is *Kanyadaan*, the gift of the virgin.
- xiii) The protection cord is tied.
- xiv) The bridegroom's scarf is tied to one end of the bride's sari, *Saptapadi* follows. This is the rite of "seven steps".
- xv) Putting vermilion on the parted hair of the bride.
- xvi) The bridegroom now sits on a pile of rice. The groom and bride throw rice on each other.
- xvii) A *tali* is tied by the groom around the neck of the bride.
- xviii) A bamboo plate is given by the bridegroom's mother to the bride's people.

These rites are aspects of one ceremony and though extended sometimes for a few days they essentially form the rites of separation.

This however is not how things actually happen. Saraswati (1977) notes there is a difference in the textual (as above) and the contextual. Again, the guide books are peculiar to specific regions and do not apply to all regions. This is also further classified by pointing out that Lokacharya traditions differ.

In a paddhati quoted by Pandey (1976) the *Kanyadaan*, means the “gift of the virgin”. Only the father is properly entitled to make this gift or someone in his place when the father is not there. Thus the grandfather, brother, and others including the mother are entitled to give away the girl. A *Samkalpa* is uttered and then the bride is given away formally. *Satpadi* are given greater prominence in the Pnaddhati quoted by Pandey than the one quoted by Saraswati (1977). This is the rite of seven steps and without it the marriage is incomplete. The husband and wife step in a northerly direction in seven steps. However it is also a *Lokachar* custom that the bride and groom go round the sacred fire seven times. Puffed rice is sprinkled by the bride who follows the groom her sari being tied to his turban. This ritual practice is supposed to legally bind the couple in matrimony. While *saptapadi* is common to the *Grihyasutras* *Kanyadaan* is not. We should now briefly point out the symbolism of the marriage rites as noted by Saraswati (*ibid*). The *sastras* treat marriage as a sacrament and religious rites are prescribed for it. The blessings of Superhuman beings are sought. When the groom makes the bride stand on a milestone it is to make the marriage firm and strong. Similarly, all the rituals of marriage and the *mantras* are used to seek blessings and make a strong creative union. The mantras too fulfil this purpose. There are biological symbols as well as such as when the bride is sprinkled with *sura*. This makes her desirable. This is so for fertility rites. Magical rites are used to make the post-consummation period safe for the woman. In Kumaoni marriage of the Hindus although a *Paddhati* is used the division of rites of passage is very clear. In brief all negotiations prior to marriage including date and time of the ceremony, putting turmeric and bathing the village water source are rites of separation, or preliminary rites. The journey to the groom from the village and carriage of the empty doli or carriage is part of the liminal or transitional aspect which last through the marriage ceremony. The post-liminal or incorporation rites are when the *doli* has the bride in it and the procession walks back (Kapur, 1988).

It may be said that a Hindu marriage is a very complex ritual and both the textual and the contextual aspects appear in it. Before we turn to the Syrian Christian Marriage rites let us look at some of the *Lokachar* rites. Before leaving his house for marriage the groom sits on his mothers lap and she ‘feeds’ him with her breasts. At the time of *Kanyadaan* the bride sits on the lap of her father. Such customs abound and Saraswati (1977) feels that they are survivals of old customs. Indeed we may say that the textual and the contextual cannot be separated. There would scarcely be a marriage where the *Sastrachar* and the *Lokachar* do not intermingle. This is because the rites and the customs go hand in hand each enriching the other. there are various facts that the marriage symbolism touches upon. Firstly, it is an aspect of unification (Saraswati, 1977) of man and woman seeking divine grace. The bride is made to tread on a milestone as a symbol of firmness. There are certain biological symbols as well. Marriage is about procreation and there is a rite when the bride is sprinkled with *sura* to make her intoxicating. In the case of survival of old customs, some have already been mentioned. These are numerous and we mention that during *Kanyadaan* the bride sits in her father’s lap. In the *Antahpat* ceremony the mother’s brother brings her in his lap. When the garlands are exchanged, he sits in her mother’s brother’s lap. The bride and bridegroom sits in the lap of the bridegrooms mother who feeds them banana and milk. While doing so the *mangalsutra* is tied around her neck. Before leaving home the bride is carried on the back of her father. Saraswati points out that these are symbolic of the custom of child marriage. These rituals create a strong bond between the groups that are participating in the marriage rites. They also carry the message of socialisation, religious merit, non verbal and verbal communication, therapy etc. to the participants. This is because tension gathers, rises and dissipates in a controlled and orchestrated manner under the influence of the customs and rituals. We now turn to the marriage ceremony in Christianity.

28.5.2 Marriage Rites Among Syrian Christians

In the past, child marriage was widely practised in Kerala. The consummation however took place only on reaching maturity. Nowadays marriages take place after maturity. It is also desirable that the groom be employed, and the bride be in her early twenties. The initiative in negotiating a marriage usually rests on the bride's family. When the appropriate choice has been made, according to the girls side, a representative of the boys' family is sent to settle the marriage. In the past a bride and groom met for the first time in the church at the time of their marriage. Today, while wooing and courtship are out, the two partners exchange photographs and may meet under supervised conditions to talk for a brief while. This supervision is done usually by the girl's mother or her married sister. The betrothal ceremony among the Syrian Christians takes place on the day the banns or formal proclamation of the intended marriage, are announced by the priest in the church immediately after the *Qurbana* or Eucharist, or the Sacramental service to commemorate the Last Supper of Jesus Christ. As usual all the ceremonies preceding the marriage ceremony are the rites of separation/preliminality. The banns are called in both the parishes, that of the boy and the girl. This is to ensure that anyone who has any objection to the marriage should place his point of view.

Activity 2

Attend a marriage of either Hindus, Syrian Christians, or Sikhs. Compare it with the description given in the unit. Discuss the similarities and differences with other students, if possible in the Study Centre.

A betrothal feast is held in the bride's house which begins with sweets and is followed by a formal meal. This is the time when the dowry is handed over. It was regarded as a gift from the father to the daughter and approximated the value of the property the younger sons would receive on the death of their father. It was ruinous in many cases.

The marriage service consists of two parts the first is the betrothal and the second is the solemnization of the marriage. The betrothal and the solemnization of marriage are both aspects of liminality. They presage the moment of transition from one status (unmarried) to another (married). When the bridal couple arrive at the church, two gold chains and a cloth serve as a veil for the bride. The *minnus* or *tali* are placed on a table in front of the sanctuary. The couple stand in front of this table, the bride on the right of the bridegroom. This is in contrast with Western Churches where the bride always stands on the left.

The service commences with prayers and blessing of the two rings. The priest first places the ring on the right hand fourth or "ring finger" and blesses it. He then places the ring on the corresponding finger of the bride's hand. It is believed that the ring finger has a vein which is directly linked with the heart. **The Syrian Christian ceremony differs from the western church in that the rings are put on by the priest and not exchanged between the couple.**

Next we have the blessing on the crowns. Gold chains with crosses are used for this. After the gold chains are blessed the priest raises the chain from the groom three times like a crown and places it on his cheek. He does the same with the chain of the bride. These chains are usually heirlooms and preserved carefully for such occasions.

The priest now comes to the actual ceremony of marriage. The priest places the *tali* around the bride's neck and the husband ties the thread of the *minu* in a knot. After this the priest puts a cloth, which is a gift from the groom to the bride on her head and the marriage ceremony closes.

The custom of tying a *minu* or *tali* is copied from the Bhramins e.g. the Nambudiris. The veil was formerly preserved as a shroud to cover the bride at the time of her death.

After the church wedding the bridal couple come in procession to the bride's house where a pandal or shamiana is erected. The rites after the marriage is solemnized and the procession to the brides house are rites of incorporation or postliminality. They are met at the gate by young women carrying lights. The best man leads them in. The crowd shouts 'nada nada', 'walk walk' and blows shrill whistles. The bride must take the right foot over the threshold, as this is both a mark of respect as well as an omen of good luck. The couple sit on a dais amidst floral patterns made of rice and flowers. Rose water is sprinkled on the guests and *pan supari* are distributed. Marriage songs are sung and the wedding feast begins. *Pan supari* and tobacco are served before the guests depart. Thus Syrian Christians have a large number of customs for their marriages. The church features prominently and is the venue of all weddings. Akin to the western Christian wedding, rings are exchanged. However the ring is given to the bride and groom by the priest not by groom and the bride respectively. These rituals of the Syrian Church reflect social control and identification, occupation and a way of life. We need to add that these rituals rejuvenate the societies values and norms, itsw "sentiments" so to speak.

28.5.3 Marriage Rites Among Sikhs

Mixing between the sexes is restricted among the Sikhs as in other religion. Again Sikhs live in extended families. Marriage is thus not a personal affair alone but forges a lasting bond between two groups. The wife who enters into a new group must prove herself compatible. This compatibility is expected not only with the husband but with others including the husband's brother, sister, sister-in-laws, parents and so on. Social status and monetary transactions should play a subsidiary role. Child marriages have been repudiated by Sikhs. The legal limit in India is eighteen years for women and twenty one years for men.

There are certain norms and considerations, usually the eldest daughter marries before her younger sister. Again, if a young person is undergoing higher education his marriage will be deferred until this is over. Further if there is death in the family e.g. a father dies then the elder son's marriage is postponed till the younger children have completed their education. The family and its friends assist in finding a partner (Cole and Sambhi : 1978). What is looked for, is suitability in the form of virtuous qualities, temperament, and age. Social status and economic status are also looked into. Finally, the caste is also taken into account. Thus a Jat is likely to marry a Jat and a Ramgarhia a Ramgarhia. There are, however, exceptions. A Sikh must marry a Sikh. The gurus teaching the best carried out in a householders state. Usually mixed marriages are not successful and conflict and tension creep in through rural-urban, ric-poor, the moral laxity versus piety. Sikhs should not marry close to their family or "whose caste name is the same at the distance of the four grandparents" (Cole and Sambhi *ibid*). The couple meets informally before the final decision is made. This is done in the presence of some of the family elders. This helps them both to familiarise themselves with, and assess the prospects of the matrimonial alliance.

A bethrothal ceremony may take place before the marriage but it is not compulsory. The wedding is both a social and a religious occasion. It can take place on any day. Sikhs do not believe in auspicious/inauspicious days. There are no doubt practical considerations. For example monsoon months are inconvenient as rains interfere in arrangements. *The wedding takes place in the bride's village, on a flat roof top of a country house or garden or gurudwara. It is important that the Guru Granth Sahib should be there.* We now turn to the preliminal, liminal and postliminal

rites. By this time you must be familiar with them. Try to locate them as the unit continues.

The groom's party usually arrives at the evening earlier and the formal meeting of the two families take place. When the covering hymn *Asa di Var* is sung the groom takes his place at the foot of the *Adi Granth*. The bride sits to the left of the groom along with a friend. A short hymn containing general advice is sung. One of the officiants then explains that *a Sikh marriage is meant to be a fusion of two souls in one and not a social contract*. It is like the union of man and God which is the aim of Sikhism. Hymns are sung giving advice on marriage. A wife should be fidel, humble, and do her husband's bidding.

Check Your Progress 3

i) What are some of the Hindu marriage rites ? List them by name.

a)

b)

c)

d)

ii) Briefly describe marriage rites among the Sikhs. Use about five lines.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

The bride and groom assent marriage by bowing to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. They sit down and the bride's a father garlands the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Then the bride's *dupatta* is tied to the muslim scarf which hangs from the groom's shoulders. The *Lavan* of Guru Ram Das is turned to. The verse is sung as the couple walk around the *Guru Granth Sahib* in a clockwise direction the groom in front.

They return to their place and the second verse is read. The circling is now repeated. This happens four times. As the last encirclement is completed, flower petals are thrown. The service ends with the singing of the first five and the last stanzas of the Anand followed by the *Ardas* prayer. The Guru's Counsel is now taken by opening the scripture at random. The congregation is served *Karah prasad*. The marriage party leaves for the grooms village in the afternoon. The entire ceremony is the liminal or transition aspect of the ceremony. The marriage party leaving for the grooms village/town/city/residence marks the period of incorporation or postliminality.

A word on the symbolism of the ritualism is useful here. The first circling is for adherence to the householders' duties. The second is for faith in God. In the third for living detachedly in the world with eyes fixed towards God. The fourth circling and verse describe the return of the soul to God. Thus Sikhism is symbolic but maintains a simplicity and beauty of ritual. The symbolism involved in the Sikh marriage is directly connected with the *Guru Granth Sahib*. This ceremony is very beautiful and simple in the sense that it involves four circlings of the holy *Grantha*, each of which have a specific significance gleaned from the scripture itself. Even the assert of both groom and bride is given to the *Guru Granth Sabhi* rather than any individual. Ritual of socialization, non-verbal communication, spiritual advancement,

28.5.4 Marriage Rites Among the Korkus

Stephen Fuchs tells us (Fuchs, 1988 : 237-281) that Korkus exercise clan and village exogamy and also kinship exogamy. This extends to all known kin. Marriage between cousins and cross cousins is forbidden. Most of the marriages are arranged marriages although love marriages are not ruled out.

In arranging the marriage similar economic background and similar social levels are also necessary.

The Korkus live in joint households and this means that the match should not disrupt this institution. During the first year of marriage the woman spends time mainly with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law.

The initiative for contracting a marital arrangement is taken by the youth's parents. When an appropriate girl is found keeping all the restriction in mind, her parents are approached. The boy and girl are usually not consulted. All love matches and open declaration of attachment are considered shameful. Such behaviour leads to a large reduction in brideprice. The elders of the house take only a marginal interest in the proceedings. Thus the choice of marriage partners is left mainly to the parents. But today a boy rarely marries against his wish. All the Korkus do not have the same rites, just as in the case of the Todas and Andaman Islanders. There are differences among Korkus of the Nimars, and Korkus of the Melghat, and Central India. Among the Nimar Korkus engagement is celebrated on a Friday. The boy's father and a villager take the brideprice. All these may be considered to be preliminal customs.

The price of a bullock or calf is also given. The bullock donated to the girl's father must be returned if the groom dies. The gift of the bullock has symbolic significance; it seals the friendship between the two families. The wedding ceremonies are spread over several days.

The Wedding Shed: The wedding shed is erected in the groom's village in a Monday. It is erected on a Tuesday in the bride's village. The young men cut 12 *salai* trees. They are received by the bride or mother of the groom. She holds a tray with unboiled rice, *kuku* and oil. She moves the plate around and puts the mixture on the foreheads of the youngmen in a vertical line. Then the wedding shed is erected. This is clearly a preliminal custom signifying the separation stage. These rites as we will see are very elaborate among the Korkus discussed.

Box 28.02

The Korkus are found in the Satpura mountains in Central India especially in the region surrounding Mahadev Hill. The hills are about 2,000 ft. high and spread out into plateaus. The Korkus occupy the central portions of the Satpura mountains, the Mahadev hill and eastern sections. They are agriculturists. This area was ruled by different political powers and led to a Hinduization of the Korkus. Hinduization here refers to a process by which the religious practices and rituals of caste Hindus are emulated by the Korkus.

In the evening after the wedding shed is erected, the groom is bathed and offerings are given to the ancestors. The offerings consist of various foodgrains and a chicken. These offerings are given at the "middle post" of the ancestors a pole in

the centre of the village. The bridegroom simply watches. Women sing wedding songs sitting in a circle following which the women amount the groom with turmeric. The night is spent in dancing and feasting. The village shaman offers a chicken and prayers to god for the young couple. The wedding party is then ready to go to the bride's village. The party consists of the bridegroom and his nearest relatives of both sexes. His mother however must remain behind in the village. The party arrives at about 5 pm in the bride's village.

Ceremonies of the Bride's village: The bridegroom is in nuptials-dhotti, shirt, and a new turban. He wears a dagger with a lemon struck on its point. This dagger symbolises protection against evil spirits. The procession then starts with jingling bells. Shortly before departure a blanket is spread in the yard. The groom embraces his elder brother's wife seven times. This is possibly a survival symbolizing the fraternal polyandry of the past.

The wedding pavillion is patched over smoothly by cloth. In front of the entrance to the house two magic squares (*chauk*) are drawn on one of these the groom sites. This brings us to the transitional aspect of the ritual.

Now the bride dressed in finery is carried into the wedding place, by her-maternal uncle who carries her on his hips like a child. The bridegroom is similarly carried by his maternal uncle. The two are thus carried around the courtyard thrice. During this time both groom and bride throw rice and millet grains at each other. They also throw turmeric. The two are seated on the square in front of the mandap. They are covered with a sheet and water is poured over them. The groom ties a bead necklace around the girl's neck. The end of the bride's *layenda* is knotted to the groom's loincloth or sheet which he carries on his shoulder.

Now both get up and walk to the image of Mutua Deo, where the priest performs an offering. The bride holds the little finger of the bridegroom with the little finger of her right hand. They both walk around the squares and the central post five times. They are now officially married. Now the couple is separated and made to sit side by side on the two squares. Once again the loin cloth of the groom is tied to the bride's *layenda*. From now on the rituals will be postliminal as the 'limen' or threshold has been crossed. As we see the customs and rituals among the Korkus are inclusive of rites of socialization, non-verbal communication and therapy. In fact there is a great deal of feasting and drama involved in it. However, unlike the formal atmosphere of the Hindu marriage, the grandeur of the Syrian Christian marriage, the beauty and elegance of the Sikh marriage, the Korku marriage is a riot of feasting, colour, and music. This however does not undermine its solemn nature.

28.6 LET US SUM UP

In the above unit we have described and explained the rites of birth and marriage in various communities. These include the Hindus, Syrian Christians, Sikhs and the Korku tribe. We have therefore dealt with the subject adequately.

28.7 FURTHER READINGS

Cole W.O. and Sambhi P.S. 1978. *The Sikhs : Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.: New Delhi.

Pothan, S.G. 1963. *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*. Asia Publishing House : Delhi.

28.8 KEY WORDS

Esoteric	: That act(s) or symbol(s) which is specialized or 'secret' and known only to a few expert people.
Exoteric	: Those acts or symbols which are known to and understood by the 'common' person.
Incorporation	: Rituals that absorb an individual into society e.g. birth rituals.
Identification	: Ritual which creates a new identity for the individual concerned e.g. ear piercing ceremony.
Separation	: Rituals, such as those at death which intend to sever relations between the living and the dead.
Ritual	: This is the core component of religions. Its rules are transmitted orally or textually.
Transition	: These rites play an important role in pregnancy and initiation rites.

28.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) a) Rites of Incorporation
- b) Rites of Transition
- c) Rites of Separation
- ii) a) Ritual as socialization
- b) Ritual as identification
- c) Ritual as merit and status
- d) Ritual as nonverbal communication

Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) Garbhadana
- b) Pumsavana
- c) Sunantonayana
- d) Namkarana
- ii) a) *Moon Yesu Masiha*
- b) Giving the child a few drops of honey to drink in which gold is mixed.
- c) Baptism along with the service in the chopal.

Check Your Progress 3

- i)
 - a) Worship of Ganesh
 - b) Ancestor and Goddess Working
 - c) Kanyadaan
 - d) Saptapadi

- ii) Among the Sikhs *Guru Granth Sahib* occupies a supreme position. The couple has to bow before it and later go round it clockwise four times as hymns of Guru Ram Das are sung. Only then is the marriage considered solemnized.

UNIT 29 LIFE CYCLE RITUAL-II: DEATH

Structure

- 29.0 Objectives
- 29.1 Introduction
- 29.2 The Idea of Death
- 29.3 Hindu Funeral Rites
 - 29.3.1 The Bier of the Corpse
 - 29.3.2 The Funeral Procession
 - 29.3.3 Collection of Bones
- 29.4 Syrian Christian Death Rituals
 - 29.4.1 Procession of Graveyard
 - 29.4.2 The Purification Ceremony
- 29.5 Sikh Death Rituals
 - 29.5.1 Cremation, A Family Affair
 - 29.5.2 Karah Prasad
- 29.6 Death and Funeral Among the Korkus
 - 29.6.1 The Funeral Procession
 - 29.6.2 Post Funeral Customs
 - 29.6.3 The Memorial Feasts
- 29.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 29.8 Key Words
- 29.9 Further Readings
- 29.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

29.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying the following unit you should be able to

- describe Hindu death rituals
- discuss Syrian Christian death rituals
- explain Sikh death rituals
- describe death rituals of the Korku
- discuss some approaches to ritual.

29.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will describe and analyse the rituals of death in four communities. These are the Hindus, Syrian Christians, Sikhs and the Korku tribals. Before proceeding further it is advisable you to go over Section 28.2 of Unit 28, *Life-Cycle Rituals-I: Birth and Marriage*. This section discusses aspects of ritual. You should then read Section 28.3 which is Saraswati's *Functions of Ritual*. These are important to an understanding of this unit (Unit 29). We point out here that birth, marriage, and death are integrally related. The form part of a whole. This whole process can be of two types

- i) cyclical
- ii) linear

In the case of a cyclical process we find as in the case of Hinduism, that there is no belief in the permanent cessation of life. Birth leads to marriage, old age and then death. This is followed by birth again. The soul, which is vital to life and living simply gets a new body to inhabit. In many tribes too of which the Todas and

Korkus are good examples there are similar beliefs. This is often held to be traceable to their Hinduization but it is not necessarily so. Tribes can have these beliefs without being accused of borrowing them from Hinduism. Thus reincarnation and *Samsara* make our study of ritual of Hinduism into one that is governed by the essentially cyclical nature of these concepts. Life does not stop for more than a moment. It goes on and on until *Moksa* or absorption into godhead is reached. This is not meant for any but the most elevated souls. A majority of Hindus must travel in *Samsara*. From one life to another working out their *Karmas* or deeds until in some hypothetical future they too draw very close to sainthood and the consequent *Moksa*.

In the case of linear rituals of life cycle we have the case of Christianity and Mohammedanism. Here birth, marriage, death and heaven or hell form a linear stretch. In Christianity it is heaven or hell and in Islam it is again heaven or hell. There is no return to the earth. Death is a full stop so far as life on earth is concerned. It then continues in some other world. The sources for this unit are given in the section on Further Reading.

29.2 THE IDEA OF DEATH

Unlike birth and marriage which bring pleasant memories with them, death is another name for horror. Death shocks the relatives, friends, and acquaintances very deeply. Death ceases normal relations and the fear of the body decomposing is very great. There is a non-acceptance of the same. In order to ward off the fear and malignancy of death many rituals arose. So stark a reality as death has to be accepted and rituals devised for the next stretch of life whether cyclical or linear.

According to primitive beliefs of Hinduism the soul survived the body. Thus death was that process by which the soul separated from the body. Again in dreams and sickness the soul separated temporarily from the body. But death was unique. The soul went away never to inhabit the same body again. Those who were alive felt mixed sentiments towards the dead. These were primarily feelings of dread release and fear.

Additionally there was the practical need to dispose of the dead body. Decomposition which occurs after death makes it difficult to keep the body for a long while. It was thus removed with care and disposed off with ritual. The rituals connected with disposal of the dead are to free the survivors from pollution of death and to put the dead to rest with dignity. We will now describe death rituals among various communities.

29.3 HINDU FUNERAL RITES

There are several variations all over India of the Hindu funeral rites. After death the body is bathed and laid out on view for all those who want *darshan* of the departed soul. A picture or some article belonging to the dead person is garlanded and joss sticks lit around it, if this is possible.

In some cases *mantras* are repeated at the side of the dead body. In some cases *tulsi* (basil) water is dropped into the dying persons mouth.

29.3.1 The Bier of the Corpse

A structure is made of bamboo which looks like a six feet ladder upon which the corpse is laid. The big toes of the corpse are tied together. The corpse is already covered with a white or red sheet depending upon the status of the dead. It is a married women then a red shroud is used. There are several other rituals for a

married woman. White shrouds are used for everybody else. The dead body needs to have been washed and cleanly clothed. These are preliminal rites which take place before the funeral itself. In a sense they are rituals which have the function of maintaining ritual order and securing the corpse to the bier.

Box 29.01

Cremation is the most recognised form of disposal of a corpse among the Hindu from the Vedas upto the present day. This custom is believed to be the most refined by the Hindus. Some causes could have led to this belief.

- i) Tribes which were nomadic found it convenient to cremate and carry only some bones of the ancestor.
- ii) Desire to be free of the ghost is also a powerful motive. When the body was gone the ghost could not stay.
- iii) Fire which consumes entire forests at times probably suggested its utility in burning away the dead as well.
- iv) These reasons were strong in the early phases but later on its was the prestige and honour given to 'Agni' (fire) that made it the method par excellence to exhume a corpse.

Once it is put on the bier and secured firmly onto it with rope, the near male relatives shoulder the bier and carry it towards the cremation ground. Shoulders are changed several times on the way to the cremation grounds. In urban areas however a hearse-van is usually requisitioned and the body is driven to the cremation ground. It is led by the eldest male, a son preferably.

29.3.2 The Funeral Procession

The procession then goes to the cremation ground by foot. Here the body is put near the cremation shed and wood is piled up into the pyre for the corpse. Meanwhile the priest performs certain ceremonies on the corpse for its betterment in the next world.

Thereafter the corpse is laid on the pyre without the bier and covered up with wood. The pyre is always lit by the eldest living son. Except in the absence of the same, a male relative lights the pyre. The main mourners go around the funeral fire keeping their right shoulder, towards the pyre. This is not always so. Among the Coorgs and the Kumaonis some groups go in an anticlockwise manner keeping the left shoulder to the pyre. This varies from group to group. The fire is then left to burn and the cranium is staved in by the eldest son. This is to free the trapped soul. This is a liminal stage in which the body transits from flesh and blood to bone and ashes.

29.3.3 Collection of Bones

The bones are collected a day later when the pyre has cooled off and put in earthen pots. These pots are taken to a river and immersed there. Holy men's bones and ashes are made into a memorial called a *Samadhi*. On the fourth day from death a prayer is organised for the peace of the departed soul. Finally a prayer is held annually for the departed soul. We must remember however that this is a variation not found all over India. It is also to be remembered that a funeral is a polluting event and the mourners either go home and bathe or bathe in the cremation ground itself if the inclination and facilities are there. There may also be a funeral feast later on. Collection of bones and their immersion into a holy river are all postliminal customs. They indicate an incorporation into the world of ancestors. This postliminal

phase include rituals like *Chautha*, *Pagade* and *Shraddha* among the Punjabis which comprise the postliminal phase. *Chautha* is held on the fourth day after the death and towards its termination *Pagade* is given to the eldest remaining survivor. It vests him with the authority of the head of the household. *Shraddha* is kept annually in memory of the deceased and the welfare of his or her soul.

29.4 SYRIAN CHRISTIAN DEATH RITUALS

The death ceremonies of the Syrians reflect reverence and solemnity. In the Syrian Christian church there is no such ritual as the extreme unction or last rites. But there are certain rituals at the time of illness. The priest is usually at the bedside and as the end approaches, prayers are chanted. The priest whispers the basic doctrinal beliefs in the dying person's ear. When death occurs women commence weeping and beating their breasts. It becomes obvious to the neighbourhood that death has taken place. Kitchen fires are extinguished and no cooking is done until after the funeral has taken place. The body is washed and dressed and placed in a room facing East with a cross at the head and candles to either side. Incense is burned. Prayers and hymns are chanted throughout the time the body is in the house. Clearly these are preliminal rites when the priest is at the bedside of the dying person. However death does not occur gradually all the time. There may be an accident. In such a case the rest of the rites are observed as given above. They are rites of separation. The group is attempting to separate themselves from the deceased and preparing themselves for transitional/liminal rites.

29.4.1 Procession to Graveyard

The dead body is anointed with oil by the priest. The sign of the cross is made on the face, breast, and knees with oil. The funeral procession then leaves for the Church to lay the body to rest. Graveyards in Kerala are usually in the church compound. The body is placed in a coffin and carried to the graveyard. Women of the household do not accompany the procession. The elaborate funeral service comprises prayers and hymns. When the coffin is lowered into the grave the priest throws mud into it in the sign of a cross. Each mourner also throws in mud while



A graveyard with symmetrically laid out graves with epitaphs on the head stones.

the prayers are said. The Syrian Christians bury the corpse with head to the west so that it faces the east. This follows the firm belief that the messiah will come from near Jerusalem. The ceremony right from the anointing of the corpse with oil and the priest making signs of the cross, till when it is laid into the ground, head facing west are all rites of transition. The body is in the grave and mud is being thrown in. It will gradually disappear and will not longer inhabit the social world. These rites indicate this liminal phase. This ritual communicates this 'disappearance' nonverbally.

After the funeral the mourners return home. Here they are served a simple meal of rice.

29.4.2 The Purification Ceremony

In older times mourners were considered to be under pollution till the eighth or tenth day. A purification ceremony known as *pullakuli* was held thereafter. This custom was borrowed from the Nambudiris. Except daily wage earners the mourners do not keep engagements till the fortieth day. On this day a special ceremony is held at the end of which the priest blesses everybody by letting them kiss the back of his hand. A non-vegetarian meal is provided and this brings to end the period of official mourning. On each death anniversary a ceremony is performed. A requiem mass is held in the church. A candle is also lit on the grave and some charity is distributed to the needy. It is clear the rites of post liminality are somewhat extended among the Syrian Christians who do not keep social engagements till the fortieth day. The priest then blesses and declares this phase closed and after several ceremonies described above. Further mourning is kept to a death anniversary.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What are the main points of the Syrian Christian funeral. Describe the same in about 5-7 lines.

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- 2) Discuss the significance of the collection of bones among Hindu death rituals. Use about 5-7 lines.

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29.5 SIKH DEATH RITUALS

Sikhs are of the view that in a hot climate the funeral should take place quickly, preferably a day after the death has occurred. They practice cremation. Burial at sea is permitted and not considered wrong, but cremation has been the tradition of five hundred years. The ashes can be buried and this has happened in the case of samadhis and shrines of saints. However, usually the ashes are immersed into a nearby river. Funeral moments are not considered desirable and the Gurus forbade any such thing in their case, but we find that *gurdwaras* sprang up in such locations. Thus the preliminal customs are done quickly and with efficiency and cremation is the favoured method.

29.5.1 Cremation, A Family Affair

Cremation is attended by the entire family, unlike the Hindus where the women stay behind. The body is washed and it is ensured that the five Symbols of *Sikhism* adorn it, that is the *Kirpan*, *Kaccha*, *Kanga*, *Kara* and *Kesh*. It is taken on a bier to the cremation ground in a procession. The mourners sing hymns. The funeral pyre is lit by a close male relative and the evening hymn is sung during the cremation. Prayers are also offered, including the *Ardas*.

When the mourners get home again it is customary to wash one's hands and face and many of them bathe as well. A complete reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* begins and goes on for the next ten days intermittently in stretches of about an hour of reading followed by intervals, till the include reading is completed. The preliminal customs do include getting the body ready and dressed. However when the fire is lit we are with the transitional/liminal rites. The post-liminal rites then begin and go on until the mourners get home, bathe and the complete reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* is done in the next ten days as described. These rituals indicate aspects of ritual as an occupation by those who chant (*Guru Granth Sahib*) and ritual as a way of life in that death will always be where life is.

29.5.2 Karah Prasad

An important social custom which has deep cultural significance in Sikh rites is the distribution of *Karah Prasad*. The mourners are given *Karah Prasad*. The sharing of the food has deep meaning and signifies the continuity of social life at a time when it is ruptured due to death. This method of affirming life contrasts with such practices as going into isolation, fasting, and manifestations of ritual grief *Karah Prasad* is also a postliminal rite and indicates that the transitional phase has ended. **It is also a ritual which rejuvenates society as it is given to all present in the ritual.**

It is believed that good *Karma* leads to birth as a Sikh. It gives one a chance to come into contact with *gurbani* and to seek liberation. Dying persons are read *gurbani* to, the message of which is that the holy name is the most precious possession and those who do not chant it will repent their ways.

Activity 1

Describe in two pages the details of any Hindu/Christian/Sikh death ritual that you have attended and can remember. Try to interpret the meaning of the various rites according to popular explanations. Compare your notes with other students in the Study Centre, if possible.

29.6 DEATH AND FUNERAL AMONG THE KORKUS

When a man is close to death among the Korkus, the dying person is served rice water or plain water to drink. If he is unable to swallow it he is considered to be close to death. He is then laid on the ground. If a Korku dies on a bed, then that bed is discarded forever. No one would sleep on such a bed for fear that the dead persons spirit would come and bother him.

Korkus lament every death in the Clan. The women strike themselves on their head and chest. They cry words of sorrow. These words express a longing to go with the dead person. A bier is made by the men with bamboo poles and seven cross bars. The corpse is denuded of all clothes and jewellery. The dead body of males is wrapped in a white sheet. The corpse of married women is wrapped in a red cloth and that of widows in a white sheet.

When a women becomes a widow she laments and takes off all her jewellery. On the other hand a widower does not do anything like that. He sits mourning near the corpse of the wife. A Korku widow is allowed to put on her jewellery after ten days. These are all preliminal aspects of a funeral and the Korkus are similar to Syrian Christians in the beating of the chest in sorrow. Among the Hindus too a widow removes her jewellery, just as a widow does among the Korkus.

29.6.1 The Funeral Procession

When all funeral arrangements are ready the procession begins. The eldest son carries with him an earthen pot containing rice water. If the eldest son is not there, a younger brother or a close relative takes over. At half distance to the graveyard the group stops. The bier is put on the ground and carriers change place from left to right. Women do not accompany the procession as their wailing and crying disturb the spirit world.

The Korku villages have their own graveyards where graves are dug somewhat haphazardly and mounds are seen covered with stones and thorns.

In the burial ground a hole 3-4 feet in depth is dug. A north-south direction is kept, the face being kept looking north. The Southern bottom where the head is kept is coated with cowdung and leaves. Before putting the body into the grave a few copper coins are thrown in. Flour and turmeric is sprinkled around the grave. The body is placed on its back with head to the south facing north. A coin is sometimes put into the mouth of the diseased, so that he or she may use it in the next world. The grave is half-filled with mud and lined with thorns. It is then filled with earth. The earth is loose and not pounded since this may hurt the dead person. When he or she will be reborn, they believe, the signs of such pounding will be on his body. The 'packing' of thorns and boulders into the grave is to keep wild animals from gnawing at the body. Occasionally a coin; flute or other articles are buried with the body. The pot with rice water is broken at the head of the grave. This is for the diseased to eat if he is unable at once to find something to eat in the other world. **We can see so far that these rituals are those of separation from the social world and incorporation into the other. These are rites of passage.**

All these rites are also an expression of affections at the separation of the dead person. They feel obliged to send off the dead person in the best possible way. The liminal customs are such that they make it clear to everyone who is participating that the man or woman has passed over to the world of the dead. They are rituals of socialization and spiritual merit. They also have an aspect of therapy in them. Once the man or woman is buried the liminal aspect gradually closes with the pot of rice being broken at the head of the grave.

Activity 2

Note down the main features of the Korku funeral. Compare these notes with those you have made in Activity 1. What similarities and differences do you find in the Hindu/Christian/Sikh funerals as compared to the Korku funeral. Try to analyse the differences and similarities of the ritual. Compare your efforts to those of other students, if possible at the Study Centre.

29.6.2 Post Funeral Customs

When the funeral is over the mourners (men) bathe in a closeby river or bathing area. They wear a turban which is washed later. The bonds with the diseased are broken at about the half way point under a *ber* tree. Here they each pluck a leaf and pick up a stone. They wave them overhead and throw them away. This is a rite of purification and segregation. It expresses the breaking of all bonds with the diseased. A brass pitcher full of water is carried back and a little water is poured in each persons hand. He waves it over his head and drops it on his left foot. This foot is held over the fire at the door. **This is a purificatory ritual that accompanies every funeral.**

The postliminal rites continue. In the evening at the house of mourning a flour silhouette of the man is drawn. It is usually 10 cm long. A top of this a basket is kept upside down. After an hour the basket is removed and the silhouette is examined. From any changes in the patter made by insects the people try to find out why the man died and how his spirit would be. If changes are found near the stomach, for instance, it is said he died of stomach disorder. Disturbances during these rites are also taken as signs of witchcraft. The divination especially the aspect concerning the spirit can be viewed as a rite of incorporation in the other world. The postliminal rites here among the Korkus are very specific and include bathing, throwing leaves overhead and pouring water from a brass pitcher into the hand of each mourner. These rituals are communicating that there is a distinction between the dead and those who are alive. These actions also have a therapeutic value giving the mourners something to do. The flour silhouette, 10 cm long also serves to convince the bereaved group of people that there was specific reason for the death.

After divination is over a chicken is killed and roasted. It is eaten with rice. After this meal, often a woman goes into a trance and the belief is that it is the dead person who possesses her. She advises the mourners often about the future.

Then a dinner is proposed in the house of the mourners. No food is cooked while the body is there. Dirges are sung each morning in this house. They become shorter and shorter as the separation becomes complete.

The memorial banquet is held about two weeks later. All the guests contribute to it. At the start a goat and some chickens are sacrificed. These are an offering to the dead and helps the spirit to find peace. Once this sacrifice is over the spirit comes to the "middle post" of the house. here a prayer is offered for forty-five days after the banquet. As mentioned earlier these postliminal rites through which the dead person will become incorporated into the 'other' world are more elaborate among the Korkus including the forty-five days prayer offered at the "middle post" of the house.

After death people become spirits if they are old, and if they die young they are devoured by an evil soul. **Naturistic beliefs are there and spirits are believed to exist in whirlwinds and other natural phenomena.** Belief in rebirth does exist among the Korkus. They also believe that dead people are usually indifferent

to those who are alive. They place memorial stones in a pile under some shady tree just outside the village. There are basic beliefs of retribution and reward according to the deeds that have been performed in heaven by the individuals concerned. Good deeds mean good rewards in heaven and bad deeds punishment in hell.

29.6.3 The Memorial Feasts

The postliminal rites described above are not complete and after one year a memorial feast is given. *It is only after the sidoli feast that the spirit is finally laid to rest that incorporation into the other world is considered to be complete.* All this while liminal aspects remain and the spirit exists but only in transition.

The feast is served, organized and arranged by the family. All kinsmen and affines are invited to the feast. The feast sets the spirit at rest. All their remains are aken to the riverside. A memorial post called '*munda*' is erected out there. It is made of teak wood. It is usually two feet below the ground and three feet above it, and is square in shape. If a man dies at a foreign location the *munda* must be rected at his original home. However not all clans of the Korku erect *mundas*.

Further a *mando* hut facing a north-south direction is also erected. Inside it are seven cone shaped stones got from the river. Each stone represents a deity. Such a hut is meant only for shamans and village priests.

Several other feasts follow and they are indicative of an attempt by the living to remove the dead person, body and soul, from them. It is also an attempt to help the dead person to be incorporated into the other world. In between, it may be said, lies a type of liminal phase for the dead person's spirit. One interesting rite of solidarity is the carrying of the basket with a light (*diya*) in it to every neighbours' house since the last *sidoli*. Then hymns are sung. The chief organizers of the feast dress like groom and bride. Their garments are knotted together. A boy or girl may substitute for them with no obligation to marry subsequently. After midnight the two are separated and go to opposite sides of the room and shout at and abuse each other. The other guests soon follow suit. This is an old ritual and the abuse may even seem grossly absence to outsiders. It is quite obvious that their concerns are now with this world and with each other rather than any spirits. On the third day of the feast the *munda* is carried to the place of the *Kharkia* where holi is celebrated.

A male goat is killed here. On the fourth day of the feast the *munda* is erected near a river. Several other rituals occur. However, they all express incorporation for the dead persons spirit from the world of the living, and life in the world of the dead.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the significance of the post-funeral customs among the Korkus. Use about 5-7 lines for your answer.

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2) Describe the main points of the Sikh cremation in 5-7 lines.

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29.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit is the second part of the life cycle rituals and deals mainly with death rituals. It is not separate from the unit on birth and marriage but has been put in a separate unit due to reasons of convenience. The unit begins with the idea of death and Hindu funeral rites. We next studied Syrian Christian funerals followed by Sikh funerals and lastly Korku death rites. We have therefore covered the subject adequately.

29.8 KEY WORDS

- Cremation** : The act of burning a dead body with fire so as to exhume it completely e.g. Hindu funeral.
- Cyclical view of ritual** : A ritual which occurs periodically such as the death anniversary. Also applied to the cyclical view of life cycle ritual e.g. the Hindu where death leads to life and life to death in an endless cycle till liberation or *Moksa* is attained.
- Linear view of ritual** : A ritual which has a full stop such as death among the Christians. The dead person never returns to earth, hence death is an ending on a linear path, which moves from birth to death.
- Samsara** : The Hindu view that the soul moves from one body to another for an indeterminate number of times till it attains *Moksa*.

29.9 FURTHER READINGS

Cole W.O. and Sambhi P.S. 1978. *The Sikhs : Their Religions Beliefs and Practices*. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. : New Delhi.

Pandey, Raj Bali. 1976. *Hindu Samskaras : Social Religions Study of the Hindu Sacraments*. Motilal Banarsidas : Delhi.

Pothan, S.G. 1963. *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*. Asia Publishing House : Delhi.

Fuchs, Stephen. 1988. *The Korkus of the Vindhya Hills*. Inter-India Publications : New Delhi.

29.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The main points of the Syrian Christian funeral are that it is a burial presided by a priest and mourners. The graveyard is in the compound of a church when the coffin has been lowered into the grave each mourner throws in some mud. The face is put facing towards, east, that is Jerusalem, from where the Messiah is expected to come.
- 2) Among Hindus the bones are collected the day after cremation when the pyre has cooled off. These bones are usually immersed into the nearest river. Holy men's bones and ashes are made into a memorial mound called a *Samadhi*.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The post-funeral customs of the Korkus are that they bathe after the burial. They pause half way back and throw a leaf and a stone away. A local diagnosis of the death is made with a flour silhouette. Two weeks later there is a memorial banquet. After an year the *sidoli* feast is also held.
- 2) For the Sikhs cremation is the preferred method of disposal. Funeral mounments are not made. The corpse is washed and the five K's are put in order. The body is cremated amidst prayers. The mourners return and a reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* is begun. *Karah Prasad* is given prayers and *gurbani* is also sung.

UNIT 30 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PILGRIMAGES

Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 What are Pilgrimages
 - 30.2.1 Definitions of Pilgrimage and Pilgrim
 - 30.2.2 Individualistic Aspect of Pilgrimage
 - 30.2.3 Sacredness in Pilgrimage
 - 30.2.4 Auspiciousness in Pilgrimage
 - 30.2.5 Pilgrimages in Different Religious Traditions
- 30.3 Socio-Historical Background of Pilgrimages Specially in India
 - 30.3.1 Turner's Typology of Pilgrimages in History
 - 30.3.2 Pilgrimages in India: Continuity and Change
 - 30.3.3 Hindu Pilgrimage
 - 30.3.4 Buddhist Pilgrimage
 - 30.3.5 Jain Pilgrimage
 - 30.3.6 Sikh Pilgrimage
 - 30.3.7 Pilgrimage in Islam
 - 30.3.8 Christian Pilgrimage
- 30.4 The Social Significance of Pilgrimages
 - 30.4.1 Turner's Thesis
 - 30.4.2 Pilgrimage and Socio-Cultural Integration
 - 30.4.3 Pilgrimage and Education
 - 30.4.4 Pilgrimage and the Arts
 - 30.4.5 Pilgrimage, Material Culture and Economy
 - 30.4.6 Socio-Political Aspect of Pilgrimage
- 30.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 30.6 Key Words
- 30.7 Further Reading
- 30.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

30.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at introducing you to the meaning and nature of pilgrimages. After studying this unit you will be able to

- understand the meaning and nature of pilgrimage as an expression of the religious sentiment — as both an individual's behaviour and a socio-cultural institution
- appreciate the social significance of pilgrimages, i.e. the effect of pilgrimage on the socio-economic life of a people and on social solidarity and unit among the people
- have a comprehensive idea of how pilgrimage has evolved through history in response to change in the social, economic and cultural spheres, specially in India.

30.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we begin with the question : what is a pilgrimage ? We then go on to define what a pilgrim is. Following this we provide descriptions of pilgrimages in different traditions. We then go on to examine pilgrimages in various contexts and features, including temple going. We then examine the merit (*punya*) producing aspects of pilgrimage. Next we discuss the institutional aspect of a pilgrimage and the sacredness associated with it. Following this we examine pilgrimage centres and their liminality and the nature of auspiciousness in pilgrimage.

Next to this section is the one on the socio-historical background of pilgrimages. This examines the typology of pilgrimages and gives the various interpretations of the meaning of the word *Haji*. It also examines continuity of pilgrimages in India. We also examine the social significance of pilgrimages. We examine pilgrimage in the arts and education, material culture and economy, and the socio-political aspect. We begin with the social integration aspect of pilgrimage.

30.2 WHAT ARE PILGRIMAGES ?

All major religions of the world have laid great emphasis on the sacredness of certain localities and have either enjoined or recommended with great insistence, pilgrimages to them. These places are famous for miracles and the inspiration for religious life of the faithful or the revivification of faith. A religious believer in any culture may feel the call of such a place which may lie at a distance and resolve to journey there, i.e., to undertake a pilgrimage to the sacred site.

39.2.1 Definition of Pilgrimage and Pilgrim

Most people understand pilgrimage as a journey to a holy place or shrine, either in the pilgrim's native land or abroad. The object of pilgrimage is to obtain some benefit — material, symbolic, moral or spiritual — which the sanctity of the chosen spot is believed to confer. A pilgrimage may be undertaken because such a journey is considered *meritorious*. The idea of the acquisition of divine favour, either directly or through a saint, is generally associated with such a journey. The benefits expected out of the *labour or travail involved in the journey or expedition* to the destination of pilgrimage, i.e., holy place, may range from the satisfaction of mundane interests to the highest spiritual attainment. But the journey has a root in the religious beliefs of the person(s) undertaking it. The journey to the sacred spot is always associated with some religious motive or motives which are, in one way or another, religious ideas and beliefs.

From the above definitions it is absolutely clear that two significant features which do recur in pilgrimages are

- i) sacred places and
- ii) the act of travelling or journeying itself.

“Pilgrimages are sacred journeys extraordinary” (Saraswati, 1985 : 103). True, pilgrimage as practised in India and elsewhere is guided by the highly diversified motives of the pilgrims.

Pilgrimages are not mindless movements or migrations either. They are voluntary and individual, *unlike the mindless collective migrations* familiar in ancient and medieval times. Each is a personal act, following a personal decision, and resulting in a wide range of significant personal experience. Pilgrimage is thus a journey in quest of some ultimate value or some spiritual experience. Is every visit to a nearby holy place a pilgrimage ? For answer to this question see Box 30.01.

Box 30.01

Is a visit made daily or occasionally by a devotee to the local or next-door shrine a pilgrimage ? No, it is just a ‘journey’ to a sacred spot. Pilgrimage or pilgrim's journey usually covers long distances and extends over a considerable duration of time. Indeed pilgrimage implies a movement away from home and the severing, though temporarily, of the enduring bonds which bind the individual there. A Hindu pilgrim is a “Yatri” (one who

goes). The pilgrim's journey begins amid the entanglements of the domestic social setting. The pilgrim then moves out and away from these, across distance, to a place that is set apart from the complex problems of everyday mundane life. The journey to the pilgrimage centre provides the opportunity for preparation of the devotee's mind for the proper attitudes needed in the pilgrimage centre.

30.2.2 Individualistic Aspect of Pilgrimage

Notwithstanding the collective aspect, associated with organisation of pilgrimages (discussed in sub-section 30.4.1), various studies of pilgrimages in Hindu, Buddhist or Christian cultures have revealed the *individualistic aspect* of pilgrimages. Hindu pilgrimage, more specifically, Kashi pilgrimage, is essentially a personal quest for salvation both in space and in time. All rituals are aimed at earning the merits which are not collectively shared. **The merit of a pilgrimage is earned individually; and moksa, the ultimate aim of pilgrimage is salvation of the individual soul.** Pilgrimage is an affair of the individual. There are, of course, cases where motives for going on pilgrimage originate in a general atmosphere of piety, devotion and communal and social loyalty. But very often a pilgrimage is "the result of a vow. Something is wrong, or some danger threatening, or some good things highly desired are missing". And, hence the journey (*ibid.*, 255). The pilgrim goes to the holy place in pursuit of some personally desired end. Buddhist pilgrims rituals of circumambulation (*pradakshina*) of the sacred shrines of the relics of Buddha is symbolic of a journey representing personal spiritual ascent.

There are specific motives concerned with mundane existence. They usually involve a commitment or vow to the deity whose blessing is sought for the solution of a problem which is of great concern to the pilgrim, e.g., the desire for the birth of a male offspring. The second category of motives consists of earning religious merit. It is hard to define such motives. It may be interpreted as the desire to purify the soul rather than to pray for wealth or success in business. Each pilgrimage has a related sacred complex. Turner (1974 : 189) views pilgrimages as processes or flows of activities and observes that "pilgrimages will constitute objectively a connected network of processes each involving a journey to and from a particular site. Such sites (are) places where, according to believers, some manifestation of divine or supernatural power had occurred, what Mircea Eliade would call a 'theophany' (Turner 1974 : 189).

30.2.3 Sacredness of Pilgrimage

The sacred is a category of things and actions set apart as holy and entitled to reverence. Such a category is often held to represent symbolically the key values of a society. The sacred is often understood in contrast with the profane. What is profane is ordinary, not sacred. Emile Durkheim (see Block 1, Unit 3, p. 42-43 of ESO-05) declares that all religions divide the universe into two opposed realms—sacred and profane and establish rules distinguishing the former from the latter. Dichotomy of the sacred and the profane in absolutist terms has been subjected to wide-ranging empirical and conceptual criticism. For instance, the idea of polar opposition between the sacred and the profane is to be applied in the Indian context with *caution*. For, Indian religious thought is hierarchical (in the sense of encompassing of the contrary) rather than simply dualistic (recognising the binary opposition). That is the profane, though the opposite of the sacred, is included in the latter and thus subordinated to it (Madan, 1991 : 3). Even in a place of pilgrimage like Kashi which is renowned for its sacredness, "it is difficult to make clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the secular in its organization of space, in the performance of its rituals and in the profession of ritual specialists".

Two illustrations may be given. The unseemly bargaining and even unscrupulous dealings of the Brahman priests with the pilgrims for extorting money from the pilgrims in temples or during the performance of rituals at the *ghats* of the Ganges are a common scene in Kashi. The other notable fact is the doms' custodianship of the sacred fire required for of the deceased including the Brahmans to ensure their salvation.

Box 30.02

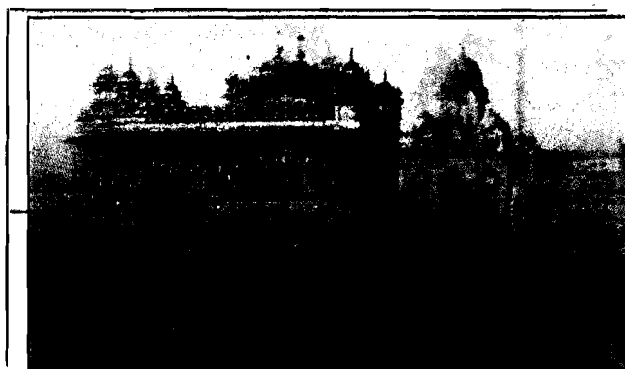
The quality of sacredness characterizes various aspects of the journey to and activities in pilgrimage centres. Liminality of pilgrimage centres becomes clear when it is likened to a *ford*. A ford is a shallow stream where it is possible *to cross safely on foot*, in a vehicle, etc., and without using a boat. Indeed, the Sanskrit equivalent for a centre of pilgrimage is *tirtha*. The Sanskrit word, *tirtha*, is translated as a passage, way road, ford, stairs for landing or descent into a river, bathing place, place of pilgrimage. *Tirtha* has other connotations and usages as well. But the plurality of the uses of *tirtha* shares a *symbolic value of holiness* prescribed to certain exalted categories of place, state or person. The significance of *symbolism* lies in the notion of "crossing over" (transition or passage). The notion of fording or crossing over, implies a crossing place — a *liminal*, media location between two realms (of the sacred and the profane). A *tirtha* is such a place, and in symbolic terms. *so is every place of pilgrimage*. Similarly, a learned, purified, initiated or devout individual rises above mundane society to stand between man and God, and so is able to act as a point of intersection and, therefore, fording.

The sacredness of the site accounts for the great concern with purity among pilgrims. The pilgrims must remove the taints of impurity from their body and mind. In case of Hindu pilgrims, for instance, the journey is itself a purification by austerities. For the quality of sacredness attached to pilgrimage and pilgrim centres, see Box 30.02. Also see, the next sub-section, 30.4.2 to find out the difference between being sacred and being auspicious.

30.2.4 Auspiciousness in Pilgrimage

Auspiciousness is an important element in pilgrimage. Auspiciousness/inauspiciousness is distinct from purity/impurity. *The former refers primarily to events* and ultimately to life itself as an event-structure. Purity-impurity is basically an attribute of objects.

A *tirtha-sthana* or place of pilgrimage of the Hindus, located on the bank of a river or body of water, is regarded as holy and a pilgrimage (*yatra*) to it is considered auspicious. The holiness of the place and the auspiciousness of the visit are greatly enhanced, if two or more rivers merge there (Madan 1987 : 52). *Auspiciousness*



The Golden Temple at Amritsar; the most holy temple of the Sikh faith.

implies benediction and well-being. An auspicious or *subha* time, or event or conduct is considered conducive to well-being.

Pilgrims attach great importance to objects or persons supposed to bring about subha or auspiciousness even if such objects or persons may suffer from impurity. Thus the pilgrims to the temple of Jagannath at Puri are told that viewing the circumambulating of devadasis is auspicious, i.e., these actions result into well-being. Some worshippers in the temple pick the dust from the feet of the dancing devadasis, or roll on the ground where they have danced, in the hope of attaining well-being, of winning divine grace (Marglin 1985 : 109). For, they are told that the devadasis are the living embodiments of Jagannatha's consort, Lakshmi, indeed, the devadasis have the exclusive right to sing and dance in the outer sanctum of the temple at various times of the day and the year. **They are associated with many other auspicious rites and events in the temple complex. They are, therefore, venerated by the pilgrims.**

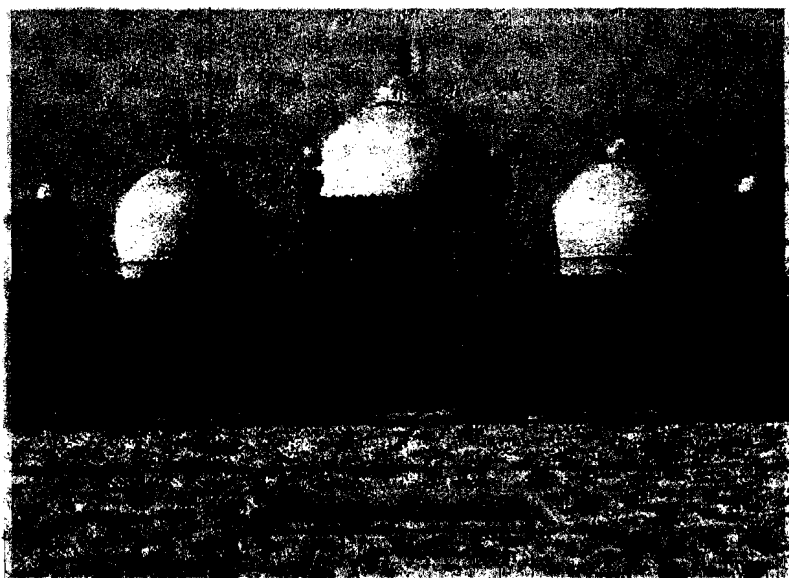
But the devadasis are denied entry into the inner sanctum of Jagannatha's temple. This prohibition is linked with the devadasis' status as courtesans. Their body is thus impure. But the sight or worship of the devadasis is auspicious for the pilgrims (Marglin 1985 : 35).

30.2.5 Pilgrimages in Different Religious Traditions

A brief description of pilgrimages as they are practised by the followers of certain major religions may help us better understand the nature and functioning of pilgrimages.

30.3 SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PILGRIMAGES

Pilgrimages have arisen in different periods of history and have taken different paths. Pilgrimage traditions vary from one culture to another. We shall first examine Turners' typology of pilgrimages through history. The typology is based mainly on the experiences of the west and Christianity, though its universal validity is claimed. We shall then see the changing interpretations of *hajj* through time. Finally, we shall discuss the continuity and changes in the meaning and practice of pilgrimage in India.



Prayer congregation in front of a mosque with three prominent domes, and two flanking

30.3.1 Turners' Typology of Pilgrimages in History

Victor and Edith Turner have attempted a typology of pilgrimages depending mainly on European history and history of Christian pilgrimages (Turner and Turner, 1978).

- i) *Archaic Pilgrimage*: Archaic pilgrimage traditions have come down from very ancient times, and little or nothing is known of their foundation. Archaic pilgrimages are those pilgrimages which bear quite evident traces of syncretism with older religious beliefs and symbols'. Turner and Turner cite Glastonbury, Chalma in Mexico, Croagh Patrick in Ireland and Pandharpur in India. Pandharpur is included in this category because "its equivocal deity Vithova Bhave may well have Dravidian, pre-Indo European associations" (Turner and Turner, 1978 : 18).
- ii) *Prototypical Pilgrimages*: Pilgrimages established by the founder of a religion by his or her first disciples or important evangelists of his faith may be called prototypical. Examples are: Jerusalem and Rome (Christianity), Mecca (Islam), Banaras and Mount Kailas (Hinduism), Bodh Gaya and Saranath (Buddhism).
- iii) *High-period Pilgrimage*: In the hey-day of a pilgrimage tradition an elaborate shrine, crowded with symbols is created. In the middle ages when the growth of Muslim power in the Mediterranean hampered Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the loss was compensated by the creation of shrines all over Europe. Chartres, Canterbury, Walsingham, Compostela, Loreto, Assisi, Czestochowa, etc., are important examples. Eventually, at many European centres routinization and decline set in and meaning was lost in the jungle of symbolic objects and rites. Hence during the era of Reformation and the era of Puritanism many of them like Walsingham became targets of iconoclasts and were suppressed.
- iv) *Modern Pilgrimages*: All over the world in the last two centuries a new type of pilgrimage characterized by "a highly devotional tone and the fervent personal piety of their adherents" has developed. This modern pilgrimage is "deeply involved with mass technological and scientific culture". Pilgrims travel by automobile and airplane. **Pilgrimage centres publish newspapers and pamphlets. The catchment areas of modern pilgrimages are great and flourishing urban industrial cities.** However, the message of the shrine is "still traditional, at variance with the values of today". Both apparitional and saint-centred pilgrimage abound in Europe as well as in other parts of the modern world, e.g. Japan or Israel.

30.3.2 Pilgrimages in India : Continuity and Change

India is well known for the antiquity and continuity of her institution of pilgrimage. All sections of its population attach importance of the institutions. For example, the



A collage of pilgrimage centres in India.

hajj is the only pilgrimage enjoined by the Quran the Muslims in India and Pakistan visit many pilgrim centres. The veneration of tombs is against the 'Ulema law of orthodox Islam and the Wahabis prohibit any such pilgrimage. However, Bharati seems to be correct in pointing out that hardly more than 5 per cent of Indian and Pakistani Muslim population would pay heed to such stricture. "The Muslim practice is clearly a copy of the Hindu model, and the observances hardly differ from those of Hindi pilgrimage..." (Bharati 1963 : 142). Some modern Hindu sects like the Arya Samaj oppose the worship of tombs and shrines and pilgrimages to them. Prior to this, the monotheistic Lingayat sect of Mysore or the Sahajiya Vaishnavas of Bengal placing reliance on Bhakti or devotion expressed a similarly negative attitude to pilgrimage. Despite these objections to pilgrimage it remains an increasingly popular Hindu practice. The nature of Hindu pilgrimage is encased in the Sanskrit expression *tirtha-yatra*, which literally means "undertaking journey to river fords".

The glorification of *tirthas* and *tirthayatra* in the literature was prompted by a very practical consideration on the part of the priests : The offerings made at sacred places are sources of livelihood for the officiating priests. The latter are, therefore, extremely zealous to extol the merits of sacred places, particularly where they are the controlling priests. In this way numerous *sthalapuranas* and *mahatmas* has been essayed to bolster the attraction of scores of *tirthas*. The vested interests of the priests become markedly manifest in the institution of Gayawals in Gaya. A Gayawal claims the monopoly of performing rites for the pilgrims who he can contact as well as their descendants. He gets paid for this religious services. The *gadi* or *gaddi* (office) of a Gayawal where the account of the pilgrims and descendants is kept is thus a source of pecuniary gain. It can be inherited or bequeathed or offered as a gift. The right to a *gadi* became in many cases subject of litigation in the Privy Council (during the colonial period) and the High Court.

The sacred places or *tirthas* form important nodes, both as

- i) repositories of *traditional* Hinduism and as
- ii) propagators of *reinterpreted* values and beliefs.

The basic factor supporting this role is that Hindus from diverse regions visit these places and thus provide opportunity and convenience for the growth of such institutions. The sacred places during the major fairs become visible centres for the diffusion of new ideas, innovations and improvisations. Thus above religion, the spread of information with widespread cultural consequences receive vital impetus. It is mainly because modern means of mass transportation, communication and services have made it possible for a larger number of individuals to undertake what were once arduous pilgrimages. The number of pilgrims each year visiting for instance the well-known Hindu *tirthas* is to be reckoned in several millions. Specific occasions, such as the *Kumbhamela* at Hardwar and Allahabad attract literally countless devotees who are eager to bathe in the sacred rivers and partake in the religious celebrations.

It is nevertheless difficult to say from the increasing number of pilgrimages to holy sites whether the Hindus have become more or less religious in modern times. But it is an undeniable fact that new cults, built around saints, either alive or deceased, have come into existence in recent times. And, they have given a great impetus to pilgrimage and its prospects in the future. Agehananda Bharati mentions "two almost contemporary cases of intensified 'pilgrimization' due to the one-time presence of a saint" (Bharati 1963 : 150). One is the Kali temple at Dakshineswar near Calcutta which drew an increasing number of pilgrims from all over Bengal, from other parts of India and more recently from the United States and Europe as well. The importance of Dakshineswar to the pilgrims lies in the fact that Ramakrishna

complex at Dakshineswar. The other case of pilgrimage mentioned by Bharati relates to Ramana Maharishi's hermitage in Madras. Srinivas talks of Saibaba, a saint of modern India whose tomb in Shirdi in Maharashtra has become a favourite place for pilgrimage. The shrine of Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamatai is also visited though his cult is not as popular as the Saibaba cult (Srinivas 1970 : 132).

The national Government and various State Government in India increasingly recognize that vast numbers of people crowding pilgrimage centres can also be used as a convenient stage for the diffusion of new ideas bearing on the social, economic and political development of India. Take the example of *Ardha Kumbha* at Hardwar where the Health Department had set up a large (temporary) family-planning exhibition and a clinic, which familiarised thousands of pilgrims with family-planning devices. It even extended individual advice to numerous people. Similarly, the ministries of Agriculture and Industries had their exhibitions. The large number of pilgrims who assemble at sacred places with very little cost to the government can provide an inexpensive method for the dissemination of new ideas even to the remote corners of the country.

30.3.3 Hindu Pilgrimage

According to (Eck 1981 : 323-25) the Hindu tradition of tirtha has three principal sources.

- i) the Vedic tradition of rituals and sacrifices
- ii) the Upanishadic wisdom and knowledge tradition; and
- iii) the "locative strand" of piety of indigenous India.

In the Vedic and Sanskrit usage a *tirtha* means a 'crossing place' or 'ford' where one may cross over to the far shore of a river or to the far shore of the worlds of heaven. Hence, in the course of time, *tirtha* has come to refer to those places of pilgrimage where the crossing might be safely made.

The Hindu pilgrimage tradition recognises not merely the sacredness of specific spots but the holiness of vast regions or rather, the entire territory of India. The recognition of India as a sacred landscape woven together, north and south, east and west by the routes of pilgrims has created a powerful sense of India as Bharat Mata-Mother India (Eck 1981 : 336). If all the temples in a tirtha area polluted or demolished to the ground, the sanctity and efficacy of the *kshetra* shall remain unaffected and hence new temples may be built at new sites within its sacred territory. This is how the *tirthas* of the Hindus have survived numerous invasions and destructions (Saraswati, 1978 : 88).

Once the pilgrim's *puja* or direct communication with the deity in the shrine is over, a part of what the pilgrim has offered in *puja* is returned to him as *prasad* or blessed object. It is believed that to eat the blessed food, to wear a string, bangle or amulet or to carry a flower returned from the Puja will bring about the desired goal. These objects are ritually energized i.e., they are infused with the power of the deity by their contact with its image. The pilgrim seeks to continue the pure status attained in the *tirtha* as long as possible. Hence, *a Hindu pilgrim does not perform any ritual of desacralization prior to his or her departure from the tirtha.*

The openness of *tirthas* is illustrated in Saraswati's analysis of the diversity of performances and performers in Kashi (Saraswati, 1978). In Kashi one will find pilgrims belonging to all the different cultural traditions of Hindus — oral, textual and transcendental. Thus a potter pilgrim belonging to the oral cultural tradition

(*Laukik Sanskriti*) feels satisfied if a Brahman priest takes him to the shrine of Viswanath in Kashi for worship and to the river Ganga for a holy bath. The priest may take him to some other Brahmanic shrines also. But what is really important for him and what he does on his own is to visit the non-Brahmanic shrines of defied heroes, known as beers, such as *Agiya beer* and *Lahura beer*, and bathe in the *Krimikunda*, a sacred tank located in Keenaramka Astar.

It would appear that by generating an essentially continuous religious space, the circulation or “flow” of pilgrims to sacred places helps them transcend the great linguistic and regional-cultural differences of India.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) What are pilgrimages ? Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write a brief note about pilgrimage in Hinduism. Use about five lines for your answer.

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30.3.4 Buddhist Pilgrimage

Buddhist pilgrimage is a concrete example of the statement that mysticism is an “interior pilgrimage” and pilgrimage is “exteriorized mysticism”. The internal pilgrimage or meditation brings a Buddhist closer to the goal of *nirvana* (pali, *nbibbana*). But the turning toward the Buddha who is iconically represented in the marks of his presence on earth or in relics is considered an important preliminary step along the path to enlightenment. In addition to bodily relics (Pali, *sariradhatu*), Buddhist tradition also recognises

- i) *paribhogikadhatu* or relics or objects that the Buddha used (e.g., his alms bowl) or marks (such as a footprint or shadow) that he left on earth and
- ii) *uddesikadhatu* which refer to routine reminders, such as images and stupas, known not to contain actual relics. *Stupas* or *chaityas* related to these indications of Buddha’s presence in the world have grown into centres of pilgrimage by Buddhists.

The secondary tradition makes Buddha himself determine the goals of pilgrimage

- i) where he was born (Lumbini in Nepal),
- ii) where *bodhi* or the highest insight or enlightenment was achieved. (*Bodh Gaya in India*).
- iii) where he “turned the wheel of the Law”, i.e. preached his first sermon (the Deer Park at Sarnath near Banaras), and
- iv) where he passed into the state of *nirvana* (Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh).

On these places, the Chinese pilgrims have reported at length. Today more than in the past centuries, these sites are being constantly visited by pilgrims from the Buddhist countries, and many different denominations belonging to several countries have built monasteries in these areas. The Indian Government built a rest house for pilgrims at Sanchi (Gwalior); the stupa connected with the Buddha's main disciples Sariputta and Mahamoggallana. The number of Buddhist Indian places of pilgrimage is limited. There is no unequivocally Buddhist tirtha in South India”. During the long period between the decline of Buddhism in India (the first millenium CE) and the late nineteenth century Buddhist pilgrimage was confined mainly to Buddhist lands outside India. The emerging importance of certain sites — the so-called sixteen great places in Sri Lanka and the twelve shrines related to the twelve-year cycle in northern Thailand — was associated primarily with the linking of political and moral communities in the world to a sacred Buddhist cosmos. *In mainland China there have been various pilgrimage sites, related to both Buddhism and Taoism. But with the advent of the Communist regime in 1949 pilgrimages in China seem to have disappeared.*

30.3.5 Jain Pilgrimage

Jains are “the pilgrims par excellence, ever on the move” (Madan, 1991: 18). Indeed, Jains hold the *sramana* or wandering ascetic to be the essential exemplar of the true path of renunciation. One important way to follow the ideal of the exemplars is found in pilgrimage. According to Diana L. Eck the Jain notion of *tirth/tirtha* has a close connection with the words of passage, *tirtha* (ford or crossing) and *tareti* (crosses) in the Vedic and Upanishadic literature. These terms were used in early Jain literature to express profound spiritual transition. Although the earliest Jain literature refers. So the enlightened teacher as a *jina*, “a victor” before long he became known as *tirthankara*, a “ford maker”, who has crossed the stream and reached the far shore (Eck 1981 : 333).

Jains divide their *tirthas* (sacred pilgrimage sites) into two categories: (i) *Siddhakshetras* from where the ascetics realised their liberation and (ii) *atisavgakshetras* which are sacred for other reasons, including *murtis* which bestow favours on their devotees (Sangave, 1980). Interestingly, the Jains economic success is attributed by many to the magical power of their *sadhus* and sacred statutes. There are many sectarian differences among the Jains. **The idea and practice of pilgrimage is, however, one of the important features common to all Jains.** Common pilgrimage sites, despite sectarian claims for ownership, reveal the shared symbol of Tirthankar (founding exemplar of Jainism) in which all repose faith (Singhi, 1991 : 140). Mass pilgrimages held to celebrate sacred anniversaries reveal the reality of community in the life of Jains divided into so many sects and subsects. Virtually all Jains take part in these at some point in their lives. Some people spend a remarkable amount of time trundling in trains, or buses, or even walking as a penance or to acquire merit, to distant holy sites. At these places there can be an immense convergence or assembly of Jains.

30.3.6 Sikh Pilgrimage

Earlier, the founder of Sikh religion had said: "Religion does not consist in wandering to tombs or cremation grounds, nor of sitting in meditative postures" [quoted by Bharati (1963); see Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* (Oxford, 1909)]. Guru Amar Das, one of the ten preceptors of Sikhism, tried to prevent the Sikhs from visiting Hardwar, Banaras, Allahabad, etc. "However, Sikhs — especially women — frequent the Hindu pilgrim centres, particularly Hardwar, which is close to the Punjab" (Bharati, 1963 : 143). It is thus interesting to note how Sikhism which developed into a distinct religion with belief in the ten Gurus, and reverence for the Holy Book *Guru Granth Sahib*, as also for certain symbols and shrines and initial opposition to pilgrimage came to incorporate pilgrimage. Bharati (*ibid*) informs that Guru Nanak himself visited the tomb of a Muslim saint (Shaikh Farid of Ajodhan).

Guru Nanak visited the Hindu places of pilgrimage like Hardwar, Kurukshetra, Puri, Rameswaram, Varanasi, Kailash, etc. as much as the places sacred to the Muslims but only to attack the hollow rituals, the superstitions, and the exclusiveness of both. Gopal Singh (1970) quotes from M.A. Macauliffe's *Sikh Religion* which records the opposition of Sikh religion to idolatry and "pilgrimages to the sacred rivers and tanks". But the same Sikh writer writes in another place that in the historic *Gurudwaras*, as at Amritsar, a large number of trained musicians are kept in employment to treat the pilgrims to devotional music at almost any time of day or night" (Singh 1970 : 84).

***Gurudwara* (the *Guru's* door) has a pivotal role in the life of the Sikhs whether in villages or towns. There are in India today four famous *Gurudwaras* — at Amritsar, Patna (the birthplace of Guru Govind Singh), Nanded (where he died) and Anandpur. The Golden Temple at Amritsar is the holiest and attracts an unending stream of pilgrims round the year. Amritsar was earlier known as *Guru ka chak* or Ramdaspur, named after Guru Ram Das who founded here a rallying point for the Sikhs. Guru Arjan Singh, known to have infused vigour into Sikhism, increased the importance of Amritsar by making it his headquarters, completing the construction of the tank, and building a temple — *Har mandir* (Temple of God — in its midst). He also built a temple at Tarn Taran and founded the city of Kartarpur, both of which became important places of pilgrimage. The shrine at Dera Baba Nanak is another famous centre in Punjab. Delhi has two famous shrines — *Gurudwara Sis Ganj* (the place of Martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur) and *Gurudwara Rakabganj* (where his dead body was cremated).**

30.3.7 Pilgrimage in Islam

The annual pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca, in West-Central Arabia, is known by the term *hajj*. The term *hajj* itself, like its Hebrew cognate *hag*, seems to reflect an ancient semitic notion of "going around" or "standing" in the presence of a deity, or sacred mountain or shrine, or the journey to it. Muhammad incorporated the pre-Islamic rite of pilgrimage of early Arabia to Kabah as one of the five Pillars of Faith in Islam, the other four being the profession of faith in Allah and his apostle, prayer or performance of divine worship five times a day, fasting during the month of Ramadan (*Saum*), compulsory alms giving (*Zakat*). In 1982 from an estimated world Islamic population of 750 million, approximately 3 million Muslims were reported to have made the journey. **The *hajj* experience is an important expression of social and religious unity and equality in Islamic culture. The duty of performing the *hajj* rests on the authority of scripture (the Quran) and the recorded practice of the prophet Muhammad (*sunah*).**

Although *hajj* is a duty which a Muslim man or woman owes to Allah, the decision as to whether and when one should undertake the "journey to the house" belongs

ultimately to each individual Muslim. This element of individual decision makes room for voluntariness in *hajj-hajj* becomes in a way a voluntary act. Hajj is valid at any stage of adult life.

Activity 1

Read Sections 30.3 to 30.3.8 on pilgrimages in different religions. Write a two page note on the similarities and differences that you find. Compare and discuss your findings with other students at the Study Centre.

The *Hajj* proper or the *Great Pilgrimage* begins on the eight of Dhu-al-Hijjah, the day of setting out for Arafat, some thirteen miles east of Mecca. At Arafat the rite of *wukuf* or "standing" at the Mount of Mercy, the themes of brotherhood and repentance dominate the afternoon sermons and supplications. At sundown the rite of *ifadah* ("pouring fourth") or *nafarah* ("stampede") or "hurrying" to Muzdalifah begins. During the overnight or shorter halt at Muzdalifah, pilgrims gather small stones for ritual lapidations or the ceremonial stoning of devil at Mina the next day. The tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah is the final official day of the *Hajj* season. Most of the ritual activities of this day take place in Mina and include (i) the casting of seven small stones at the pillar of Aqaba, symbolizing the stoning of the devil who waked Ibrahim not to obey the command of Allah, (ii) the feast of major sacrifice (*Id al-adha*), (iii) the rite of deconsecration from the condition of *ihram*, and (iv) the visit to Mecca for the *tawaf*, called *al-ifadah* (P.D.: 1966).

Those who complete the *hajj* will be entitled to the epithet *hajj* or *hajji* (*hajjah* or *hajjiyah* if female). This honorific title indicates socially perceived status enhancement. It is a recognition by one's peers that a sacred duty has been performed. It is a matter of universal value and spiritual merit, if not universal spiritual achievement in Islam.

30.3.8 Christian Pilgrimage

Pilgrimages played a very important role in the religious life of the Christian church, particularly in the middle ages, and it is still in vogue among the Christians different places like Palestine. Pilgrimage, or making one's way to holy places, is regarded by devout Christians as an ascetic practice that lets the Christian find salvation through the difficulties and dangers of temporary exile. It is also a means of coming in contact with that which is divine and obtaining grace or the blessings of the supernatural power associated with the pilgrimage site. Pilgrimage is undertaken by Christians also to give thanks to the supernatural power for obtaining the blessing requested.

Pilgrimages to Christian shrines in India have two noteworthy features. First, the most popular shrines attract pilgrims round the year not only from among the Christians but also from among "Indians of other faiths as well" (Moore 1964 : 47). "Even Muslims have been known to overcome their aversion to graven images and to pray at the shrines of Mary" (*idem*). Secondly, norms associated with most of these Christian pilgrimages reflect a significant impact of Hinduism on them. For example, a Christian pilgrim suffering from an ailment in any part of the body offers a wax replica of the affected organ to St. Mary at Bandra. It resembles the practice of offering silver or other metallic replicas of eye, nose, ear, hand or foot to Lord Venkateswara at Tirupati by the Hindu devotees for the cure of ailment of particular organs. The walking pilgrimage of the Christians from Howrah to Bandel (in preference to the very convenient travel by train) to visit 'Our Lady of Happy Voyage' reminds one of similar pilgrimages by the Hindus to many places like Tarakeswar (West Bengal) or Baidayanath Dham (Bihar), where they carry water from a sacred river, walking all the distance on foot. To collect money from aims to visit a place of pilgrimage and *Bhakhaoti* (sacred vow for a wish fulfilment) as

found among the Christian pilgrims to the shrines of Virgin Mary at Bettiah and the village of Rampur in North Bihar or elsewhere are also Hindu attributes. **The pilgrimage by two Christianity in early fifties to Kedarnath and Gangotri as an instance of indigenization of Christianity in India and an attempt to understand Christianity with the use of Hindu idioms and vice-versa.**

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Enumerate the types of pilgrimage that have been described by Turner. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write a brief note on pilgrimages in India. Use about 5 to 7 lines for your answer.

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30.4 THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PILGRIMAGES

For a comprehensive understanding of the social significance of pilgrimages we shall first examine Turner's thesis on pilgrimage as a social process, where he emphasizes the *communitas* in pilgrimages and their *liminal* (see Key words) character. We shall then see how pilgrimage is related to different aspects of social life, namely, social and cultural integration, educational, economic, political and other kinds of activities.

30.4.1 Turner's Thesis

Victor W. Turner begins his thesis on pilgrimages as social processes with the idea that pilgrimage has the classic three-stage form of a rite of passage (as described by Van Gennep)

- i) separation,
- ii) the liminal stage (the journey itself, the sojourn at the shrine, and the contact with the sacred, and
- iii) reaggregation (the home-coming).

In this context Turner asks us to consider two modalities of social experience

- i) of structure and
- ii) of *communitas*.

Activity 2

Have you ever been on a pilgrimage or do you know someone who has been on a pilgrimage? Do his/her experiences conform to Turner's classic three stage form of a rite of passage? Try to put the experiences into the three stage frame provided by Turner. Put these experiences down on a sheet of paper and discuss them with your fellow students, if possible at your Study Centre.

In structure people are differentiated by social role and position and linked in an often hierarchical political system. By contrast, *communitas* presents itself in an undifferentiated community of equals who may recognize each other in an immediate and total way. *Communitas* "is almost everywhere held to be sacred or 'holy', possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency". Turner (1974a : 203) remarks that *communitas* emerges where social structure is not and reaffirms the bonds of essential unity upon which the social order ultimately rests.

Pilgrimages seem to be regarded by self-conscious pilgrims both (i) as occasions on which *communitas* is experienced and (ii) journeys towards a sacred source of *communitas*, which is also seen as a source of healing and renewal.

The intervening period and flow of activities between departure from home for the pilgrimage centre and return therefrom to the familiar world is marked out by "liminality, the optimal setting of *communitas* relations, and *communitas*, a spontaneously generated relationship between levelled and equal, total and individuated human beings" (Turner, 1974a : 202).

Liminality and *communitas* together constitute anti-structure. Anti-structure is not the total reversal of structure but rather *the source and origin of the all structures and their critique*. It suggests new possibilities. In the pilgrimage situation the ethos of *communitas* becomes manifest in the social bond which develops among pilgrims and which welds them into a group. Relations among members of the group of pilgrims cut across the social divisions which are typical of social order in the home sphere. Pilgrims are relieved for a time from the nets of social structure wherefrom they journey to the pilgrimage centre. Since it allows temporary release, pilgrimage is designated as a form of anti-structure compared to the highly ordered and structured sedentary life of the place of residence. Pilgrimage involves the establishment of a temporary bond of camaraderie/comradeship and quasi-fraternity among those en route.

30.4.2 Pilgrimage and Socio-cultural Integration

The contribution of pilgrimages to social and cultural integration of a people is observed at three levels.

- i) First, pilgrimage promotes national or regional integration cutting across group boundaries.
- ii) Pilgrimage has a great impact on the group of participants themselves in maintaining and strengthening the values and ideals held by the group.
- iii) Pilgrimage serves in many cases to reinforce the existing patterns of social relations within the area from which the pilgrimage draws pilgrims.

India is well known for diversities of race, region, language, sect, caste etc. Here too pilgrimages have been a very important vehicle of the idea of essential unity of

the Indian people. Noting this M.N. Srinivas (1962 : 105) writes, “The concept of unity of India is essentially a religious one”. Famous centres of pilgrimage lie in every part of the country. Even in pre-British times when the means of communication and transport were very poor, pilgrims occasionally walked hundreds of miles across territories infested with fierce animals and dacoits and braved disease and privation to reach the sacred places for earning religious merit. The grand pilgrimage was *pradakshina* or clockwise circumambulation of the territory of India.

In a sacred centre like Banaras many kinds of people and many local and regional elements of culture are juxtaposed and ordered in a small place. A Maharashtra priest intending to study the Vedas in Banaras will look for and get a Maharashtra scholar in the city where he will also meet Bengalis and Tamils and rituals bearing the colour of their specific regional cultures. For example, the deity Murukan enshrined in several pilgrimage centres throughout the State of Tamil Nadu, stands as a symbol for Tamil Nadu and its people. Pilgrimage practices are a feature of Tamil regional identity. *Pilgrimage forges a social bond within the local area.* Sectarianism and factionalism are widespread in the regions from which the pilgrims come. But the pilgrimage is non-sectarian and is joined by all segments of the population to perform non-sectarian agricultural rites which concern the entire population of the area.

Some pilgrimages transcend national boundaries and therefore function to bring together communities larger than the nation-state. The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca links all the separate communities of Muslims into one community of the Faithful centred on Mecca.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) What are Turner’s views on structure and communities ? Use about 5 lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write briefly on the socio-cultural aspect of pilgrimage. Use about 5 lines for your answer.

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30.4.3 Pilgrimage and Education

Pilgrimage has been one of the important sources of education, information and cultural awareness for the pilgrims. The Hindu pilgrimage affords, for instance, an opportunity to countless people living in distant villages to know India as a whole and also her varying manners, life styles and customs. Karve (1962 : 13-29) noted that three characteristics of education were present in the pilgrimage —

- i) the preservation of traditional knowledge,
- ii) its cultivation,
- iii) and its transmission to the next generation.

This education was also many-sided. Besides religion and philosophy, the three arts of music, dancing, and drama were included in it. It also encompassed the living together for some time of the whole array of communities, castes and classes within Indian society.

30.4.4 Pilgrimage and the Arts

Dance and music, architecture, sculpture, and painting receive ample encouragement and transmission through pilgrimage. Many of the temples in Hindu and Jain *tirthas* are commendable for their artistic beauty and admirable design and conception which set examples for other such constructions. *Temples in India may rightly be said to represent both poetry and philosophy in brick and stone, and temple worship was in a way responsible for the great development and subsequent refinement of sculpture and painting, and music and dancing to extraordinary levels of excellence.* It is difficult to find temples of great antiquity in North and West India as these parts of the country were vulnerable to repeated invasions and destruction by the foreigners. In north India's *tirtha* tradition a *tirtha* is created through the deification of the land or territory. Temples are less significant than the sacred territory on which they stand. By contrast, the creation of a *tirtha* by building temples and housing the deity is largely a south Indian tradition. Hence, the large temple complex and the walled sacred territory are the characteristic features of the South.

30.4.5 Pilgrimages, Material Culture and Economy

Pilgrimages have a role in the spread of material culture through the exchange of ideas and goods among the pilgrims along the routes of pilgrimage. The route-pattern of ancient pilgrimages suggests at least two favourable zones or corridors of contact between the North and the South. These corridors seem to have been favoured for the southward expansion of plow agriculture. The areas less suited for plow agriculture remained outside the zones and hence the pale of Hinduism and partly inhabited by tribal peoples. The *Purohits* (popularly known as *Pandas*) at Hardwar also maintain an elaborate system of record keeping on long leaders called *bahis* which contain genealogies of their clients *Yajman*. The *bahis* have been kept for generations and are handed down from father to son or even sold to other *purohits*, given in dowry to a son-in-law, or otherwise exchanged as property. This is so because of their association with the means of livelihood of *Pandas* who depend for their living on the custom provided by pilgrims visiting pilgrimages. *Constant coming and going of pilgrims in a pilgrim place gives impetus to growth of business activities in the area, small and big needs of pilgrims have to be catered and as a result appear a variety of marketing arrangements.* Apart from deity requirements of temporary shelter, food, articles for worship, several forms of entertainment, recreation also appear as a side-business activity. For example, the Pushkar *tirtha* in Rajasthan is famous for both its sacred character and its fair, where brisk business in animal trade is transacted between buyers and sellers from a wide area.

30.4.6 Socio-Political Aspect of Pilgrimage

The close association in a common purpose, namely, the purpose of pilgrimage, of large numbers of people from different tribes, communities and localities affords the

basis for the development of political unity and stability of political authority. Pilgrimages played as vital a role in pan-Hebraism (Hebrew system of religion) as in modern pan-Islamism. Pilgrimages provided in the past the ideological legitimation for empires. Christian pilgrimages can be traced back, to the glorification of the Palestinian and Syrian 'Holy Land' perpetrated by the Emperor Constantine and his ecclesiastical retinue. The crusading spirit of the Christian intending to visit Jerusalem was generated when the hardship in the way increased because of the seeming intolerance of the aracen rulers. No doubt, notice of political conquest and worldly ambition entered into the Crusades in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well as in the practice of pilgrimage. Similarly, the Buddhist and Islamic holy places were generated out of the respective efforts of King Asoka and Muhammed and their priestly functionaries to establish Buddhism and Islam as state religions, respectively.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) How is pilgrimage a source of education, information and cultural awareness ? Answer in about 5-7 lines.

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- ii) What is, in your opinion the link between pilgrimage places and advancement in performative arts ? Answer in about 5-7 lines.

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- iii) Why do markets develop around pilgrim places ? Answer in about 7-10 lines.

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30.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen what pilgrimages are: This includes the definitions of pilgrimages, temple going, merit producing aspects and so on. Also covered were the institutional aspects of pilgrimage and its sacredness. Pilgrimage centres and liminality and auspiciousness in pilgrimage were also examined. We then examined Turner's typology of pilgrimages, the interpretations of *Hajj* and pilgrimages in India. Finally we turned to the social significance of pilgrimages. This included Turner's thesis, cultural integration, the arts and education. It covered economy and the socio-political aspect of pilgrimage we have therefore covered the topic adequately.

30.6 KEY WORDS

- Antistructure** : this is not the reversal of structure, but the source of all structures and their critique.
- Canon** : something that is fixed, a rule or norm. The canon of scripture means that fixed list of books that are determined to belong to sacred scripture.
- Communitas** : in the context of pilgrimage, communitas is a feeling of being one with other pilgrims, experiencing a release from all societal constraints, from class or creed. This lasts while the pilgrim is at the shrine.
- Liminal** : the state of being on the journey of a pilgrimage, visiting the shrine or pilgrimage spot, and returning we may say pilgrimage takes place in a liminal atmosphere, of being 'in between' two places the home and the pilgrimage shrine.
- Merit** : religious practices that have the calculated aim of improving the future spiritual welfare of oneself or others.
- Reaggregation** : this could be also called the homecoming or returning home to where the pilgrimage ends.
- Tirtha Yatra** : this is a Hindu expression of pilgrimage. It literally means undertaking a journey to river-fords.

30.7 FURTHER READING

Agrawal, B.C. 1980. *Cultural Contours of Religion and Economics in a Hindu Universe*. National : New Delhi.

Jha, Makhan (ed.) 1985. *Dimensions of Pilgrimage* Inter-India Publication : New Delhi.

Madan, T.N. (ed.) 1991. *Religion in India*. Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Saraswati, Baidyanath. 1975. *Kashi : Myth and Reality of a Classical Cultural Tradition*. Indian Institute of Advanced Study : Simla.

30.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) A pilgrimage is a long-often strenuous journey to an old or sacred place or shrine. It is undertaken for its spiritual merit. This could also lead to satisfaction of one's mundane desires. It is nevertheless essentially a individualistic pursuit for salvation or material wishes.
- ii) According to one view, the Hindu tradition of pilgrimages derives from the Vedic tradition of rituals and sacrifices, and common folk wisdom. In the pilgrimage traditions of India one finds that the Upanishad wisdom and tradition in the entire territory of India. This is why, according to Saraswati, pilgrim places in India have survived through invasions and wars during the past. The pilgrim places accommodate a variety of sacred sites and interests belonging to the different categories of pilgrims.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) The types of pilgrimage enumerated by Turner are
 - i) archaic pilgrimage
 - ii) prototypical pilgrimages
 - iii) high-period pilgrimage
 - iv) modern pilgrimage
- ii) India's pilgrimages are both ancient and continuous. the *tirthas* were glorified by the sacred literature. As the offerings made at the sacred places are a source of livelihood for the priests. They extol the sanctity of the *tirtha* they serve. Tirthas are repositories of tradition and propagators of reinterpreted values and beliefs. The government of India is providing all facilities and accommodations possible at these sites. It is also using these places for its programme of family planning or exhibition of agricultural and industrial products.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) In a structure-situation we find that people are differentiated by status and position. This is often manifested in a hierarchical manner. On the other hand 'communitas' dissolves structure and erects bonds of essential unity.
- ii) Pilgrimage causes socio-cultural integration. In Banaras, for example all regions are represented, including Tamils, Maharashtrians, Bengalis and Punjabis. Many social bonds are formed, indeed some of the transcending national boundaries.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) While on a pilgrimage, people get the chance to interact with persons from different regions, with different socio-economic backgrounds. This interaction gives them a chance to learn about people of other regions, their life styles and customs.
- ii) In most pilgrim places, there are often side-shows which give ample scope for proliferation of performative arts of drama, dance, singing and playing of instruments. Many temples are famous for their devadasis and their performances. Besides, many temples are unique examples of architectural designs and they have beautiful paintings and sculptures.

- iii) Basically, markets appear in pilgrim places to cater for the needs of pilgrims. Pilgrimages involve fulfilment of the daily needs of pilgrims on their way. Apart from daily needs, supply goods related to worship and other sacred duties is also another reason for setting up shops. In addition, for recreation and entertainments, different types of arrangement are made in and around the pilgrim centres.

UNIT 31 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Structure

- 31.0 Objectives
- 31.1 Introduction
- 31.2 Scope of the Unit
 - 32.2.1 What is a Religious Festival
 - 32.2.2 Meaning of Social Significance
- 31.3 Some Religious Festivals
 - 31.3.1 *Sanjhi*
 - 31.3.2 *Karwa Chauth*
 - 31.3.3 *Ravidas Jayanti*
- 31.4 Social Significance : A Discussion
 - 31.4.1 Adjustment Between Man, Nature and Society
 - 31.4.2 Emotional Social Security of Individual
 - 31.4.3 Identity, Solidarity, Differentiation and Conflict
 - 31.4.4 Social Stratification
 - 31.4.5 Ritual Art
 - 31.4.6 Unity in Diversity
- 31.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 31.6 Key Words
- 31.7 Further Reading
- 31.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

31.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit seeks to help you to

- comprehend, sociologically, the phenomenon of religious festivals
- analyse its relation with individual, society and culture in general and in India in particular
- delineate its social significance, both positive and negative
- enrich your overall understanding of the relation between Society and Religion.

31.1 INTRODUCTION

In this block we have so far covered three previous units on life cycle ritual (birth and marriage; and death) and a unit on pilgrimage. These units indicate that the social significance of religion pervades every aspect of our living right from birth onwards to marriage and death. *It also pervades our efforts at a better life and an attempt to come in contact with the sacred.* This unit shows us a colourful side of the significance of rituals. It indicates how some religious festivals are celebrated and therefore reveals to us another facet of the importance and significance of religion.

We begin this Unit by describing what a religious festival is and what the meaning of its social significance is. We then go on to examine certain religious festivals including those of *Sanjhi*, *Karwa Chauth* and *Ravidas Jayanti*. We then analyse the social significance of religious festivals. We point out the adjustment between man, nature and society. Next we probe the emotional social security of the individual. We then analyse identity, solidarity, differentiation and conflict. Stratificational setting, ritual art and unity in diversity close our discussion.

Religion takes birth where man seeks to derive emotional social security not through science and technology but through the Supernatural, the Transcendental and the Otherworldly Power which he himself conceives and creates. Hence, religion is vitally connected with those elements of human experience which derive from contingency, powerlessness and scarcity as conditions of human existence. If they change, religion also changes.

In this connection, your understanding of the distinction between religion and magic, their interrelatedness and intertwined continuum into each other shall be of strategic importance. This is because both religion and magic can also be viewed as a consequence of what Max Weber conceives as 'routinization'. This leads to the institutionalization of norms, values and rituals and also symbols. They enter into social relationships at the individual and collective levels. The collective level manifests itself in such social spheres as family, caste, community (village/city) and at the levels of communal and religious groupings.

Social ceremonialization of rituals takes place not at individual but at the collective level. Of course, rituals of black magic are hardly ever collectively ceremonialized. And, to this is added recreation, mirth, merry-making (singing, dancing), tension-management, fast and feasting. Socially, all this remains intertwined with kinship, social stratification, economy, and with the polity of caste and village; and of religious groupings like church, sect and *panth*. And, thus, is created the realm of religious festivals. The sources for this unit are to be found in *Further Reading* of the end of the unit.

31.2 SCOPE OF THE UNIT

In view of what is stated, in this unit, your learning part is related to two questions: What is a religious festival? What do we mean by its social significance and how can we comprehend it sociologically?

31.2.1 What is a Religious Festival ?

Derived from the adjective festive (meaning festal, mirthful), festival means joyful celebration, feast (Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary). It also means day or season for public celebrations or merry-making (Oxford Progressive English Dictionary). Sociologically, too, a joyful public celebration or merry-making on or within a fixed day or season is the essential ingredient of a festival. Usually, such a celebration also includes feasting.

When because of its association with the Supernatural, a festival also acquires the rites and ceremonies of prayer/propitiation as a means of salvation from evil, it becomes religious. In India, festivals mostly fall on the continuum of religion and magic, some carrying the overtones of religion and some of magic. Mostly, they tend to combine both.

Box 31.01

In the Indian situation, the line between sacred and profane, prayer and propitiation—in short, between religion and magic—becomes very thin and, in many cases, even flimsy. As an exercise, we can take a festival—*Holi/Deepawali*/or any other popular festival of your region or village or city. Then, we can try to find if its rituals and ceremonies are entirely religious or magical or they range from religion to magic and are religio-magical or magico-religious.

Because of its association with the Supernatural, a religious festival is viewed as sacred. It is a tradition which has routinized rituals and ceremonies. Highly routinized

and sophisticated rituals and ceremonies may be conducted by the priest/magician but others may be informally performed at the group level. In celebrating *Deepawali*, the worship of the goddess Lakshmi at the family level is not as highly routinized and formal as that of Shiva in a prestigious temple as a part of the celebration of the festival of *Mahashivaratri*.

Activity 1

Write, in not more than two hundred words, your views for or against this statement: *Deepawali* is a religious festival. Compare if possible your note with the note of other students of ESO-15 in the Study Centre.

31.2.2 Meaning of Social Significance

By its very nature, the religious festival gets set in the patterned network of social relationships. This patterning may take place at the level of a society and/or also at the levels of groups. That is, as in our society, at the levels of family, caste, village, city, region and religious groupings of various kinds.

The religious festival is a social expression of what sociologists/anthropologists conceive as 'religious experience'. Emile Durkheim pointed out that questions about all sorts of things which surpass the limits of knowledge are the basis of the human social experience we call religion. Let us begin our discussion by taking the following examples.

- i) In the celebration of *Shia* and *Sunni* Muslims show a differing network of social relationships, attitudes and theological ideology. For Muslims, Moharram is both a measure of group-identity and intra-group differentiation and conflict.
- ii) Celebration of *Holi* does not exhibit the same patterned network of social relationships and religious attitudes at the urban and rural levels. In the city, Holi is mostly celebrated through formally organized groups. The underlying orientation to fertility cult, crop-prosperity and intercaste relations, as occupationally ritually defined, have tended to disappear in the city. So does Nature's exuberance, motivating the well-known gay abandon of the ruralite.
- iii) The Bengalis celebrate *Basant Panchami* with greater enthusiasm than others. The same festival acquires an altogether different significance for the followers of Shivanaraini Panth of *Bhakti*-cult. On this day, at night, they organize a *gadi* (the seat of the Guru). It is presided over by the local *mahant* (the local religious head). At this gathering is arranged public singing of hymns, composed by Shiva Narain, the founder of the *panth*. The meaning of these hymns is expounded to the laity. It is a ceremonial occasion for initiating the new converts to the path shown by the Guru. Here, the Guru seems to replace the Goddess Saraswati, with whose worship *Basant Panchami* is associated.

In the light of the above example let us now raise the question as to what should we mean by the social significance of a religious festival. As per the dictionary meaning of the term significance, should we simply confine ourselves to the 'meaning' and 'importance' of the festival? We would do that definitely. But, it should not be the meaning and importance as seen by you or by me. To do so would be arbitrary, subjective and highly unsociological.

In order to be social, significance is to be interpreted in the context of meaning which practitioners of a festival assign to it. Its importance is to be interpreted in relation to the patterned network of social relationships in which the festival in question is set. Both meaning and importance are to be seen in the context of the individual's society and culture and their interrelatedness

and structuring at the level, we may have in mind. As for example, social significance of *Basant Panchami* among the Shivanarainis is to be interpreted in the context of the *panth*, its social structure and worldview. As a student of sociology, you may be already familiar with the concept of function which, largely, includes both meaning and importance. To be precise, in sociology, function is conceived as observable consequences of a cultural trait, an institution, a patterned social activity and a role or a set of roles in relation to the operation of the patterned social network it belongs to or of which it is a part. Consequences can be positive or negative or partly positive and partly negative. From the point of view of group solidarity and identity, for Muslims, *Moharram* is partly positive and partly negative.

To enable you to delineate social significance of the religious festival, in the next section are presented the details of a few selected religious festivals.

31.3 SOME RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Religious festivals are occasions when ritual is seen at its height and picturesque best. We now describe some religious rituals.

31.3.1 Sanjhi

In Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and certain parts of Madhya Pradesh (Malwal and Nimar), *Sanjhi* is largely associated with the worship of the Goddess (Devi). She is known by various names—Devi, Durga, Shakumbari etc.

It is celebrated just after the fall of *pitripaksha* (annual fortnightly ancestor worship held in the month of October). It coincides with *navaratri*s—the week devoted to the worship of the all prevailing female-power (*shakti*). That power is generally symbolized as Devi/Durga. *Sanjhi* seems to be a regional expression of the *Shakta* Cult (worship of Shakti), the roots of which are traced back to India's prehistoric past. In some form or the other, *Shakta* cult is found all over India and has been a powerful thematic stream of the religious experience of Indians. It forms a continuum from little tradition to great tradition. For the concepts of little tradition and great tradition, see pp. 38-40 of Unit 3, Block 1 of ESO-02.

Celebration of *Sanjhi* is virtually related to women and to the art of clay-modelling. The idol of the Goddess (*Sanjhi*) is modelled, dried, coloured and fixed in a canvas, created on a wall by using cowdung. The idol is dressed in *lahanga* (skirt), *choli* (blouse) and *chumri* (scarf). Highly bedecked in local ornaments, the *Sanjhi* appears to be a true replica of the local rural woman.

Box 31.01

Holi is a popular North Indian festival celebrated each year at the full moon in the lunar month of March-April. The celebration can start a few days earlier or a few days later. First of all the holi fire is prepared by piling up wood around a central pole. This is kindled at the time of the rising moon. Both men and women circumambulate the fire. Coconuts are thrown into the fire and new barley is roasted on it. The coming harvest, and how good it will be are cast by the direction of the flames. Sometimes embers are taken out from the fire to light fires in their own homes.

Ashes are also collected from the *holi* fire to guard against disease. The holi fire is also regarded as a holi pyre which buried the demon Holika. Holika had a boon that she could never die by fire. She went into the fire catching Prahlada a faithful devotee of Vishnu and son of her brother Hiranyakasipu. Prahlad survived through his devotion to Vishnu while Holika the evil one, die in the flames.

During playing of *holi* people of all caste drench each other with water stained with colours and rub 'gula' coloured powders on each other. Men are even beaten with sticks by women in Mathura. McKim Marriott has called Holi the feast of love.

Along with this, models of the Sun, Moon and stars, parrots perching on a green branch of a tree, comb, fan, brass-band players, *Sanjhi's* brother and a thief are also made and hung upside down. Other symbols from every day life can also be modelled and arranged on either side of *Sanjhi*. Modelling of symbols depends on the skill and ingenuity of the local artist. Modelling and arranging of *Sanjhi* is mostly done by women, particularly young women.

Below the Sanjhi, in a container, is placed mud (mitti) sown with barley seeds. Every evening, women worship the Goddess and collectively sing songs in her praise and to invoke her blessings. Worship and singing is also mingled with mirth and merry-making. It is an occasion of recreation in the otherwise busy schedule of village-women.

The worship culminates on the day of *Durgashtami*, though it continues up to *Vijayadashami*, the day *Dashahra* is celebrated. By that time, the barley seeds sprout into creamish green shoots. On the day of *Dashahra*, in the morning, small bundles of these shoots are placed on the ears of the males of the family. Then, after final worship, *Sanjhi* is dismantled and ceremonially immersed in a nearby river/pond/canal.

Many streams of socio-cultural life seem to intermingle in the festival of *Sanjhi*. It is linked with the Indian philosophy of *adiprakriti* (The Eternal Female) which, in the unison with *adipurusha* (The Eternal Male), constitutes the eternal unity of life and is a source of reproduction and continuity. Sowing of barley seeds and placing of barley shoots on the ears of males symbolize an endeavour to attain agricultural prosperity with the help of the Supernatural. It, thus, seems to be related to the fertility cult which is widely practised among the peasantry. Interestingly, it is more popular with the agricultural castes of the region.

Some women also feel that the worship of *Sanjhi* in the modelled symbol of married woman is intended to attain the longevity of marital state of a woman. because, socially, the marital state is considered a sign of good luck (*saubhagya*) for her. Green parrots perching on a branch of a tree are said to symbolize prosperity. As believed, a parrot is supposed to ward off an impending evil of which one may not be aware.



A Hindu religious festival in progress with three straw figures in the background.

Modelling of *Sanjhi*'s brother is for the longevity of life of the worshipper's brother(s). The thief hung upside down is supposed to magically ward off thieves. Other symbols like those of brass band players, *chat*-seller, sweet seller and hookah etc. seem to be related to the joy of artistic creation.

31.3.2 Karwa Chauth

It is a festival of married women, confined mostly to the upper strata of Punjab and Hindi-speaking belt of the country. It is characterized by fast, feasting, worship of *Girija Gauri* (the consort of lord Shiva and a symbol of woman's devotion to her husband), Moon and Sun and the art of drawing and painting. As in *Sanjhi*, the art-aspect of *Karwa Chauth* is not intrinsic to it and, hence, is not universally associated with it. It is not practised in every family and region. In the villages around Lucknow, in the linguistic-cultural region, called Awadh, *karwa* is drawn and painted on a wall. It looks like a wall painting.

Within the bordered canvas is painted the symbol of the goddess. It symbolizes the married woman. Here are also painted Sun, Moon and Stars. Other usual symbols are—married women being carried in a palanquin, brother carrying *karwa* (a kind of earthen/bronze vessel used in the worship) to his sister's house as a ritual present.

Karwa is observed on the fourth of the black fortnight of the month of *Kartik* (Oct.-Nov.), twelve days before *Deepawali*. In this month fall a series of festivals having *tantrik* (magical) undertones. *Karwa Chauth* is one of them. It starts with a daylong fast by the woman observing it. In the evening, in the twilight of rising moon, the goddess is worshipped and water-oblation is offered to the moon. In some places, after offering water, women view the moon through a sieve. After the worship is over, the woman touches the feet of her husband. It is followed by a family feast.

Through *Karwa Chauth*, a woman prays for and ritually seeks to derive emotional security for the longevity of her married life. As it seems, it is observed where remarriage of woman is not permitted and widowhood is viewed as an evil. That explains its non-observance among low castes, and the untouchables where divorce, remarriage by women and widow remarriage have been permitted. It is not a tradition in Garhwal where even among high castes remarriage has been permitted.

As seen in Dehradun, in some Garhwali families living in the cities of plains, it has now been adopted. Women of low castes of new generation are now gradually adopting it as a customary symbol of prestige. Motifs of *Karwa* painting are being innovated and new motifs are being added. An educated girl, in a village near Lucknow, added a television set and a farmer behind the plough as new motifs to the *Karwa*-painting. Her painting of the Sun and Moon is of course symbolic but more anthropomorphized.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Describe the festival of *Sanjhi*. What is the importance of this festival? Give your answer in 10-12 lines.

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2) Describe the religious festival of *Karwa Chauth*. What is the significance of this festival ? Use 10-12 lines to give your answer.

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31.3.3 Ravidas Jayanti

On the full moonday of the month of Magh (Maghi Poornima : Jan.-Feb.), members of the Chamar caste celebrate the birth anniversary of Sant Ravidas, also known as Raidas. He came from the Chamar caste and was a disciple of Kabir. Like his *guru*, in his sayings and compositions, he denounced both formal Hinduism and institutional Islam. He preached the eternally formless unit of God, equality of one and all before Him and recourse to unconditional devotion (*bhakti*) as the assured road to salvation. Rejecting renunciation, he advocated the value of a pure and simple worldly life, dedicated to one's family life, caste-occupation and therein to the formless God who transcends all religions and all faiths.

Box 31.02

Deepawali is an important annual festival celebrated all over India in the autumn equinox. *Deepawali* can be translated as "row of lights". These lights stand for the hope that is kindled by the new season coming at the end of the dangerous monsoons. In many ways the festival is a celebration of a new year. Deepawali is a three night festival, the last night of which is the first night of the waxing moon. Much care is taken to cleanse and purify home and shops. Oil lamps are lit by every home and fine crackers are exploded to frighten off evil spirits and welcome Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity. Lakshmi is propitiated with money food and clothes. Gifts are given to neighbours and servants.

Gambling is rampant and is done in limitation to see how the gods settle the fate of men.

In North India the second day of *Deepawali* is for hill Govardhana, near Mathura. Legend has it that once Indra captured all the world's cattle, but Krishna freed the cows. However the angered Indra sent down a deluge of rain on the animals. It was then that Krishna raised Govardhana to save the cows. Offerings are thus made to mounds of cow dung. Finally the ritual also includes feasting especially for brothers on whose wrists the protective thread (*rakhi*) had been tied.

In the early thirties of this century, celebration of *Ravidas Jayanti* was instituted. In the then prevailing politics of reform and revival through caste, Ravidas was rediscovered as the divine symbol of the unity of the Chamar endogamous groups (Jatis) and also of the Chamar's move towards upward social mobility through protest and Sanskritization. *Ravidas Ramayan* and *Ravidas Katha* were composed to take the place of *Tulsidas Ramayan* and *Satya Narain Vrat Katha*.

Celebration of *Ravidas Jayanti* was thus instituted as a politically motivated religio-festive platform. It was first organized in the cities and then it spread to the villages. It became a socio-political movement among the Chamars of Northern India. Here and there emerged Ravidas temples as centres of preaching the philosophy of Ravidas and motivating the Chamar for social mobility.

Over the last six decades, celebration of *Ravidas Jayanti* got routinized with overtones of a religious festival. On the day of its celebration, the highly devout observe a fast. In the morning, a flag with seven colours, symbolizing the main teachings of Ravidas, is unfurled. At the foot of the pole, a painting of Ravidas is kept. It is worshipped like a divine idol. In front of it, a *hawan* is performed.

Depicting and portraying anecdotes of miracles from Ravidas's life, a procession is taken out in the afternoon. On that day, the Chamars mostly refrain from work, don new clothes and join the procession. Next day, a gathering of caste-members is invited. Games for children are organized and prizes are given away to the winners. Referring to Ravidas, political and caste leaders make politically oriented speeches. As in *Deepawali*, at night, houses are decorated with earthen lamps.

31.4 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE : A DISCUSSION

We now turn to examine the social significance of the festivals described. It is quite clear that society has given an importance place to religious festivals and that they are of integrative value. They also have significance for socialization purposes.

31.4.1 Adjustment Between Man, Nature and Society

O'Dea (1966 : p. 115) points out that in the annual social cycle of life, there occurs 'the patterned alternation of sacred and profane periods, of periods of celebration and periods of work'. If we keep in mind our festivals of *Basant Panchami*, *Shivaratri* and *Holi* on the one hand, and *Sanjhi*, *Karwa Chauth*, *Deepawali* and *Govardhan Puja* on the other, we notice that our religious festivals mostly fall in the periods of transition alternating between well-set seasons—Rains, Winter and Summer.

The months of *Agahan* and *Paush* do not have any festivals. As against this, in the polyandrous tracts of Garhwal (Jaunsar Bawar, Jaunpur and Rawain), the last days of the month of *Paush* are characterized by a series of festivals falling one

after the other. They are characterized by a festive gay abandon expressed through singing, dancing, eating, drinking and merry-making.

By tradition, young married girls return to their father's houses to join the winter festivities. These festivals are partly religious but mostly this worldly, given mainly to recreation and merry-making. It is to be noted that because of intense cold and snow, agricultural activity remains at a standstill, in some places.

31.4.2 Emotional Social Security of the Individual

Certain festivals like *Karwa Chauth* are intended to provide emotional social security to the individual. *Karwa Chauth* may be said to have a loose group-character in so far as it is observed only by married women or by the women of a family or neighbourhood. It is intended to provide salvation against the evil of the social curse of widowhood. Festivals seeking to attain emotional-social security tend to acquire a magical undertone. They may or may not have group-character.

Festivals relating to fertility cult, agricultural and otherwise prosperity, longevity of husband brother and son, and annual collective propitiation of gods or goddesses to ward off the evils of misfortunes and diseases (small-pox and cholera) fall in this category.

31.4.3 Identity, Solidarity, Differentiation and Conflict

Socially, religious festivals are also related to group identity and solidarity and to intra-and-inter-group differentiation and conflict. It tends to lend identity and solidarity to different types of groups, namely, a *panth* (religious brotherhood), a caste, a spatial group (village/region/nation) and an ethnic group (as for example, the Parsis).

To illustrate : *Moharram* lends identity to the Muslim, the *gadi* Panchami to the followers of Shivanaraini *Panth*. *Karwa Chauth* and *Sanjhi* are not all-India but regional festivals. Likewise, *Dala Chhatha* is essentially a festival of the Bhojपुरi region. It is characterized by rituals ensuring fecundity of a woman, fulfilment of longing for a male offspring and longevity of the son's life.

Celebration of *Moharram* is also linked to the *panthic* differentiation between the *Shia* and the *Sunni*, as in Lucknow, it often leads to a conflict between them. Sometimes, it even takes a violent form. When celebration of *Moharram* and *Holi* or *Dushahara* coincide, the danger of Hindu-Muslim tension, leading to violent conflict, remains an imminent possibility.

Celebration of *Ravidas Jayanti* has not united endogamous groups of its followers into a socially solid group. At Dehradun, the *Raidasi* and *Jatiya Chamars* join the procession but hold other celebrations in their respective Mohallas (Bhatt, 1961). Even the *Raidasis* now hold their celebration at two places though they live in the same ward and in a more or less contiguous settlement. Now there are separate organizations to manage the celebration of *Ravidas Jayanthi*.

Activity 2

List five religious festivals which have not been dealt with in the text. Compare your list with the list prepared by other students of ESO-05 in the Study Centre. How many of them in their lists are the same ?

31.4.4 Social Stratification

In the Indian situation, there is a close linkage between the celebration, of a

religious festival and social stratification. Social stratification on India consists largely of hierarchically arranged castes. Each caste has a traditionally ordained occupational role. Traditionally, caste-based occupational roles have been subservient to agricultural economy and to the social-economic position of the agriculturist.

Because of the growing impact of urban-industrialism, the traditional synchronization between caste and occupation is fast changing. Still, in the rural situation, it continues though in a fragile form. However, largely speaking, in the celebration of a religious festival, the Brahmin performs a priestly role, members of artisan castes meet the requirements relating to the craft of their respective castes and members of low castes play the role of the menial. In the celebration of *Ram Lila*, in many places, the effigy of Ravan is made by Muslim artisans.

31.4.5 Ritual Art

Ritual art relates to the expressive aspect of religion in society. As the previous descriptions of *Sanjhi* and *Karwa Chauth* indicate, art finds a crucial place in the celebration of a religious festival. It may be found associated with various forms of art—drawing, painting, modeling, sculpturing (out of stone and/or wood) and decoration, floral and otherwise.

As already indicated, Karwa is characterized by the art of drawing and painting and Sanjhi by that of clay-modelling, technically speaking, by the art-form of tile mural. In Brij Mandal, at Mathura, floral decoration enters into the arrangement of *Sanjhi*. Here, *Sanjhi* symbolizes Radha and Krishna. In the month of *Shravan* (August), with fresh leaves and flowers, their figures are arranged on the ground inside the temple.

Artists may be specialists as well as non-specialists. Where rituals are directed by a specialist and celebration of the festival is set in the stratificational structure, creation of relevant art-objects may become a job of one or more specialists. In a village, in the polyandrous tract of Garhwal, the wooden idols of Hanuman, bear and sheep, are carved by the village carpenter (the *Badi*). Otherwise, as in the case of *Sanjhi* and *Karwa*, it may be done by non-specialists.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Write about identity solidarity differentiation and conflict and religious festivals. Use 5-7 lines for your answer.

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- ii) What is ritual art? Can you give some examples of it? Use 5-7 lines for your answer.

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31.4.6 Unity in Diversity

In a pluralistic society like ours, emotional realization of unity in diversity is our socio-cultural ethos and philosophical worldview. Our religious festivals are also seen in the corresponding socio-cultural matrix.

Like cultural traits, religious festivals, too, have the tendency to diffuse. Diffusion is both vertical and horizontal. Shakti cult, for example, has diffused both vertically and horizontally. In the horizontal diffusion, in which the process of spread, assimilation, integration and consequent modification come into operation. Consequently, there develop regional forms of a religious festival.

To illustrate, the concept of Goddess emanates from the philosophically conceived all-pervading supernatural female power. But, that manifests itself in various forms—Vashno Devi, Shakumbhari, Kamakhya, Durga, Kali, Shitla etc. Each of them is regionally located. But, all are viewed as manifestations of the same power.

Unity in diversity of *Shakti* cult manifests at another level—at the level of region and habitat. In Malwa, in M.P., *Sanjhi* is celebrated during *pitripaksha*, in the Western Uttar Pradesh after *pitripaksha* and at Mathura in the month of Shraavan. In Malwa, *Sanjhi* symbolizes a divine unmarried girl who, year by year, leaves for her *sasural* (father-in-law's house). In Western Uttar Pradesh, it symbolizes the Goddess and in Brij Radha and Krishna.

In Bundel Khand (U.P.) it is a form of Mamulia and, in Maharashtra, a form of Gulabi. In Eastern U.P. and Bihar, it is Jhinhia and in Bengal, the powerful Durga cult. In Tamil Nadu, it becomes a festivals of dolls. In Gujarat, it takes the form of vigorous and glamorous Garba festival. And, in all these regional forms of *Shakti* cult, young unmarried girls play a crucial role.

31.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we examined what a religious festival is and analysed the scope of its social significance. In this context, some religious festivals were discussed, these were *Sanjhi*, *Karwa Chauth*, and *Ravidas Jayanti*. We then discussed the social significance of religious' festivals. This included adjustment between culture, nature and society. Next we looked at the emotional and social security of the individual. Following a discussion of identity, solidarity differentiation and conflict the issue of stratification was examined. Ritual art and unity in diversity in relation to observation of religious festivals were also discussed.

31.6 KEY WORDS

- Anthropomorphic** : Representation of God as having the form, personality or attributes of man.
- Festival** : A religious celebration incorporating ritual elements.

Identity	: Affiliation with a group and being aware of it, in terms of behaviour and thinking.
Karwa Chauth	: Festival of women who worship Goddess Durga and God Shiva for the long life of their husbands.
Sanjhi	: Fertility cult ritual of Devi/Durga/Shakumbhari.
Supernatural	: Concerning phenomena which is paranormal—like the Gods, Ghosts, and Demons.

31.7 FURTHER READING

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31.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The festival of *Sanjhi* is held in Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan. It is held in the month of October. The idol of the Goddess (*Sanjhi*) is made with clay. Below her is mud sown with barley seeds. In the evening women sing her praises. On *Dashahra* the sprouted seeds of barley are placed on the ears of the males of the family. The idol is then dismantled. The importance of this worship is that it is linked with Indian philosophy and is a symbol of fertility and prosperity.
- ii) *Karwa Chauth* is a festival of married women in Punjab and the Hindi speaking belt. It is characterized by fast, feasting, and worship of *Girija/Gaura*. An idol is made of goddess Durga with canvas painted variously. *Karwa* is observed 12 days before *Deepawali*. In the evening the goddess is worshipped and water oblations are offered to the moon. After this the women see the moon through a sieve. The women then touch their husband's feet and there is a family feast. The importance of this ritual lies in the desire for the longevity of one's husband. It is observed where remarriage of the woman is not permitted, and widowhood is viewed as an evil.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Religious festivals are related to group identity and solidarity and to group differentiation and conflict e.g. *Moharram* lends identity to the Muslims the *gadi* of *Basant Panchami* to the followers of Shivanaraini faith. Again celebration of *Moharram* is linked to the differentiation between *Shia* and *Sunni*.
- ii) Ritual art is that which is done within a context of religion and society. An example of this is the clay modelling of Goddess *Sanjhi*, the *Tazias* at *Moharram*, and the making of the *karwa* in *Karwa Chauth*.

UNIT 32 FUNDAMENTALISM, COMMUNALISM AND SECULARISM

Structure

- 32.0 Objectives
- 32.1 Introduction
- 32.2 Basic Concepts
 - 32.2.1 Fundamentalism
 - 32.2.2 Communalism
 - 32.2.3 Secularism
- 32.3 Aspects of Fundamentalism
- 32.4 The Communal Divide
 - 32.4.1 Recent Communal Riots
 - 32.4.2 Reasons for Communal Riots
 - 32.4.3 Economic and Social Dimensions
 - 32.4.4 Inter-community Dynamics
- 32.5 Aspects of Secularism
 - 32.5.1 Secular Views
 - 32.5.2 Gandhiji's Views
- 32.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 32.7 Key Words
- 32.8 Further Reading
- 32.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

32.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this unit you should be able to

- describe fundamentalism
- explain communalism with the help of relevant examples
- clarify what is secularism and how it works in India.

32.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we begin by clarifying the basic concepts of fundamentalism, communalism and secularism. We then explain up each of these basic concepts and expand on them. We take up first the concept of fundamentalism and describe it. Next we turn to communalism and note down the reasons for communal riots and examine their economic and social dimensions. This is followed by an analysis of inter-community dynamics.

Finally we turn to secularism which is seen, in some ways, as a panacea to fundamentalism and communalism. We examine some different views on secularism, including Gandhiji's viewpoint.

32.2 BASIC CONCEPTS

Let us put forth the basic concepts of our unit first.

32.2.1 Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is the first of our three concepts and it stresses the infallibility of

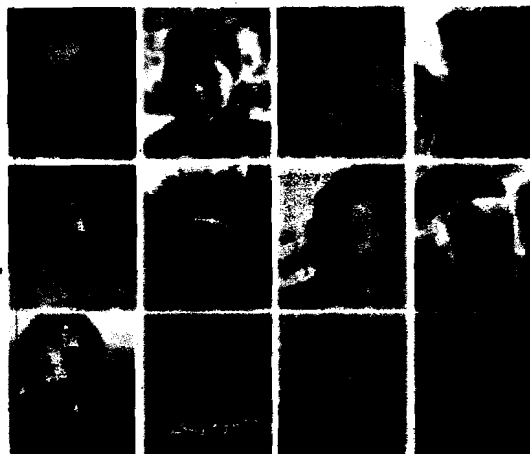
a scripture (e.g. the Bible, the Granths, the Gita or the Quran) in all matters of faith and doctrine. The believers accept it as a literal historical record. The result is that a militant stand is taken by the followers; often preceded or followed by a desire for a separate homeland. At times, this too is taken as a prophecy in the scriptures. Fundamentalism thus separates a certain community from the mainstream. However, society, by its various arms (the police, army and so on), attempts to suppress or eliminate the fundamentalists. This is especially so when they begin acting outside of the law. Communalism is associated with eruption of violence and riots, these conflagrations may not have any particular aim or goal (apart from communal ascendancy or supremacy). Fundamentalism however is an organised all encompassing movement which aims at promotion of societal goals specifically in the light of religious enshrinements. Operational strategy includes peaceful as well as war-life uses and movements.

32.2.2 Communalism

While discussing the nature of politics in the new states of Africa and Asia, Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist (1963 : 105-157), wrote, "When we speak of communalism in India we refer to religious contrasts, when we speak of it in Malaya we are mainly concerned with racial ones, and in the Congo with tribal ones". Here the significant link is between communal and political loyalties. Thus when we talk of India we are talking mainly of religion based oppositions. Communalism has been described as a sectarian exploitation of social traditions as a medium of political mobilization. This is done to punish the interests of the entrenched groups. Thus communalism is an ideology used to fulfill socio-economic hopes of a community or social groups. It requires proposals and programmes to ensure its very existence. These become active in phases of social change. Communalism arose in India during its colonial phase. Communal politics bases its strategies on religion and tradition. The interpretation of history is for purposes of mobilisation. Communal organisations have little room for democracy. Secondly they may also involve racist contrasts and perpetrate the same. They consider egalitarianism as abnormal and support patriarchy as a familial and social norm. Communalism is therefore a

- i) belief system
- ii) social phenomenon.

Communalism arises out of a belief system, and assumes great solidarity within a community which is not always true. We find that there are often intercommunity quarrels. Further, the protagonists of communalism hold a particular view of history and take care to point out that a community has been identified with common



Members of different communities. Why is that only particular communities are antagonistic to each other?

sufferings and goals as a whole. The exclusiveness of the community is stressed vis a vis other communities, and it is therefore considered logical to fight for one's rights in a literal way.

Communalism in India has, as noted earlier, a colonial legacy wherein the rulers (Britishers) used religious contrasts, existing among the different communities to their advantage by giving them prominence.

After Independence economic modernization of India expanded economic opportunities but not enough to curb unhealthy competitiveness. Job sharing among the different communities from a smaller pool of opportunities in causing much heartburn. Independence from the colonial power unleashed a horrendous communal holocaust, caused by the partition of the country into two parts on the eve of Independence in 1947.

32.2.3 Secularism

The conceptual construct of secularism is adopted in India by way of a solution to the problems, posed by fundamentalism and communalism. Ideally speaking, it denotes a situation where there is a clear distinction of religion from such spheres of life as political and economic systems. Each religion is to be respected and practiced in private. In ideological terms it is not a system of beliefs and practices that is to be mixed with political ideology, with a view to wooing any particular community into the voting booth. By and large, secularism separates religion and polity. It endorses the view that there should be provided equal opportunities by the state to all the communities. Further, for secularists all religious beliefs are to be approached rationally and finally social life is to be approached in an equalitarian manner.

Further the term secularism refers to the ideas opposed to religious education. It has been linked to the process of secularization. This is the process by which various sectors of society are removed from the domination of religious symbols and also the domination of religious institutions. Finally the idea of secularism has been transferred from 'the dialectic of modern science and protestantism' in the west to South Asian societies. This transference is full of problems and cannot be conceived in terms of a smooth process.

Box 32.01

India cannot cease to be one nation, because people belonging to the different religions live in it ... If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in a dreamland. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow-countrymen, and they will have to live in it only for their own interests. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India.

— M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (1908)

32.3 ASPECTS OF FUNDAMENTALISM

Fundamentalism as a concept was first used in 1910-1915 when anonymous authors published 12 volumes of literature called them 'The Fundamentals'. In the early 20s the print media used this word with reference to conservative protestant groups in North America. These groups were concerned about liberal interpretations of the Bible. Alarmed by this the conservatives insisted on some "fundamentals" of faith. These included belief in the virgin birth, divinity, the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ and the infallibility of the scripture. As mentioned these and other fundamentals

were published in 12 pamphlets called *The Fundamentals* between 1910-1915. Thus began the specialised usage of the concept of “fundamentalism”. Thus a fundamental movement is one which takes infallibility of a scripture as a basic issue and as a guide to life. Some fundamentalists add that there is no need to even interpret the scripture as meaning in it is self-evident. *This often amounts to intolerance of any form of disagreement or dissent. Thus there is an apprehension that fundamentalists are narrow minded, and bigoted.*

T.N. Madan (1993) has pointed out that the word Fundamentalism has gained wide currency in the contemporary world. According to him it refers to a variety of norms, values, attitudes which either judge the fundamentalists or condemn them outright. This word is sometimes erroneously used in place of communalism. In fact the word fundamentalism has become a blanket term. That is to say that various fundamental movements across the world are actually not identical but differ in various ways. But they are linked by a ‘family’ resemblance.

Fundamentalist movements are of a collective character. They are often led by charismatic leaders who are usually men. Thus the 1979 Iranian movement was led by Ayatollah Khomeini, and the recent Sikh fundamentalist upsurge by Sant Bhindranwale (Madan, *ibid*). Fundamentalism leaders need not be religious leaders. Thus Maulana Maududi, founder of the Jamati Islami in India was a journalist. K.B. Hedgewar, founder of the Rashtriya Sewak Sangh was a physician.

The fundamentalists are a practical people and try to purge the way of life of all impurities (religiously speaking). They reject all corrupt lifestyles. An example of this is Dayanands critique of the traditional, superstition filled way of life (see Unit 26 of Block 6 for details on this). Thus Maududi characterised the present Muslim way of life as ‘ignorant’ and Bhindranwale talked of the ‘fallen’ Sikhs who shave off their beards, cut their hair and do not observe the traditional Sikh way of life. Thus fundamental movements are not only about religious beliefs and practices, but lifestyles generally.

Thus fundamentalist movements are reactive and a response to what the persons involved—the leaders and participants, consider a crisis. The crisis calls for urgent remedies. The basic programme is presented as a return to the original tradition. That is to say to the contemporarily redefined fundamentals, which cover the present-day needs. This usually involves a selective retrieval of tradition. It may even be an invention of tradition.

The case of Dayanand (see Unit 26, ESO-05 for further details) illustrates this very well. He tried to evolve a sanitized Hinduism in response to the challenge for conversion by Christian missionaries (Madan, *ibid*). He claimed that the Vedas were the only true form of Hinduism and his call was back to the Vedas.

In Iran Khomeini developed an Islamic state based on the guardianship of the jurists. Again Bhindranwale gave a selective emphasis to Guru Gobind Singh’s teaching rather than those of his immediate successors. **Assertion of spiritual authority and criticising the culture are two aspects of fundamentalism. A third crucial element is that of the pursuit of political power.**

The pursuit of political power is very important to fundamentalism, for without it we would be presented with a case for revivalism. The Arya Samajis were ardent nationalists in North India, and the movement had its political overtones. Again the RSS which has been described as a cultural organisation has had close links with political parties, and contemporarily with the Sangh Parivar. This covers both cultural and political aspects of Hindu nationalism. This explains why fundamentalist movements often turn violent, and the ideology of secularism is rejected. They are

totalitarian and do not tolerate dissent. However these movements also perform a particular role in modern society which cannot be ignored.

Thus an objective intellectual analysis should consider fundamentalism as a distinctive category. It is not theocracy or backward communalism.

32.4 COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

The ideology of communalism in India was, and still is, that the different communities in India cannot co-exist to their mutual benefit, that the minorities will become victims of Hindu subjugation and that the historically created situation nor culture will allow cooperation.

Communalism took deep roots in Indian polity during the later phase of the national movement and this was encouraged by the colonial rulers. This process was a continuation of the weakness and inadequacy of secularism as conceived and practised during the anticolonial struggle.

Implicit in all the theories has been the assumption that the growth of Hindu-Muslim tension was not the natural and inevitable outcome of changes taking place in the Indian society. Partition was the culmination of the conflict which could and should have been avoided. Further this line of reasoning states that nation building essentially means obliteration of communal moulds and creation of a common identity which decries the existence of differentiated groups based on religion, caste or language. Communal forces are therefore viewed as division and a sign of political underdevelopment. *Communalism arises when one or two characteristics of an ethnic identity e.g. religious beliefs are taken and emotionally surcharged. Communal movements are often brief and exist in a dyad, comprising an opposing force or ideology which has to be countered. Unlike fundamentalism, communalism can only exist dyadically.*

Hindu-Muslims riots reflected the religious fears and socio-economic aspirations of the Hindus and Muslims. Sometimes these riots occur for very minor reasons such as quarrels between Muslim and Hindu shopkeepers (Ghosh, 1981 : 93-94).

The important point is that these are not isolated acts but often deliberate mechanizations of various socio-religious organisations. Recurrent collisions were engineered on festivals by stopping them and various religious occasions by interfering in their process. This was done to inflame communal passions and bitterness. According to Ghosh (1981) the acme of communal rioting was reached in August 1946 in Calcutta when the Muslim League observed a 'Direct Action Day'. Bombay did the same in the following month. Thus Independence was erected on the corpses of many thousands of people. With Mahatma Gandhi's assassination the riots abated awhile, and this situation was basically sustained by Nehru. Again the passing away of Nehru in 1964 and the deteriorating socio-economic circumstances led to the resurrection of communal violence.

32.4.1 Recent Communal Riots

Thus during the late 60s and 1970s there was large scale communal rioting in Ahmedabad, Baroda, Ranchi, Jamshedpur etc. Communal configurations in towns such as Ranchi cast a shadow over predictions and beliefs in the future of workers unity. Again in Bhiwandi where there was a carnage in 1969, it was a shock for the leftists. The grassroots movement among the handloom workers fostered by committed communists was unable to stem the onrush of communal violence.

In 1969 itself a communal riot occurred in Ahmedabad. The inflammatory factors

were insults to holy scriptures and sacred cows. It was suspected however that these riots were politically motivated.

These riots indicated clearly that there were various political factors behind the surface level factors of religion based tensions and confrontations. In the mid seventies the communal riots abated a bit both due to the Emergency and the Janata Regime. The first exercised iron control and discipline the second aroused the hopes of both Hindus and Muslims. The first six years of the eighties once more created an upward incline in the riot-graph. Patel (1990) feels that Communal violence is backed by religious arguments and backing. He feels that those resorting to it are neither true Hindus or true Muslims. Religion does not preach enmity. However the causes which are often given for communal violence are hurt religious sentiments. The causes are flimsy such as playing music before a mosque, insulting the Prophet or the Holy Quran. This is sufficient to provoke violence among some of the Muslims. So also disturbing by Muslims of a religious yatra is enough to rouse Hindu ire. (Patel, 1990 : 41-42).

32.4.2 Reasons for Communal Riots

In the context of our section of recent-communal riots we turn now to some further reasons for the same. As Ghosh (1981) points out the several arguments have been forwarded for the existence and continuation of communal riots. These are:

- i) riots are part of progress in an under developed country. The class struggle is converted into a communal struggle weakening the solidarity of the proletariat class. Further the middle and backward classes have acquired greater political and economic strength and influence and these often assert themselves. Economic conflicts lead to riots as in Bihar Sharif and Bhiwandi.
- ii) Electoral politics determine the objectives and direction of communal violence e.g. Delhi 1986.

These explanations cannot be binding—they cannot be held to the necessary and sufficient. Often economic reasons emerge after (not before) the rioting has begun. Again in a developing society economic factors where competitive or one lagging behind the other can lead to a riot. The same applies to reductionist political causes. The idea of behind-the-scene political manipulation may not be valid.

32.4.3 Economic and Social Dimensions

Regarding gaining economic benefits after the eruption of communal riots we find that in Godhra, Hindu Sindhi refugees from Pakistan gave competition to Hindu merchants. But riots have frequently emerged between Sindhis and Muslims. Again in Punjab while Ramgarhia and other Sikhs have gone beyond the Hindu Khatri in commerce there have been no riots because of this.

Lastly in the Punjab tragedy, the terrorist acts while antagonising the Hindus, are not considered to be the acts of the Sikh community as a whole.

Hindu-Muslim riots in recent times have been confined to medium sized towns and cities. These include areas like Meerut, Aligarh, Moradabad, Pune etc.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Give three reasons for Communal rioting.

- a)
- b)

c)

2) Fill in the blanks:

Hinduriots have in recent times been confined totowns.

The people in a riot tend to be crowd oriented, and the conflict tends to be very violent. These people tend to be merciless. A "cause" is often espoused: for example in 1969 the handbills have a call for *dharmayudha* by the Hindu militants. Thus in recent decades from the 60s onward the trend has been for collectivity orientation and in-group loyalties. Moreover, the functional independence of caste and community are disintegrating and replaced by competitive patterns. This makes for greater tension in interactions between people let alone communities.

Activity 1

Read carefully sections 32.4.2 and 32.4.3 on the reasons for communalism and communal riots. What reasons for the existence of communalism can you add to this analysis? Ask people of different communities their opinions and note them down. Then write a note of about 300 words offering your explanation for the phenomena of communalism. Discuss this with other students at the Study Centre, if possible.

32.4.4 Inter-Community Dynamics

Medium sized towns/cities are being divided on communal lines. We find that the workers don't have class consciousness. The educated middle class professional act as a bridge between Hindus and Muslims. During prepartition there were Muslim doctors, lawyers etc. who also attracted Hindu clients—Similarly Hindu professionals were patronized by Muslim clients—Thus

- i) common bonds developed
- ii) there were common networks and patronization.

Again the existence of Muslim professionals administrators etc. created a positive image for the Muslims. Post partition mass migrations saw these advantages vanishing. Many trade and economic activities are run by Hindus and there were no problems so long as the Muslims were not competitive. There was an interdependence between Hindu employers and Muslim artisans. However, in recent time economic competitiveness come from Muslims and has turned into a religious threat to Hindus. Again channelling of Arab money into mosque renovation and lavish festival celebrations has resulted in an admixture of economics and religion which creates intercommunity tensions and eruptions of violence.

Box 32.02

Biharsharif owes its name to the *mazar* (tomb) of a Muslim saint. It is considered a cultural heritage in Bihar on the lines of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Trouble began over a piece of land near a mosque called 'Mughal Kuan'. Muslims claimed that piece of land as its own. The Hindus planted a tulsi sapling and installed an idol on it. The dispute worsened by 1979 and led to the death of a harijan.

What are the factors which can remedy the communal divide in India. Some suggestions have been given (Verma, 1990, 63-65). The suggestions include that religion should be separated from politics and communal bodies should be banned. Further the freedom of press should not extend to spreading communal ideas.

Communalism needs to be denounced by political leaders and all leading citizens. Measures should be taken for raising the economic lot of the minority community. About all overall ethos should be created which leads to peace between communities and an end to communal violence. Community leaders should explain the situation to the community and defuse tensions. Let us now turn to secularism.

Thus communalism has an ugly aspect and goes against national integration. Religion should not become the whipping boy of political ambitions.

32.5 ASPECTS OF SECULARISM

While fundamentalism and communalism are widely held to be the problematic and disintegrative, the ideology of secularism is held to be a palliative solution to the above. Although there is no single definition of secularism which could be applied world-wide, yet it was first applied to separate the Church from the King. This was the political dimension. In the social sphere secular meant separating the strangle hold of religion over the individual's life. In the Indian context it proclaims the existence of spiritual values which can be stressed in a variety of ways. See also Block 3 Unit 6, ESO-05 'Secularism and Secularization' which deals with this. Thus the word secularism has a variety of connotations in India. As Madan (ed. 1991 : 394-412) notes these dimensions are:

- i) the separation of state from religion.
- ii) equal and impartial treatment of all communities by the state.
- iii) approaching religious beliefs in a spirit of objective rationality.
- iv) ensuring a just standard of living for all people irrespective of community.

32.5.1 Secular Views

Through the judicious use of the philosophy of secularism fundamentalism and communalism can be curbed. On combating fundamentalism and communalism through secularism there are three views that can be presented. These are:

- i) An ideological campaign against communalism can be waged to *decommunalize* people at all levels. The logic of this approach is that communalism will die out only if the communal ideology is removed.
- ii) Grassroot politics is another approach mooted for the eradication of communalism along with a democratic rights approach. That is to say there has to be an awakening at the grassroots level. Secondly a new type of activity is required which is politically oriented but not the grassroots type. The problem however is that unless this grassroots approach has an All-India spread and a unity within it we do not find it likely to do well.
- iii) A major issue concerning fundamentalism, communalism and secularism is religion. How do we approach religion in a secular view ? Firstly we should not dismiss any religions or pronounce them to be false. Second we should try to locate the democratic and the secular in the social basis of religion. Thirdly the irrationalities of religion should be exposed and a rational approach taken.

As Madan (1983) explains India is defined as a secular republic in the Preamble to the Constitution. Secularism in India does not imply abolition of religion but the separation of state from religion. However the separation of politics from religion is not envisaged. The people are free to form religion based political parties. What then is secularism in a multireligious society such as that which India represents.

Activity 2

Do you feel secularism is only an ideology, or can it and is it operating in everyday reality in India? Go to individuals of different communities and ask them this question. Note down their answers in a notebook. Discuss your findings with other students in the Study Centre, if possible.

That secularism can be defined in various ways has been pointed out earlier. However we can say now that secularism implies the separation of religion from state and its relegation to the sphere of personal belief and private commitment. It is important to point out at this stage that this description is not true of any society as this separation happens to be analytical rather than actual. As things stand there are some politics with an anti religious stance. Other are natural towards religion. And finally there are those which follow a secularism which falls between these extremes.

How does the secular policy of India reflect in the pre and post-independent politics of India? In the closing decades of the 19th century the "liberal-plural" theory was advanced by the moderate nationalists. *This approach believed that religion should not be mixed with politics. Its proper sphere was that of private belief.* This would preserve both religious sentiments and those towards the nation would remain intact. This theory demanded sophisticated understanding but the wider society could not grasp it. *This was replaced due to its obvious shortcomings by the "orthodox plural" theory of secular nationalism. This was forwarded by Gandhi. He picked up religion as basic to political action and national identity.*

32.5.2 Gandhiji's Views

The 'nation-to-be', argued Gandhi, should draw from Hindu, Muslim, and all other communities. The idea was to draw popular symbols into the political mainstream creating a national identity. This ideology which was successful in political mobilization has certain problems so far as the post-independent 1947 era was concerned.

- i) Gandhi's idea that religious cleavages which could be handled by using religious loyalties and thus lead to nationhood proved wrong. The idea of orthodox pluralism heightened rather than reduced the rift between different religious communities.
- ii) The ideologies drew the rich and powerful into the national struggle and ensured that they dominated post-independent India.
- iii) Another theory (the radical socialist) which gained some ground had the dream of a secular polity which reflected the dream of the poor masses, both in rural and urban areas. Religious loyalties were relegated away from national identity. National identity it was felt could only be based upon politics, which linked socio-economic facts with the reality of nationhood. Religion was to be a private thing and not to trade upon the domain of politics. This stance resembles the liberal plural theory of religion. However the radical socialists addressed themselves to the poor and attempted to bring about social redistribution of wealth.

This theory of radical socialist secular nationalism took the stage during the second quarter of the 20th century, but could not last much longer. Despite its poverty orientation and orientation toward equal redistribution of wealth this theory failed in the light of Gandhian ideas.

Gandhi's orthodox plural theory of secular nationalism was popular due to various reasons:

- i) the strong religious feeling among different classes and communities. This Gandhi mobilized for a popular base to nationalism.
- ii) Again while desiring to uplift the downtrodden it did not deprive the rich, industrial, commercial classes from the control over social and economic power.

Box 32.03

Nehru wrote in 1961 that being Secular did not mean being opposed to religion. This he stated was not correct. What was true was the existence of a state which held all faiths in equal esteem and provided for them equal opportunities. He also added that this was not fully reflected in mass living and thinking (Gopal, 1980 p. 330).

This theory killed two birds with one stone: it mobilized mass support for nationhood; it also left alone the theory issue of capital and property. The rich felt that the theory did not nail them. At the same time Gandhi never stated that he wanted to sacrifice the interests of the poor to the greed of the rich. Thus we can say that in India the orthodox plural theory of secular nationalism on the one hand and communal tension on the other can provide us some insights into national integration. Thus theories of secular nationalism which are religion or community based cannot be healthy for the polity. However, the theories of secularism which distinguish between religion and politics are the best for the field of politics. Such secular politics can use either the rich or the poor as a base for their activities.

Thus we see that education of the masses is the way to secularism. Being educated they would eschew all fundamental and communal paths and seek to achieve a true democratic republic.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mention two connotations of the word 'secular' in the Indian context.
 - a)
 - b)
- 2) What were Gandhiji's views on secularism ? Use 7-10 lines for your answer.
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32.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we began by explaining the basic concepts of fundamentalism, communalism and secularism. We then turned to an examination of communalism and secularism. The reason for communal riots, and some of the inter-community dynamics were then laid bare. Finally we turned to secularism, examined its various views, and also presented Gandhiji's views on secularism. It was felt that secularism, in its true sense could counter fundamentalistic and communalistic tendencies.

32.7 KEY WORDS

- Communalism** : This is a situation wherein religion and religious communities view each other with hostility and antagonism. They may often come out in open conflict such as in communal riots.
- Fundamentalism** : This word stresses the infallibility of a scripture in matters of faith and doctrine. Certain groups take this to espouse a militant stance and claim sovereignty of a territory based on the same principles.
- Secularism** : This is the principle which believes that all matters of religious faith be separated from other fields of interaction economic, political, administrative and so on. In doing this it hopes to create a harmonious and integrated nation state.

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32.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) Economic reasons
b) Political reasons
c) Sociological reasons.
- 2) *Muslim, Medium, Sized.*

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) a) separation of state from religion.
b) equal and impartial treatment of all communities by the state.
- 2) Gandhiji felt that the nation-to-be should take ideas from all communities, not only from Hindus and Muslims. This idea was to draw symbols of religion into the political mainstream. This ideology however failed in post independent India and increased the rift between communities. Also the rich and powerful came into the national struggle and dominated post Independent-India.

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