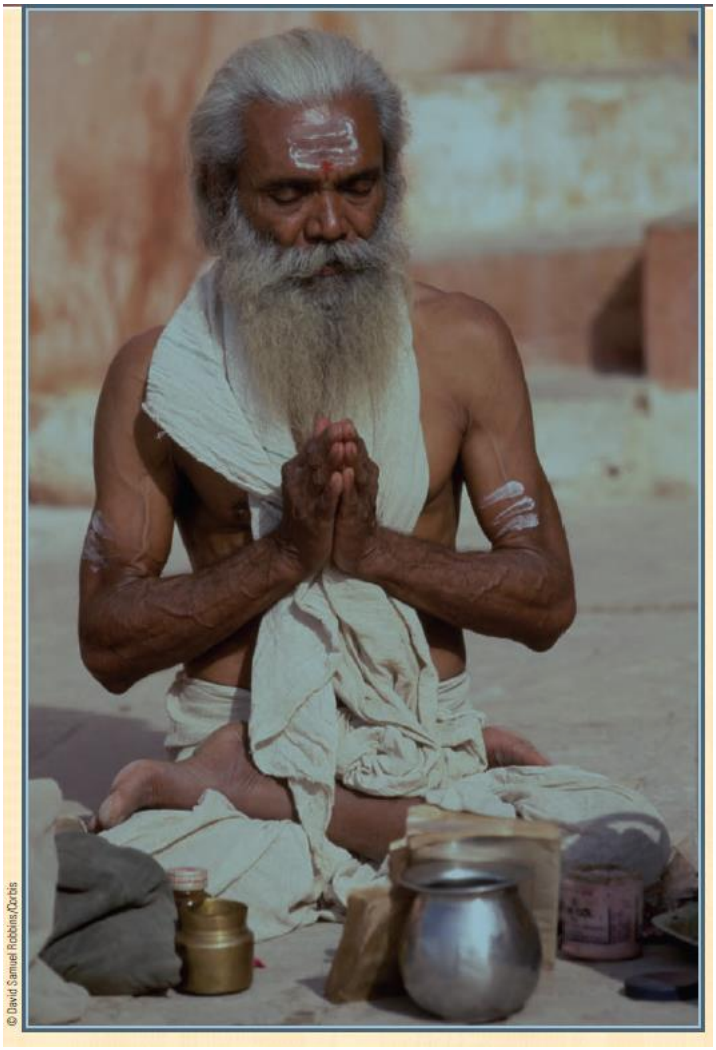
RELIGION

Introduction



Since the inception of the discipline Anthropologists have been eliciting the relationship between religion and society. In traditional societies it has regulated the lives of the people in different aspects that included economy, polity, life cycle crisis, etc. Some Marxist structuralists, like Maurice Godlier, believed that in societies where religion was predominant, it was regarded as a mode of production, as is also the case with societies that are predominantly kinship based, which controlled the production, distribution and relations of production. The classical example that can be cited is that of the Inca and Hindu society during the ancient times. In many societies religion is one of the main social control mechanisms. Even in the present day societies, it plays a very significant role in controlling and regulating lives of people. Put differently, religion and society are intricately related, be it tribal, rural, urban, traditional or modern. By and large, what we notice in traditional societies is that religion is community oriented, while in the modern societies it is, to a certain extent, individual driven. It is, therefore, important to understand the way religion and society are intertwined.

The subject matter of religion is dealt with in anthropology differently from the other disciplines, such as philosophy, theology, comparative religion, religious studies and so on. It tries to explain not what religion is but why is religion important in the lives of the people. It basically takes people's perspective and seeks to find out how it is important to the people. There is no society that is known so far without any religious idea. As early as nineteenth century, anthropologists made attempts to search for earlier forms of religion and religious thoughts and the courses of change therein. Some intellectuals thought that religion will have no place where science and technology flourish, but the reality is to the contrary. Even today in the age of computers, robots and inter-planetary travel religion plays important roles in the lives of people. Anthropologists are trying to know the relevance of religion in human societies whether they are technologically advanced or primitive hunter and gatherers. This obviously raises the question of the significance of religion in human societies.

Anthropological approach of studying human societies as integrated wholes, considers religion as a part of culture. Each culture is unique in its own way and each culture can be studied and described. The recent thinking is that the world can be viewed in multiple ways and, therefore, the representation

of culture cannot be monological, authoritative and bounded. Thus, the anthropological perspective of religion is the way its practitioners see the world, interpret and see themselves different from others.

One may begin to have an understanding of the domain of religion with the question what constitutes religion? And how do we define religion? Anthropologists defined religion in different ways. But none of these well known definitions adequately cover all aspects of religion practiced by all human societies. There has been criticism on each of these definitions for their failure of accounting for one aspect or the other.

Definition of Religion

For Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) religion is the belief in spiritual beings.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) defines religion as "**a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things,** that is to say**,** things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called Church, all those who adhere to them".

Clifford Geertz defines religion as (**1**) a system of symbols which acts to (**2**) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [and women] by (**3**) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (**4**) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (**5**) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RELIGION

After introducing various concepts found in religious discourses, we should focus on the anthropological theories about religion. These include evolutionary, psychological, functional, Marxist and symbolic perspectives.

John Lubbock (1834–1913), an English anthropologist, made an early attempt to combine archaeological evidence of prehistoric people, on the one hand, and anthropological evidence of primitive people, on the other, to trace the origin and evolution of religion. In this scheme, in the beginning there was **absence of religious ideas(atheism)** and development of **fetishism**, followed by **nature worship**, and **totemism** (a system of belief involving the relationship of specific animals to clans), **shamanism**, **anthropomorphism**, **monotheism** (belief in one god), and **finally ethical monotheism.**

The anthropology of religion owes a great debt to **Emile Durkheim** who put forward the concept of **sacred, profane orders**, and the so-called **supernatural and natural categories**, which have proved to be more beneficial in better understanding the concept of religion. A strong impetus to subsequent application of Durkheimian theory is found among the British **structural-functionalists**, such as Radcliffe-Brown, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, and Melford Spiro, etc., who also made significant contributions towards understanding religion. They primarily focussed on the religion of tribal groups. However, many of the contemporary exponents of anthropology of religion like Clifford Geertz, Melford Spiro, Victor Turner, Sherry Ortner, Mary Douglas and Stanley Tambiah have devoted bulk of their attention to local variants of major world religions – Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity and the impact of the world religions in developing countries like Java, Indonesia, Morocco, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Nepal, and Burma, instead of the religions of isolated tribal groups. Contemporary ethnographers concentrate on examining religious diversity in complex societies rather than providing further documentation for uniformity in tribal religions.

Evolutionary Perspective

Like so much else in anthropology, the study of the religious notions of primitive people arose within the context of evolutionary theory. Besides their evolutionary assumption about religion, the followers of evolutionary theory show overwhelming Eurocentric biases. But it is true that they made valuable contributions to the study of religion. Most of the nineteenth century anthropologists derive assumptions about religion from the Judeo-Christian heritage and from their own religious experiences within that tradition. E.B. Tylor, expounds in his book, **Primitive Culture** (1871), that **animism is the earliest and most basic religious form**. Out of this evolved polytheism, and, finally, monotheism is derived from the exaltation of a great god, such as the sky god, in a polytheistic context**. He defines religion in such a way that all forms of it could be included, namely, as 'the belief in Spiritual Beings'**. He firmly states that **religion is a cultural universal**, for no known cultures are without such beliefs. Belief in spirits began as an uncritical but nonetheless rational effort to explain such puzzling empirical phenomenon as death, dreams and possessions. **Herbert Spencer advocated ancestor worship**, a relatively similar system to Tylor's animism.

R.R. Marrett (1909), on the other hand regarded animatism as beginning of religious ideas. His derivation is from ideas as **mana (power), mulungu (supreme creator), orenda (magic power),** concepts found in the Pacific, Africa, and America, respectively, **referring to a supernatural power** (a kind of supernatural 'electricity') that does not necessarily have the personal connotation of animistic entities and that becomes especially present in certain men, spirits, or natural objects.

For Sir James Frazer human thought is best understood as a **progression from magic to religion to science**. By publishing his two volume book titled **The Golden Bough** , he attempts to construct a universal theory of magic, religion and science. According to Frazer, magic is the primordial form of human thought. He further postulates early man was dominated by magic, which viewed nature as 'a series of events occurring in an invariable order without the intervention of personal agency'. These magicians, according to Frazer, believed in nature and developed imaginary laws, which are of course, not real. However, in course of time the more intelligent members of the society, in the state of disillusionment, conceived of spiritual beings with powers superior to man, who could be induced by propitiation to alter the course of nature to his advantage. According to Frazer, this was the stage of religion. Later on this was seen to be an illusion and men entered the final, the scientific stage of development. Magic, according to Frazer, is based on the principle of contagion or on 'sympathy' or the notion of imitation, said to be the earliest form. In more advanced societies, Frazer contends, magic eventually is replaced by religion, and both are finally replaced by science.

Anthropologists like Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead and Alfred Kroeber discredit the speculative evolutionary perspective and seek explanations for similarities of rituals, myths and symbols found in different cultures through culture contact. For them cultural dispersion, instead of independent evolution of religious thoughts and actions, is the reason for such similarities. They emphasise need for understanding culture as an integrated whole and interpreting the cultural elements in that pattern, including the religious activities, in a meaningful way.

Psychological Approach/Emotive Theories

RR Marrett believes that religion is not a problem solving phenomenon and answering the questions of man is not the basis of religion. According to him religion is a profound emotional response to various aspect that are usually characterised by emotional overtones. These emotional aspects act as an anchor in giving religion a rationale for its existence.

Sigmund Freud's thesis is that religious rituals and beliefs are homologous with neurotic symptoms (Eriksen, 1950). According to him, a deep subconscious psychological conflict within social groups is responsible for the development of religion. He explains that the psychological conflict between the father and son, the hatred of son towards father, his desire for killing him and the guilt feeling are the reasons for the creation of totem based on the Oedipus myth. The worship or respect shown to the totemic animal is the reflection of subconscious conflict between the son and father and the latter's kinsmen. The psychological defence mechanisms involve projections to avoid conflict and reduce anxiety.

Further, the childhood experiences carried out through out adult life in the forms of images and in this regard dependency of children on parents is significant. The dependency on parents by the children in the latter part of life is projected on the spiritual beings.

Following this line of thinking**, Kardiner**, who is considered as a neo-Freudian, sought to demonstrate that religious institutions of tribal people are **projections of a "basic personality structures," formed not by the action of an unconsciously remembered historical trauma but by the more observable traumas produced by child-training practices.**

The emotive factors according to various scholars are following:-

1) **Fear** According to Wilhelm Wundt religion is a projection of fear into the environment. R. Otto says that religion is identical to numinous feeling- something pertaining to divinity. The sense of mystery and fear attached to religion is usually numinous emotion that is always paired with fear towards the uncanny (supernatural or weird).
2) **Unspecified emotion** According to William James the phenomenon of religion is not associated with any specific type of emotion though he admits that religion has a strong emotional base.
3) **Anxiety and uncertainity by Malinowski (refer theories)**

Functionalist Approach

Anthropological studies of religion are no longer dominated by the search for origins. More recent studies have focused on how religious systems function for both the individual and the society as a whole. Because religious systems are so universal, it is generally held that they must meet a number of important needs at both personal and societal levels.

Various forms of functionalism in anthropology—which focus on social patterns and institutions with reference to their functions in the larger cultural context— have proved illuminating for wider understanding of religion. This has helped to discover interrelations between differing aspects of religion as it connects various institutions. Functionalism emphasises on the interrelations between the various elements of a social system, and, therefore, pays less attention to evolutionary origins and the notion of "survivals" – the continuation of primitive elements in a culture.

Society is seen as a self-regulating system in which religion, economic organisation, and kinship form parts of an organic whole. The realm of the sacred is defined by the attitude people have towards it – rituals are sacred if they are performed with reverence and awe. Numerous functional aspects of religion include providing explanation or comfort; sanctions on social, economic and political norms and institutions; and aiding ecological adaptation and unifying the social group. Anthropologists like Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown, etc., who approached religion from functionalist perspective provide explanation that satisfies human needs and solidarity of the group.

Malinowski, for instance, in his work on the Trobriand Islanders emphasises on the close relationship between myth and ritual. He puts forward the idea of psychological functionalism, religious acts fulfilling the psychological need and satisfaction. According to him man is continuously in state of uncertainty and anxiety which is reduced by religion. Hence religion is for satisfying human needs. A mortuary ritual, for instance, is intended to release the soul and prevent it from returning to haunt the living.

One finds a different kind of functionalism in Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955). **Radcliffe-Brown** (1922) provides an account **of Andamanese religious beliefs** and ceremonies. He asserts that the Andaman Islanders' main supernatural beings are spirits of the dead, associated with the sky, forest, and sea, and nature spirits, which are thought of as personifications of natural phenomena. Religion integrates society and rituals bring in solidarity of the group. He examines different types of social action and devotes significant attention to "ceremonial customs." In interpreting these customs, he shows how "every custom and belief of a primitive society plays some determinate part in the social life of the community, just as every organ of a living body plays some part in the general life of the organism."

For example, weeping on several occasions is observed as a custom amongst the Andamanese; it is not associated only with sadness, but with a renewal of social relations which have been interrupted. "Weeping is the affirmation of a bond of social solidarity." Ritual value is attributed to something not because the object is important in itself but symbolically stands for certain aspects of social life. He also examines ancestral cults and totemism and finds parallels in lineage structures and other aspects of society to show a close correspondence between religious beliefs and rituals and social structure.

In India **M.N. Srinivas'** (1952) study of society and religion among the Coorgs is an outstanding contribution to the study of religion in functionalist perspective. He very innovatively integrates social structure with religion which he finds it operating at different levels – local, regional, peninsular and all India. Drawing the difference between Indological and sociological approach, he adopts the latter for a meaningful treatment of religion in relation with the social structure of the Coorg. He demonstrates that various rituals organised at family, patrilineal joint family (okka), village and naad level bring in solidarity and unity among different social segments.

FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

Social Functions of Religion

One of the most popular explanations for the universality of religion is that it performs important functions for the overall well-being of the society of which it is a part.

Social Control

One very important social function of religion is its use as a mechanism of social control. Through both positive and negative sanctions, religion tends to maintain social order by encouraging socially acceptable behavior and discouraging socially inappropriate behavior. Every religion, regardless of the

form it takes, is an ethical system that prescribes proper ways of behaving. When social sanctions (rewards and punishments) are backed with supernatural authority, they are bound to become more compelling. Biblical texts, for example, are very explicit about the consequences of violating the Ten Commandments. Because of their strong belief in ghostly vengeance, the Lugbara of Uganda scrupulously avoid engaging in any antisocial behavior that would provoke the wrath of the ancestor-gods.

From an anthropological perspective, it is irrelevant whether these supernatural forces really do reward good behavior and punish bad behavior. Rather than concern themselves with whether and to what extent supernatural forces work the way they are thought to, anthropologists are interested in whether and to what extent people actually believe in the power of the supernatural forces. After all, it is belief in the power of the supernatural sanctions that determines the level of conformity to socially prescribed behavior.

Conflict Resolution

Another social function of religion is the role it plays in reducing the stress and frustrations that often lead to social conflict. In some societies, for example, natural calamities such as epidemics or famines are attributed to the evil deeds of people in other villages or regions. By concentrating on certain religious rituals designed to protect themselves against outside malevolence, people avoid the potential disruptiveness to their own society that might occur if they took out their frustrations on the evildoers.

As an economic determinist, Marx claimed that religion, like other institutions, reflects the underlying modes of production in the society. The purpose of religion, according to Marx, was to preserve the economic superstructure that allowed the upper classes (bourgeoisie) to exploit the working classes (proletariat). By focusing people's attention on the eternal bliss awaiting them in heaven, religion diverts their attention from the misery of their lives in the here and now. In other words, religion blinds working people to the fact that they are being exploited by the ruling class. As long as the working class focuses on the afterlife, they are not likely to heed Marx's advice to revolt against their oppressors

Reinforcement of Group Solidarity

A third social function of religion is to intensify the group solidarity of those who practice it. Religion enables people to express their common identity in an emotionally charged environment. Powerful social bonds are often created among people who share the experiences of religious beliefs, practices, and rituals. Because every religion or supernatural belief system has its own unique structural features, those who practice it share in its mysteries, whereas those who do not are excluded. In short, religion strengthens a person's sense of group identity and belonging. And, of course, as people come together for common religious experiences, they often engage in other nonreligious activities as well, which further strengthens the sense of social solidarity.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

In addition to promoting the well-being of the society, religion functions psychologically for the benefit of the individual. Anthropologists have identified two fundamentally different types of psychological functions of religion: a cognitive function, whereby religion provides a cognitive framework for explaining parts of our world that we do not understand, and an emotional function, whereby religion helps to reduce anxiety by prescribing some straightforward ways of coping with stress.

Cognitive Function

In terms of its cognitive/intellectual function, religion is psychologically comforting because it helps us explain the unexplainable. Every society must deal with imponderable questions that have no definitive logical answers: When did life begin? Why do bad things happen to good people? What happens to us when we die? Even in societies like our own—where we have, or think we have, many scientific answers—many questions remain unanswered. A medical pathologist may be able to explain to the parents of a child who has died of malaria that the cause of death was a bite by an infected anopheles mosquito. But that same pathologist cannot explain to the grieving parents why the mosquito bit their child and not the child next door. Religion can provide satisfying answers to such questions because the answers are based on supernatural authority.

Religion assures its believers that the world is meaningful, that events happen for a reason, that there is order in the universe, and that apparent injustices will eventually be rectified. Humans have difficulty whenever unexplained phenomena contradict their cultural worldview. One of the functions of religion, then, is to enable people to maintain their worldview even when events seem to contradict it.

Emotional Function

The emotional function of religion is to help individuals cope with the anxieties that often accompany illnesses, accidents, deaths, and other misfortunes. Because people never have complete control over the circumstances of their lives, they often turn to religious ritual in an attempt to maximize control through supernatural means. In fact the less control people feel they have over their own lives, the more they are likely to practice religion. The fear of facing a frightening situation can be at least partially overcome by believing that supernatural beings will intervene on one's behalf; shame and guilt may be reduced by becoming humble and pious in the face of the deities; and during times of bereavement, religion can be a source of emotional strength.

People perform religious rituals as a way of invoking supernatural beings to control the forces over which they feel they have no control. This takes a number of different forms throughout the world. To illustrate, the Trobriand Islanders perform magico-religious rituals for protection before a long voyage; to protect their gardens, men in parts of New Guinea put leaves across their fences, believing that the leaves will paralyze the arms and legs of any thief who raids the garden; and in Nairobi, Kenya, some professional football teams reportedly hire their own ritual specialists to bewitch their opponents. In addition to providing greater peace of mind, such religious practices may actually have a positive *indirect* effect on the events they are intended to influence. For example, even if their witchcraft doesn't work, football players are likely to play more confidently if they believe they have a supernatural advantage. This ability to act with confidence is a major psychological function of religion.

1) **Religion explains human suffering-** religion serves to sooth the emotion of man in times of sufferings and disappointments and contributes to the integration of his personality. It consoles and compensates the man. There is always a limit to which a society can go guided by sheer rationality.

2) **Religion is a source of social cohesion-** Religion is the ultimate source of social cohesion. The primary requirement of society is the common possession of social values by which individuals controls the action of self and others through which society is perpetuated.

3) **Religion takes care of social welfare-** Religion led to accumulation of the capital and creation of leisure class. The priesthood was often dedicated to art and culture. Magic

suppled the roots of observation and experimentation from which science developed. Religion has served humanity through spreading education. It has also created the habit of sharing among people.

4) **Religion is the agency of Social Control-** Religion provides a model for living. It upholds certain ideals and values. Rewards or punishments follow approved or disapproved actions.

5) **Religion controls and affects economic life-** Max Weber was of the view that religion influences the economic system of the believers. According to him, capitalism grew in protestant methods like U.S.A. It didn't grew in Italy where there was catholic population. Because Hinduism lay more stress on spiritual progress, materialism couldn't grow in India.

6) **Religion is a source of conflict-** Religion is not only a source of cohesion but it is also a source of conflict. Religious wars has been brutal and bloody. Religious difference produce tension and conflict.

7) **Religion stimulates aesthetic expression-** Great architectural monuments, musical composition and fine works of sculpture and paintings use religious themes and subjects.

Structuralist Approach

Taking cue from structural linguistics, in particular the work of Ferdinand Saussure, Levi-Strauss has sought to reveal a grammar of the mind, a kind of universal psychology with a genetic base, which gives rise to social structures. Myths reveal common story lines that can be used to understand the limited number of ways in which human beings interpret the world. The structural analysis of myth, which is a pioneering work of Levi-Strauss in anthropology, has influenced many scholars in the 21st century. Levi-Strauss contends that primitive religious systems are like all symbolic systems, **fundamentally communication systems**.

In Indian context Louis Dumont (1959) takes the structuralist perspective of religion manifested in the worship of village deities. He finds **the opposition between 'purity' and 'impurity'** and **interdependency of both the values in the religious thoughts**. The 'purity' is strongly associated with vegetarian food offered to the sanskritic gods and 'impurity' associated with non-sanskritic gods and other spiritual beings that receive the offering of non-vegetarian foods. The purity is superior to impurity, and these values have transcended to form the basis of caste system.

Marxist Approach

Karl Marx has been an influential theorist who was very critical of religion, and his approach **depicts religion and religious belief as fictions that support the status quo and that maintained class differences.** Religion reflects false consciousness of people that diverts their attention from the miseries of their lives. It is the outcome of human distress that may have been the consequences of human's struggle with the nature in the past, but now it is a way to get along with capitalist culture. He said, "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the **opium of the people**."

Maurice Godelier finds Marx's view of religion as **reflection of the real world in the human mind**; the nature is personified unconsciously as objective realities, and it is both transcendent and independent of human mind. In dealing with the nature, he says, there is internal structure of relations in which humans alienate themselves. Godelier (1975) explains this position while analysing **the Mbuti Pygmy's**

relation with the forest as hunters. The forest provides animal as well as plant food, but the Mbuti imagine the forest as kinsman and offer prayer of thanks, as forest is considered as omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient divinity as it yields food that sustain them. When a Mbuti dies, his or her breath leaves and mixes with the wind, which is the breath of the forest. Various rituals that they organise and their belief patterns show social and organic unity with the nature. Thus, he argues that the religion of the Mbuti represents both a real and a symbolic action upon the real and imaginary conditions. The real causes are transformed into the effects of imaginary, and the transcendent causes personified into imaginary omnipotent being - god. In this nexus of forest, food and society, there is alienation of human agency. Further, with other examples, Godelier argues that the **shamans in the simple societies mediate between the nature and society in the imaginary conditions set, and thus shamans acquire power over the equals.** With some other examples he explains that the shamans or priests or the chiefs, who are also priests, exercise control over the nature and dominate over the people in their collective enterprise of political and economic dealings. Thus, the class differentiation and exploitative social relations are inherent in the small societies though such relations are unconsciously accepted as natural. The religion or ritual is basically used for maintaining this kind of social order.

Symbolic Approach

Victor Turner's work on the Ndembu rituals provides a highly detailed and enormous work on Ndembu religious life which consists of rituals falling under these two categories – Life cycle crisis ritual and ritual of affliction. His work shows that the Ndembu society is greatly marked by different ceremonies replete with symbolic meanings in every act and performance.

Geertz proposes religion as the part of the cultural system. For him, a symbol means any object, act, event, quality or relation that serves as a vehicle for a conception. His conception of religion rests on the notion that people act basically according to the systems of meanings that they have and the job of anthropologist is to interpret these meanings and provide for their description. The system of meanings engages continuous dialogue between the meanings acting upon people and people's actions upon meaning – the cultural system shapes and gets shaped by the people. He says, "For an anthropologist, the importance of religion lies in its capacity to serve, for an individual or for a group, as a source of general, yet distinctive, conceptions of the world, the self, and the relations between them, on the one hand—its model of aspect—and of rooted, no less distinctive "mental" dispositions—on the other. From these cultural functions flow, in turn, its social and psychological ones"

Geertz (1973) has given his theory of thresholds to explain this deeply motivating power of religious symbols. Humans **look towards religion to overcome three critical thresholds of every human's life** experience, **the threshold of reason or the limits of analytical ability**, where on so many occasions we are left only with the question, "Why?". It may be when a loved one dies an untimely death or some event not foreseen takes place. The **second is the threshold of suffering**; religion does not give us relief from suffering but only a support to enable us to bear it. Thus, every religion in its own way tries to explain the reason for suffering thereby giving the sufferer a psychological strength to bear it, it may be one's karma or it may be a promise to inherit the kingdom of heaven. **The third threshold is that of evil or the lack of explanation of not only why evil exists but that it also gives good dividend**. The explanation of why the evil and corrupt prosper in this world can only be given by religion and nothing else. It is only when we are told about the separation of Satan from God or about bad karma leading ultimately to a bad return even if it is in another world that most people feel committed to leading a moral life.

Myths and Rituals

Myth, a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual) and symbolic places or objects (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience. The term *mythology* denotes both the study of **myth** and the body of myths belonging to a particular religious tradition.

The word *myth* derives from the **Greek** *mythos*, which has a range of meanings from "word," through "saying" and "story," to "fiction"; the unquestioned validity of *mythos* can be contrasted with *logos*, the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated. Because myths narrate fantastic events with no attempt at proof, it is sometimes assumed that they are simply stories with no factual basis, and the word has become a synonym for falsehood or, at best, misconception. In the study of religion, however, it is important to distinguish between myths and stories that are merely untrue.

Franz Boas tried to understand the social organisation, religious ideas and practices of people from their myths. **Malinowski** argued that myth is a powerful social force for the native which is relevant to their pragmatic interests. It expresses and codifies beliefs and works towards efficacy of ritual and provides a practical guide. However, for Levi-Strauss, myth is a logical model, it is a cultural artefact. The human mind structures reality and imposes form and content on it. According to him, myth is an area where human mind enjoys freedom and unrestrained creative thinking expressed in it. Taking into consideration several limiting factors, humans think certain conceivable possibilities about the critical problems that they face. Therefore, myth provides the conceptual frame for social order, but it need not correspond with the ethnographic facts of social organisation. Levi-Strauss provided a method for structural analysis of myth.

Functions of myth and mythology

Explanation

The most obvious function of myths is the explanation of facts, whether natural or cultural. One North American Indian (Abenaki) myth, for example, explains the origin of corn (maize): a lonely man meets a beautiful woman with long, fair hair; she promises to remain with him if he follows her instructions; she tells him in detail how to make a fire and, after he has done so, she orders him to drag her over the burned ground; as a result of these actions, he will see her silken hair (viz., the cornstalk) reappear, and thereafter he will have corn seeds for his use. Henceforth, whenever Abenaki Indians see corn (the woman's hair), they know that she remembers them. Obviously, a myth such as this one functions as an explanation, but the narrative form distinguishes it from a straightforward answer to an intellectual question about causes. The function of explanation and the narrative form go together, since the imaginative power of the myth lends credibility to the explanation and crystallizes it into a memorable and enduring form. Hence myths play an important part in many traditional systems of education.

Justification or validation

Many myths explain ritual and cultic customs. According to myths from the island of Ceram (in Indonesia), in the beginning life was not complete, or not yet "human": vegetation and animals did not exist, and there was neither death nor sexuality. In a mysterious manner Hainuwele, a girl with extraordinary gift-bestowing powers, appeared. The people killed her at the end of their great annual celebration, and her dismembered body was planted in the earth. Among the species that sprang up after this act of planting were tubers—the staple diet of the people telling the myth. With a certain

circularity frequent in mythology, the myth validates the very cultic celebration mentioned in the myth. The cult can be understood as a commemoration of those first events. Hence, the myth can be said to validate life itself together with the cultic celebration.

Comparable myths are told in a number of societies where the main means of food production is the cultivation of root crops; the myths reflect the fact that tubers must be cut up and buried in the earth for propagation to take place.

Ruling families in ancient civilizations frequently justified their position by invoking myths—for example, that they had divine origins. Examples are known from imperial China, pharaonic Egypt, the Hittite empire, Polynesia, the Inca empire, and India. Elites have also based their claims to privilege on myths.

Description

In as much as myths deal with the origin of the world, the end of the world, or a paradisiacal state, they are capable of describing what people can never "see for themselves" however rational and observant they are. It may be that the educational value of myths is even more bound up with the descriptions they provide than with the explanations. In traditional, preindustrial societies myths form perhaps the most important available model of instruction, since no separate philosophical system of inquiry exists.

Healing, renewal, and inspiration

Creation myths play a significant role in healing the sick; they are recited (e.g., among the Navajo Indians of North America) when an individual's world—that is to say, his life—is in jeopardy. Thus, healing through recitation of a cosmogony is one example of the use of myth as a magical incantation. Example Ramcharitmanas being recited for peace and happiness in the house.

RITUALS

Ritual is the performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or by sacerdotal decree. Ritual is a specific, observable mode of behaviour exhibited by all known societies. A ritual is first of all a performance and to be socially meaningful, it must have a public content. As Gilbert Lewis puts, the rituals are a "category of standardized behaviour in which the relationship between the means and the end is not 'intrinsic', i.e. is either irrational or non-rational".

Edmund Leach has defined rituals as culturally defined behaviour that can be regarded as a form of social communication. Eliade (1987) and Rudolph Otto (1958) who have emphasised the sacred dimension of rituals, in that rituals express an encounter with the supernatural and, therefore, have a numinous character that sets them apart from the ordinary actions of the world.

Rituals also must have a structure, in that they follow a given script and adhere to some very stringent rules and regulations. They also follow a time frame and are usually repetitive or occur at specific designated points in a life cycle or natural processes, like a birth or an eclipse. The structure also includes a designated space and time, spatial organisation, personnel, their ritual status and a material infrastructure. Most of these have no apparent rational content and, if any explanation exists, it is always mythical, like the myths associated with rituals, such as pilgrimage to Mecca or Sabarimalai or the myths associated with Totemic or annual rituals like Dussehera.

FUNCTIONAL STUDY OF RITUALS

Foremost among the functional interpretation of rituals is the work of Emile Durkheim, whose work Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912) set the stage for functional analysis from the earlier

emphasis on evolution. Durkheim showed how the totemic rituals establish within the participants a sense of oneness with the sacred totemic ancestor.

It is because of this that the people belonging to a clan claiming descent from a common totem feel a sense of solidarity with each other and also a sense of commitment to the norms governing the totem, thereby establishing a stable society that has internal coherence and a sense of morality that upholds the very sentiments out of which the society is forged, namely the system of clans. Thus, Durkheim was led to comment that God is nothing but society writ large. He also showed how the totemic rituals led to a harmonious relationship between humans and nature where humans were committed to preserving some parts of nature that was important to them.

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown followed Durkheim to give a structural-functional analysis of collective rituals that uphold the social structure by reinforcing sentiments and also by the emphasis given to socially important aspects like food, relationships and events that reintegrate these within the social fabric so that society remains harmonious. He showed the significance of taboos or prescriptions and prohibitions in creating a ritual status and thereby giving a ritual value to an object that could be anything, including a person. This ritual value is nothing but a social value necessary for maintaining necessary sentiments essential for social reproduction and solidarity. Thus, the rituals and taboos surrounding a puberty ritual have many functions. They emphasise the sense of responsibility that a child who is becoming an adult must feel in order to fulfil his or her role in society. Thus contained within the puberty rituals are many messages that initiates future roles and responsibilities, like fertility, being a good husband or wife, etc. Also he showed that for the Andaman Islanders, for example, the enhanced ritual value of some food created through taboos is to show the value of conserving such rare and precious foods in the environment; in other words, to have a respectful attitude towards them.

According to Malinowski, all human beings have certain amount of rational knowledge about tasks that they are required to do, but in spite of even the most extensive knowledge and skill, a certain degree of uncertainty prevails for all the tasks that we undertake. The role of rituals is to take care of this grey area of uncertainty that no amount of skill or knowledge can cover, take for example the failure of space missions, such as the Challenger, in spite of the best material and intellectual resources to back it up. Therefore, one is not surprised when one hears of space scientists offering rituals at Tirupati or otherwise invoking supernatural help for their missions. The more dangerous the result of failure, the greater is the anxiety. For example, in his study of the Trobrianders, a seafaring community of the pacific islands, Malinowski showed that when they are fishing in back waters, or otherwise safe zones, the fishermen perform little rituals, but they always perform elaborate rituals when they are venturing out in the deep sea or on any long distance voyage where the risk factor is high. The performance of rituals can be rationalised by the positive mind set or confidence it builds up in the individual, who feels satisfied at having done all that he or she could do, to take care of all the aspects, including those that are beyond human control and which only the supernatural can take care of.

Types of Rituals

Positive and negative

Rituals may also be classified as positive or negative. Most positive rituals are concerned with consecrating or renewing an object or an individual, and negative rituals are always in relation to positive ritual behaviour. Avoidance is a term that better describes the negative ritual; the Polynesian word tabu (English, taboo) also has become popular as a descriptive term for this kind of ritual. The word taboo has been applied to those rituals that concern something to be avoided or forbidden.

Rites of passage

Alan Barnard describes rites of passage as a ceremony that an individual goes through to mark the change from one status in life to another. For example christening or baptism in Christianity.

- Naming rites mark the transition from non-person to person or from person outside the community to person within the community.
- Initiation rites mark the transition from childhood to adulthood
- Marriage rites mark the transition from single to married status. Marriage rites are found in every society though not religious in nature in all the cases.
- Funeral rites mark the transition from person to ancestor or from person within the community of the living to person beyond. Funerals are also universal. In some societies more than one funeral is necessary and sometimes even more than one burial ceremony. In Aboriginal Australia an individual is buried once then his or her body dug up and buried again to mark these phases in the transition from living to ancestral status

The basic characteristic of the life-crisis ritual is the transition from one mode of life to another. Rites of passage have often been described as rituals that mark a crisis in individual or communal life. These rituals often define the life of an individual. They include rituals of birth, puberty(entrance into the full social life of a community), marriage, conception, and death. Many of these rituals mark a separation from an old situation or mode of life, a transition rite celebrating the new situation, and a ritual of incorporation.

In India, a striking example is the Hindu rite of being "twice born." The young boy who receives the sacred thread in the *upanayana* ritual, a ceremony of initiation, goes through an elaborate ritual that is viewed as a second birth.

According to **Van Gennep**, every **such ritual has three stages**, a stage of **separation**, a **liminal stage** and a **final stage of incorporation**. Thus, in the first stage an individual is removed from normal life, often giving up on normal daily activities, is surrounded by taboos and often enters a ritual status of sacredness. For example, just before getting married a person may take leave from work, a girl is not allowed to go out of the house, and they are treated like special people. In India, girls and boys may be given oil baths, confined to the house, surrounded by relatives and restrictions placed on activities, dress and food. This is then the liminal period when a person is kept away from society. Sometimes they may be physically hidden away, almost a person is kept away from normal day to day activities. Thus, they are in society but not a part of it, this is the betwixt and between situations when one is suspended as it were in social space and time. After the transition is made, say, for example, one gets married one gets back to ordinary life and comes out of the liminal period. This is the ritual of incorporation, like, for example, a new bride may be asked to cook a dish in her in-law's house, thereby incorporating her into the daily routine of everyday life.

Concept of liminality
The concept of liminality in rituals was introduced by Van Gennep (1909) and elaborated by Victor Turner and Edmund Leach. A liminal period is 'a betwixt and between' period where normal life and time stands still. According to Van Gennep, who analysed the role of lifecycle rituals for individuals and for society, these rituals such as those of birth, puberty, marriage and death, mark stages of transition in an individual's life, where a person makes a transition from one status to another. Beginning from birth where one enters society as an individual and has pre-existing relationships like with one's parents, aunts and cousins, etc. The birth of a child also changes the status of many others too, from being husband and wife a couple become parents, and some may become grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. In the same way, social statuses change with marriage and even with death. Puberty rituals make an adult member out of a child. According to Van Gennep,

every such ritual has three stages, a stage of separation, a liminal stage and a final stage of incorporation. Thus, in the first stage an individual is removed from normal life, often giving up on normal daily activities, is surrounded by taboos and often enters a ritual status of sacredness. For example, just before getting married a person may take leave from work, a girl is not allowed to go out of the house, and they are treated like special people. In India, girls and boys may be given oil baths, confined to the house, surrounded by relatives and restrictions placed on activities, dress and food. This is then the liminal period when a person is kept away from society. Sometimes they may be physically hidden away, almost a person is kept away from normal day to day activities. Thus, they are in society but not a part of it, this is the betwixt and between situations when one is suspended as it were in social space and time. After the transition is made, say, for example, one gets married one gets back to ordinary life and comes out of the liminal period. This is the ritual of incorporation, like, for example, a new bride may be asked to cook a dish in her in-law's house, thereby incorporating her into the daily routine of everyday life.

Almost all life cycle rituals, rituals that mark life stage transitions, are marked by these three stages. Edmund Leach has used the concept of liminality to describe what he calls the marking of structural time, or intervals where important social events mark the oscillations of time, from one period to another. For example, harvest rituals mark the interval between one agricultural cycle and another. Thus, time begins with one sowing and ends with the reaping of the crop, then going back to a new season of sowing. This sowing-reaping-sowing cycle is marked at each phase by a ritual. Leach calls this oscillating time as against the concepts of lineal time and even cyclical time.

Since this kind of liminality is compared to the swinging of a pendulum, there is a sense of reversal, where ordinary life is reversed or stopped, a typical example being a carnival celebrated during harvest festivals and such annual cycles as the coming of spring. For example, during the festival of Holi in India, we find that all social norms are reversed as in one kind of Holi celebrations in India, the women take brooms and beat men, who are not supposed to protest.

Victor Turner builds on Van Gennep's concept of rites of passage and especially discusses the middle stage, liminality, and what implications it has for the general structure or society in which the ritual takes place. The characteristics of the liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since they cannot be identified with the web of classifications that normally persist. This ambiguity is expressed in diverse ways. "It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new situation in life." (Turner 2002. [1969]: 359). What Turner finds interesting about liminality is the space it produces, characterized by lowliness and sacredness, allowing for homogeneity and comradeship.

Turner states that this isn't simply about giving legitimacy to existing social structures but is rather a recognition of an "essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society". Passage rites are often collective. Several individuals—boys being circumcised, fraternity or sorority initiates, men at military boot camps, football players in summer training camps, women becoming nuns—pass through the rites together as a group.

Most notable social aspect of collective liminality called **communitas** (Turner 1967), an intense community spirit, a feeling of great social solidarity, equality, and togetherness. People experiencing liminality together form a community of equals. The social distinctions that have existed before or will exist afterward are temporarily forgotten. Liminal people experience the same treatment and conditions and must act alike. Liminality may be marked ritually and symbolically by reversals of ordinary behaviour.

Rites of Intensification

Rites of intensification are rituals that take place during a crisis in the life of the group and serve to bind individuals together. Whatever the precise nature of the crisis—a drought that threatens crops, the sudden appearance of an enemy war party, the onset of an epidemic—mass ceremonies are performed to ease the sense of danger. This unites people in a common effort so that fear and confusion yield to collective action and a degree of optimism. The balance in the relations of all concerned is restored to normal, and the community's values are celebrated and affirmed.

While an individual's death might be regarded as the ultimate crisis in that person's life, it is, as well, a crisis for the entire group, particularly if the group is small. A member of the community has been removed, so its composition has been seriously altered. The survivors, therefore, must readjust and restore balance. They also need to reconcile themselves to the loss of someone to whom they were emotionally tied.

A remarkable cultural example of a rite of intensification is the Hindu cremation ceremony in Bali. Sharing a worldview with a religious belief in the reincarnation of a deceased person's soul, the Balinese deal with death by turning what could be a painful emotional experience of grief and loss into a joyous celebration of life's progressive continuity by being reborn in a future existence. At the same time, as a social reminder of Hindu caste differences in Balinese stratified society, the family of a deceased relative uses this elaborate public ceremony to display its wealth and social rank. Everyone can see that some funeral pyres are bigger and more beautiful than others (such as those built for members of a noble or royal family on the island).

Funerary ceremonies, then, can be regarded as rites of intensification that permit the living to express in non-disruptive ways their upset over the death while providing for social readjustment. Frequently such ceremonies feature ambivalence toward the dead person. For example, one part of the funerary rites of certain Melanesians was the eating of the dead person's flesh. This ritual cannibalism, witnessed by anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, was performed with "extreme repugnance and dread and usually followed by a violent vomiting fit. At the same time it is felt to be a supreme act of reverence, love, and devotion."

This custom and the emotions accompanying it clearly reveal ambivalence toward death: On the one hand, there is the survivors' desire to maintain the tie to the dead person, and, on the other hand, they feel disgust and fear at the transformation wrought by death. According to Malinowski, funeral ceremonies provide an approved collective means for individuals to express these feelings while maintaining social cohesiveness and preventing disruption of society.

Rites of intensification do not have to be limited to times of overt crisis. In regions with marked differences in seasons where human activities must change accordingly, these rites will take the form of annual ceremonies. These are particularly common among horticultural and agricultural peoples, with their planting and harvest ceremonies. Because these are critical times for such cultures, the ceremonies express reverence toward nature's generation and fertility upon which people's very existence depends.

Participation in rituals of reverence and celebration during planting and harvest seasons reinforces group involvement. It also serves as a kind of dress rehearsal for crisis situations by promoting the habit of relying on supernatural forces—a habit that may make a crucial difference under stressful circumstances when it is important not to give way to fear and despair.

Relation between Myth and Ritual

Ritual from Myth

One possibility immediately presents itself: perhaps ritual arose from myth. Many religious rituals—notably Passover among Jews, Christmas and Easter among Christians, and the Hajj among Muslims—commemorate, or involve commemoration of, events in religious literature.

E. B. Tylor

Leaving the sphere of historical religions, the ritual-from-myth approach often sees the relationship between myth and ritual as analogous to the relationship between science and technology. The pioneering anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor is the classic exponent of this view. He saw myth as an attempt to explain the world: for him, myth was a sort of proto-science. Ritual is secondary: just as technology is an application of science, so ritual is an application of myth—an attempt to produce certain effects, given the supposed nature of the world: "For Tylor, myth functions to explain the world as an end in itself. Ritual applies that explanation to control the world." A ritual always presupposes a pre-existing myth: in short, myth gives rise to ritual.

Myth from Ritual (primacy of ritual)

Against the intuitive idea that ritual re-enacts myth or applies mythical theories, many 19th-century anthropologists supported the opposite position: that myth and religious doctrine result from ritual. This is known as the "primacy of ritual" hypothesis.

William Robertson Smith

In his ***Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*** **(1889)**, Smith draws a distinction between ancient and modern religion: in modern religion, doctrine is central; in ancient religion, ritual is central. On the whole, Smith argues, ancients tended to be conservative with regard to rituals, making sure to pass them down faithfully. In contrast, the myths that justified those rituals could change. In fact, according to Smith, **many of the myths that have come down to us arose "after the original, nonmythic reason [...] for the ritual had somehow been forgotten."**

James Frazer

The famous anthropologist Sir James George Frazer claimed that **myth emerges from ritual during the natural process of religious evolution.** Many of his ideas were inspired by those of Robertson Smith. In *The Golden Bough* , Frazer famously argues that man progresses from belief in magic (and rituals based on magic), through belief in religion, to science.

Myths and Rituals as non-coextensive

Not all students of mythology think ritual emerged from myth or myth emerged from ritual: some allow myths and rituals a greater degree of freedom from one another. Although myths and rituals often appear together, these scholars do not think every myth has or had a corresponding ritual, or vice versa.

Bronisław Malinowski

Like William Smith, the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski argued in his essay *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926) that myths function as fictitious accounts of the origin of certain rituals, thereby providing a justification for those rituals: myth "gives rituals a hoary past and thereby sanctions them.". However, Malinowski also points out that many cultural practices besides ritual have related

myths: for Malinowski, "myth and ritual are therefore not coextensive." In other words, not all myths are outgrowths of ritual, and not all rituals are outgrowths of myth.

Conclusion

Following World War II, the semantic study of myth and ritual, particularly by Bill Stanner and Victor Turner, has supported a connection between myth and ritual. However, it has not supported the notion that one preceded and produced the other, as supporters of the "primacy of ritual" hypothesis would claim. According to the currently dominant scholarly view, the link between myth and ritual is that they share common paradigms

Forms of religion in peasant and tribal societies

a) Animism
b) Animatism
c) Ancestor worship
d) Fetishism
e) Naturism
f) Totemism

a) Animism: (from the latin word anima- meaning soul) is belief in spiritual beings. As a philosophical theory, animism is usually called as pan-psychism. It is a doctrine that all objects in the world have an inner soul or are psychological beings. In Tylor's view religion originated in people's speculation about dreams, trances or death. Tylor thought that life like appearances of imagined persons and animals suggests a dual existence: a physical visible body and a psychic invisible soul. Because the dead appears in dreams people come to believe that souls of dead are still around. This led him to propose animism.

The long sleep that is death comes when the wandering soul doesn't return. The body that is vessel for the soul has no further function once its soul has abandoned it. Illness is due to intrusive corruption of soul.

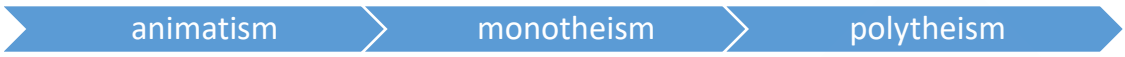
According to Tylor, belief in soul is the most ancient belief and therefore, animism should be the earliest form of religion. Again as souls are aplenty, the origin of religion should be polytheistic and its evolution from polytheism to monotheism.

b) Animatism: Animatism is a term coined by RR Marett to refer to a belief in a generalized impersonal power over which people have some measure of control. He argues that certain cultures believe" people, animals, plants and inanimate objects were endowed with certain powers, which were both impersonal and supernatural.

Mana, Marett states, is a concentrated form of animatistic force found within any of these objects that confer power, strength and success. To various cultures, animatism and mana are visible through the success and failures of these objects. Success equals a high amount of animatism, or mana whereas failure is the result of animatism, or mana being lost.

Marett rejected Tylor's theory that all objects were regarded as being alive. Marett thought that primitive peoples must have recognized some lifeless objects and probably regarded only those objects that had unusual qualities or behaved in some seemingly unpredictable or mysterious ways as being alive. Primitive people treated the objects they considered animate as if these things had life, feeling and a will of their own, but didn't make a distinction between the body of and object and a soul that could enter or leave it.

Marett studied Melanesians. He found the belief that a Melanesian chief possessed a large amount of mana. As the chief died, whoever became chief, acquired that amount of mana automatically. Therefore, mana is universal and is transferable. According to Marett, these Melanesians were living in conditions as primitive as those of early man, therefore, their belief should form earliest form of religion. Besides as mana is a single universal force, origin of religion should be monotheistic and its evolution from monotheism to polytheism.



Beliefs in mana like forces are widespread, although the specifics of the religious doctrines vary. Consider the contrast between mana in Melanesia and Polynesia. In Melanesia, one could acquire mana by chance or by working hard to get it. In Polynesia, however, mana wasn't potentially available to everyone but was attached to political offices. Chiefs and nobles had more mana than ordinary people did. So charged with mana were the highest chiefs that contact with them was dangerous to the commoners. The mana of chiefs flowed out of their bodies wherever they went. It could infect the ground, making it dangerous for others to walk in the chief's footsteps. It could permeate the containers and utensils chiefs used in eating.

Contact between chief and commoners was dangerous because mana could have an effect like an electric shock. Because high chiefs had so much mana, their bodies and possessions were taboo (set apart as sacred and off-limits to ordinary people). Contact between a high chief and commoners was forbidden. Because ordinary people couldn't bear as much sacred current as royalty could, when commoners were accidentally exposed, purification rites were necessary.

Criticism- By saying that Melanesians were living in condition as primitive as those of early man, Marett wants to convince that in last million years, Melanesians have not changed a bit. This is literally impossible.

c) Ancestor Worship: is the reverence granted to deceased relatives who are believed to have become spiritual beings, or have attained the status of God. It is based on the belief that ancestor are active members of society and are still interested in the affairs of their living relatives.

The cult of ancestor worship is common although not universal. Extensively documented in west African societies (The Bantu) among Indo-European peoples especially Japan, China and India. In general ancestors are believed to wield great authority having special powers to influence the course of events or to control the well-being of their living relatives. Protection of family is their min concerns.

They are considered intermediaries between Supreme God and the people and can communicate with the living through dreams and by possession. The attitude towards them is one of mixed fear and reverence. If neglected, the ancestor may cause disease and other misfortunes. Ancestor worship is the strong indication of value placed on the household and of strong ties that exist between past and present. Some scholars have also interpreted it as a source of well-being and of social harmony and stability.

In many of the religious practices, only a few become ancestors and receive ritual attention. Where descent is through males, the ancestors would be male only. In matriliny, as in case of Nayar in India or Ashanti in Africa, the ancestorhood is bestowed upon the mother's brother who holds jurisdiction over lineage as lineage head. In some cases, ancestor shrines are built where regular offerings are made and sacrifices offered. Functionalists like Malinowski explain this phenomenon as emotional reassurance against the loss.

d) Fetishism:

A fetish is an object believed to have supernatural powers, or in particular, a human-made object that has power over others. Essentially, fetishism is the emic attribution of inherent value or powers to an object. In August Comte's theory of evolution of religion, he proposed that fetishism is the earliest stage followed by polytheism and monotheism.

Theoretically fetishism is present in all religions, but its use in the study of religion is derived from study of West African religious beliefs, as well as Voodoo, which is derived from those beliefs. Blood is often considered a particularly powerful fetish or ingredient in fetishes. In addition to blood, other objects and substances such as bones, fur, claws, feathers, water from certain places, certain types of plants and woods are common in tradition of cultures worldwide.

e) Naturism: Nature worship, system of religion based on the veneration of natural phenomena—for example, celestial objects such as the sun and moon and terrestrial objects such as water and fire.

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

The worship of nature underscores the fact that the sacred can appear in any guise. Frequently the sun is worshiped because of its heroic achievements, including the creation of human beings. The sun and the moon created human beings from gourds, according to the tradition of the Apinagé people of South America. In the tradition of the Desána, a Tucano-speaking group of southern Colombia, the sun inseminated his daughter with light (through her eye) and caused the creation of the universe.

The moon is one of the most fascinating and rich religious characters. It has long been an object of worship in many cultures. The moon's shifting shape and changing disposition in the sky at various times of the night, day, and month makes it the focus of a wide range of associations that have led to its veneration. Sin, the Babylonian god of the moon, had important connections with the waters of the earth. Their ebb and flow were connected with the rhythmic capacities and periodic nature of Sin. Sin also created the grasses of the world.

Mountains are a ubiquitous object of cult. Mount Haguro, another sacred mountain on the northern part of the Japanese island of Honshu, serves as the centre of worship during four seasonal feasts. The New Year celebration is one of the most important and dramatic of these, for at that time the sacred combat between the old and the new year determines the outcome of the future year

Waters are frequently presented as supernatural beings worthy of worship. Water, according to mythic accounts, is often the source of primal life. In Scandinavian mythology Ægir (the Sea) is the boundless ocean. His wife, Ran, casts her net through the ocean and drags human beings into its depths as sacrificial offerings. The nine daughters of Ægir and Ran represent the various modes and moments of the sea.

The earth is sacred in many traditions and is the object of devotion and affection. The earth is also frequently the locus of burial. As such the earth becomes an ambivalent source of regenerative life, for it is a regeneration accomplished through devouring. All that is buried in the earth and rises to new life must undergo the decomposition of the seed. Rituals associated with the earth, such as agricultural

orgies, frequently re-enact this furious and destructive episode of degeneration in imitation of the experience of the seed in the earth.

Plants, trees, and vegetation also have their place in worship. The tree of life or the cosmic tree expresses the sacredness of the entire world.

Examples of the worship of nature could be multiplied endlessly. There is hardly any object in the natural cosmos that has not become the centre of cult somewhere at one time or in one place or another.

James G. Frazer contended that the worship of nature and the worship of the dead were the two most fundamental forms of natural religion. Lévi-Strauss contends that religion involved the humanization of the laws of nature.

f) Totemism: Totemism, system of belief in which humans are said to have kinship or a mystical relationship with a spirit-being, such as an animal or plant. The entity, or totem, is thought to interact with a given kin group or an individual and to serve as their emblem or symbol.

The term totem is derived from the Ojibwa word ototeman, meaning "one's brother-sister kin." People generally view the totem as a companion, relative, protector, progenitor, or helper, ascribe to it superhuman powers and abilities, and offer it some combination of respect, veneration, awe, and fear. Most cultures use special names and emblems to refer to the totem, and those it sponsors engage in partial identification with the totem or symbolic assimilation to it. There is usually a prohibition or taboo against killing, eating, or touching the totem.

Émile Durkheim, examined totemism from a sociological and theological point of view. Durkheim claimed to see the origin of religion in totemism. Durkheim held that such a religion reflects the collective consciousness that is manifested through the identification of the individuals of the group with an animal or plant species; it is expressed outwardly in taboos, symbols, and rituals that are based on this identification.

Radcliffe-Brown held that totemism was composed of elements that were taken from different areas and institutions, and what they have in common is a general tendency to characterize segments of the community through a connection with a portion of nature. At first, he shared with Malinowski the opinion that an animal becomes totemistic when it is "good to eat." He later came to oppose the usefulness of this viewpoint, since many totems—such as crocodiles and flies—are dangerous and unpleasant.

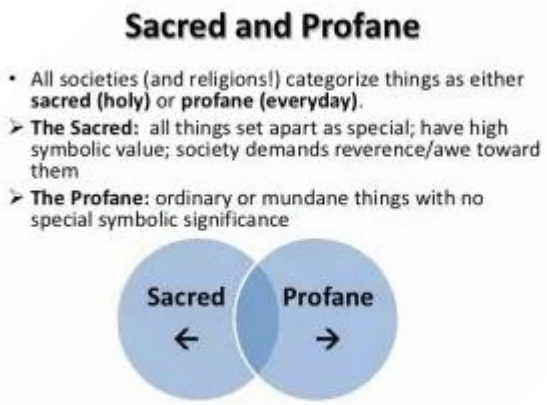
According to Levi-Strauss totemism was a mode of classification. Totem is not good to eat but good to think. Members of each totemic group believe themselves to be descendants of their totem. Traditionally they customarily neither killed nor ate a totemic animal, but this taboo was lifted once a year, when people assembled for ceremonies dedicated to the totem. These annual rites were believed to be necessary for the totem's survival and reproduction. The totems are usually animals and plants, which are part of nature. People relate to nature through their totemic association with natural species. Because each group has a different totem, social differences mirror natural contrasts. Diversity in the natural order becomes a model for diversity in the social order. However, although totemic plants and animals occupy different niches in nature, on another level they are united because they all are part of nature. The unity of the human social order is enhanced by symbolic association with and imitation of the natural order (Lévi-Strauss 1963).

Stephen Fuchs (1982) mentions about totemic species as the saviour of the forefathers of that clan. The Gonds of central India have a goat clan because their ancestors once stole a goat for sacrifice; but they were saved from the punishment of stealing as the goat turned into a pig and thereafter they regarded goat as their totem. The Korkus of central India have tree totems, as their ancestors hide under various trees to save themselves from their enemies. The Balahis of central India have snake and owl totems; these animals saved and protected their ancestors when by accident they had been left behind in the field as helpless babies.

When a clan becomes very large in size, it may be segmented and each segment may acquire a part of the totemic species as the new totem. For instance, a tiger clan may split into sections which regard the head, tail, claws, teeth, etc., of the tiger as their totems. This gives rise to the concept of a phratry, group of brother clans. The clans are sometimes named after some nicknames and such clans are found mostly among the Australian tribes. The Crow-Indians of America are also divided into thirteen exogamous matrilineal clans. These units are designated after nicknames.

Sacred and Profane

Durkheim defined religion "as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them". For Durkheim, the division into "sacred" and "profane" was a necessary precondition for religious beliefs, indeed their very foundation. "Religious beliefs are those representations that express the nature of sacred things and the relations they have with other sacred things or with profane things … rites are rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things"



"Sacred", the meaning of this word in an abstract sense is the quality, of a particular thing, of holiness. In other words, if a thing is considered as it is sacred, it means it is holy. It is not an absolute word or in other words, holiness is the **matter of belief**, a material or thing which may be holy and scared for one society and community may not be considered as holy and sacred in other society. For instance take an example of cross, it is a holy symbol for Christians and not a holy symbol or sign for Hindus, the materials which are holy and sacred for Sikhs, for example Pagadi; it is a long cloth, wearied on head by Sikh and likewise there are many things which may not have value in one society but may possibly be considered as the most valued thing in other society.

Almost anything can be sacred: a god, a rock; a cross, the moon, the earth, a king, a tree, an animal or bird, or a symbol, such as swastika. **These are sacred only because some community has marked**

them as sacred. Once established as 'sacred', however, they become symbols of religious beliefs, sentiments and practices.

Sacredness is not imposed upon any objects because of exterior dimension but as a result of the "collective conscience". Therefore, the source of holiness of the holy water is not because of its chemical composition but it lies in the fact that holiness is attributed to water by collective thinking of the people.

Durkheim work describes seven qualities of the sacred. They are:

(i) The sacred involve belief in power or force,

(ii) It is characterised by ambiguity in that, it is physical and moral, human and cosmic, positive and negative, attractive and repugnant, helpful and dangerous to men,

(iii) It is non-utilitarian,

(iv) It is non-empirical

(v) It does not involve knowledge of any rational or scientific character,

(vi) It strengthens and supports worshippers, and

(vii) It makes moral demand on the believer and worshipper.

Profane is the material, which also has values, same as sacred materials, objects and holy scripts; but are negative in sense, i.e., in other words, they are unholy. These are such object which if come in contact then they are believed to contaminate them also.

Origin of Sacred:

Durkheim simply refers to accept that people would have found either dreams or natural phenomena extraordinary enough to feel the need to create religion because of them. He supposes that, as neither man nor nature is inherently sacred, the source of sacred must be elsewhere.

Durkheim believes source of sacred is totemism. He described his views by study of Arunta tribe in Australia. This tribe have a totem and they sculpt the totemic symbol on wooden piece and apply blood on it. They print totemic symbol on different objects which thereby becomes sacred and is called churingas. These objects are kept separate and had not to be touched or looked by profane persons.

Durkheim said that all Gods and spirits become symbols of society. He said 'God and society is the same thing.'

RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS

SHAMAN

Societies with subsistence economics show the presence of Shaman. Such societies tend to form with nomadic or semi- nomadic food collectors. The word shaman has been derived from the native Siberian tongue, as Siberia is an ancient centre of Shamanism. **A shaman is usually a part time male specialist, proficient in magical rites.** He holds a fairly high status in his community. **People often call him to cure the diseases.** Shamans know sacred songs, pantomime and other specialized formulae to serve the society. Although westerners sometimes call Shaman as Witch doctor, but actually he is more potent and important figure than a Witch- doctor.

As defined by anthropologist **Michael Harner**, famous for his participant observation among Shuar (or Jivaro) Indian shamans in the Amazon rainforest, **a shaman is "a man or woman who enters an altered state of consciousness— at will—to contact and utilize an ordinarily hidden reality in order to acquire knowledge, power, and to help other persons. The shaman has at least one, and usually more, 'spirits' in his or her personal service."** The term shaman has become so popular in recent decades that any non-Western local priest, healer, or diviner is often loosely referred to as one.

Shaman is a religious practitioner who devotes part of his time to serve as an intermediary between a supernatural and individuals. He often works alone, since he applies his ability primarily as an individual rather than as a representative of a group. He learns to be a shaman from an elder shaman. He may claim to gain his abilities by direct contact with supernatural beings. Generally, a shaman has a guardian spirit who visits him when he is in a state of trance, vision, dream or some such visitation.

Shaman are employed to determine cause of illness and cure it. Divination may be used to seek the cause and magic may be used to cure it. He may specialize in weather control or warning about impending disaster.

Shamans are often prevalent among hunter gatherer societies. A shaman must typically endure intense training which may take over a decade and involve the use of psychotropic drugs to attain an altered state of consciousness. Shamanic activity is said to take place while the shaman is in a trance. Typical methods for inducing a trance involve:

-fasting

-the use of psychedelic mushrooms, peyote, cannabis, ayahuasca, salvia, tobacco

-dancing, singing or drumming to a hypnotic rhythm

-deadly nightshade

-vision quest

The preparatory stage of shamanistic inspiration is painful and lengthy. They not only undergo hard trainings by the older shamans; they remain far apart from care and distractions of ordinary life. At this time, they experience the supernatural beings and the other world. The spirits talk with them and instruct many magical formulae. Thus, they acquire great power to summon a storm, to banish a game or to cure a patient.

Typically, the shaman enters a trance state, in which he or she experiences the sensation of traveling to the alternate world and seeing and interacting with spirit beings. The shaman tries to impose his or her will upon these spirits, an inherently dangerous contest, considering the superhuman powers that spirits are thought to possess.

An example of this can be seen in the trance dances of the Ju/'hoansi Bushmen of southern Africa's Kalahari Desert. Traditional Ju/'hoansi belief holds that illness and misfortune are caused by invisible arrows shot by spirits. The arrows can be removed by healers, men and women who possess the powerful healing force called n/um (the Ju/'hoansi equivalent of mana).

In return for services rendered, the shaman may collect a fee—fresh meat, yams, or a favorite possession. In some cases, the added prestige, authority, and social power attached to the shaman's status are reward enough.

Two kinds of shamans are found – the **Emotional Shaman and the Steady shaman. The Emotional shamans** are usually unstable and even epileptic. During the performance of a rite, their physical features get distorted. Muscles are convulsed and eyes are strained. A shaman at this stage may roll

on the ground and brings foams at the mouth. A Siberian man shakes his limbs, sucks up the disease-causing agents and finally gets exhausted. An Ona Shaman behaves wildly. His whole body trembles violently until he falls down on the ground. A Polynesian shaman, during his performance acquires extra- ordinary physical strength; He eats the food of four adults at a time. An Eskimo Shaman is able to rock and jump a drum on his forehead. A Siberian Shaman at this time gathers so much power that he breaks up a metal chain easily with which he is kept tied.

The **Steady Shamans**, on the other hand, are not prone to emotional or epileptic fits. For guidance, they depend on the guardian spirits that come to them in dreams. A Steady Shaman in California talks to an eagle, a snake, a bear or even to a personified mountain in dreams, for boon. Such a shaman can make himself invisible or can build a bullet proof body. However, both kinds of shamans with the special skills serve the people in primitive society.

PRIEST

In societies with the resources to support a full-time occupational specialist, a priest or priestess will have the role of guiding religious practices and influencing the supernatural. He or she is the socially initiated, ceremonially inducted member of a recognized religious organization, with a rank and function that belong to him or her as the holder of a position others have held before. The sources of power are the society and the institution within which the priest or priestess functions. **He is a full-time religious specialist formally recognized for his or her role in guiding the religious practices of others and for contacting and influencing supernatural powers.** He devotes all of his time to serving as an intermediary, usually for his group.

A religious leader who is authorised to be part of an organised religion is considered to be a priest or priestess. Different religions have different terms for these individuals. **They may be known as Rabbis, Ministers, Mullahs, Lamas, Imams**, or something else. These individuals are the keepers of the sacred law and tradition. They are found mostly in large-scale societies.

Priests are sometimes distinguished from people by the way they dress, or different hairstyle etc. He is often a member of religious organization which has provided him with special training. The training of a priest can be rigorous and long, which includes not only fasting, prayer, and physical labour but also learning the dogma and the rituals of his religion. Priests are authorised to perform religious rituals designed to influence the supernatural world and to guide the believers in their religious practices. **They personally do not have supernatural power of their own by the rituals but the rituals that they perform are believed to be effective**.

In societies where there is a hierarchy of spirits and gods and the chief gods, they must not be approached directly but through the priest. The community deals with deity or deities through the priest who **acts as a representative of the community**. The latter performs various rituals on behalf of the community, which include periodical or rituals of calendar usually related to agricultural cycles and seasons, disasters, epidemic diseases and well-being of the community.

Priests also perform the rites of passage associated with birth, puberty, wedding and death. They are also to legitimize authority of the community through rituals, as in case of coronation and they are usually taken as protectors of ethics and morals of the community and set high standard for the entire community. By virtue of this and their association with the sacred place which may be a shrine or sacred space where deities or spirits dwell, they remain symbols of sacred.

The priests usually enjoy highest status in the society because of the above which are special to them. While in some cultures both men and women can be priests but in some, such as Islam or Hinduism, women cannot be priests. As in Catholic Christianity and Buddhism the priests remain unmarried but in several other religions priests are married. Anthropologists have observed that societies with full-time religious specialists (priests) are likely to be dependent on food production rather than food collecting. They are also likely to have economic exchange involving the use of money, class stratification, and high levels of political integration. These are all features indicative of cultural complexity.

SORCERER

The **sorcerer is a magician, an evil figure; in many religions healers use black magic, but a sorcerer is internally evil that works for illegal and antisocial ends.** Usually the sorcerer employs contagious magic with hair, nail, clothes, etc., of the victim. The sorcerer learns the art and uses different techniques and rituals for causing an effect of the power on others. Another sorcerer is engaged to undo the sorcery or a witch may be allowed to do the same. In Kipsingis of Kenya there are various kinds of sorcerers and witches, and the most powerful one who could perform sorcery against the whole tribe is called orgoiyat and the less powerful one is bonnindet. There is another specialist called chepsogeiyot that determines who is the bonnindet in a particular case.

In some cultures, almost everyone learns to harm their enemies by sorcery techniques. Among such people knowledge of sorcery rites and spells is widespread. Among other peoples, sorcery is a more specialized practice; only certain people inherit or acquire the knowledge of how to recite spells and perform the rites correctly.

In 1890, Sir James Frazer proposed that magic (including sorcery) is based on two kinds of logical principles or assumptions. Both involve a symbolic identification of something (e.g., an object or action) with something else (e.g., an event or a person). The imitative principle is often stated as “Like produces like.” That is, if an object resembles a person and the sorcerer mutilates the object, then the same thing / will happen to the person. The so-called voodoo doll is a familiar example. In another kind of imitative magic, the magician or sorcerer mimics the effects she or he wants to produce. Sorcerers among the Dobu of Melanesia cast spells by imitating the symptoms of the disease they want their victims to suffer.

The second logical premise underlying magic and sorcery is the contagious principle, stated as “Power comes from contact,” that is, things once in contact with someone can be used in rites and spells to make things happen to that person. By performing sorcery rites and spells on such objects as hair clippings, bodily excretions, nail parings, umbilical cords, or jewellery and clothing, one can cause harm to one’s enemies. In societies in which sorcery rests on the contagious principle, people must dispose of objects they have been in contact with, including things have come out of or off of their bodies, lest one of their enemies use them for sorcery.

Sorcery practices are related to the social life of a people. For example, who accuses whom of sorcery reflects how individuals and groups relate to one another. In any society, certain kinds of social relationships are especially likely to be beset by conflict. Co-wives of a polygynous man may be jealous over their husband’s favours or may compete for an inheritance for their children. People who have married into a kin group or village may be viewed as outsiders who are still loyal to their own natal families. Two men who want the same woman, or two women who want the same man, have reasons to dislike each other. Men who are rivals for a political office have conflicts of interest.

WITCHES AND WITCHCRAFT

As pointed out by Evans-Pritchard, a Witch is different from a Sorcerer in Africa. But it may not be the case everywhere. **Witches have antisocial characters or behaviour; believed to practice cannibalism or incest in order to enhance their powers. They show deep sense of greed, jealousy and hatred.** A witch is always a woman in Nupe, whereas in Gwari, a neighbour with similar culture, a witch can be man or woman. The witch's power is internal and inherited whereas the sorcerer uses external power to harm others. Both are believed to be causing untimely death. The practices of witch differ from society to society and even within the same society. In Cameroon, witchcraft is known as ekong or kupe or famla and is practiced across ethnic lines. Even rural France is no exception to the belief in witches. The occurrence of a series of misfortunes to an individual or family is attributed to the works of a witch (Bowie 2000). The acts of a witch are attributed when no explanation is readily available. Even **in modern times, as in case of Sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS is termed as consequences of witchcraft.** In Christian theology the witches and sorcerers are the agents of the Devil or Satan.

The witch is distinguished from the sorcerer by the fact that the source of supernatural in case of a witch remains in the body of the witch that is often inherited also. The sorcerer acquires the art and does not necessarily pass on to the next generation. The witch generally wills in death and destruction, whereas the sorcerer performs magical rites to achieve evil ends. Witchcraft is seen as an evil force bringing misfortune to members of a community. Whereas sorcery usually involves the use of rites and spells to commit a foul deed, anthropologists usually define witchcraft as the use of psychic power alone to cause harm to others. Sorcerers manipulate objects; witches need only think malevolent thoughts to turn their anger, envy, or hatred into evil deeds.

Cultures vary in the characteristics they attribute to witches and in how witches cause harm. The following examples illustrate the diversity.

• The Navajo of the American Southwest associate witches with the worst imaginable sins. Witches commit incest, bestiality (sex with animals), and necrophilia (sex with corpses); they change themselves into animals; they cannibalize infants; and so on.

• The Nyakyusa of Tanzania hold that witches are motivated mainly by their lust for food; accordingly, they suck dry the udders of people's cattle and devour the internal organs of their human neighbours while they sleep

• TheAzande of southern Sudan believe witches possess an inherited substance that leaves their bodies at night and gradually eats away at the flesh and internal organs of their victims. Witches, as well as their victims, are considered unfortunate because the Azande believe a person can be a witch without even knowing it. Witches can do nothing to rid themselves permanently of their power, although they can be forced to stop bewitching some particular individual by overcoming their bad feelings against their victim.

• The Ibibio of Nigeria believe witches operate by removing the spiritual essence (soul) of their enemies and placing it in an animal. This makes the victim sick, and he dies when the witches slaughter and consume the animal. Sometimes Ibibio witches decide to torture, rather than kill, a person. In that case, they remove the victim's soul and put it in water or hang it over a fireplace or flog it in the evenings. The afflicted person will remain sick until the witches get what they want out of him or her.

Functions of Witchcraft

Witchcraft is an explanation of events based on the belief that certain individuals possess an innate psychic power capable of causing harm, including sickness and death. In a world where there are few proven techniques for dealing with everyday crises, especially sickness, a belief in witches is not foolish; it is indispensable. Not only does the idea of personalized evil answer the problem of unmerited suffering, but it also provides an explanation for many happenings for which no cause can be discovered. Witchcraft, then, cannot be refuted. Even if we could convince a person that his or her illness was due to natural causes, the victim would still ask, as the Ibibio do, Why me? Why now? Such a view leaves no room for pure chance; everything must be assigned a cause or meaning. Witchcraft offers an explanation and, in so doing, also provides both the basis and the means for taking counteraction.